



INFLUENCE OF GENDER, PARENTS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND ATTACHMENT QUALITY ON PARENT-ADOLESCENT CONFLICT

Mary Basil Nwoke & Ihencheta D. Njoku

Department of Psychology

University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

E-mail marybasil.nwoke@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

The influence of gender, parents' level of education and attachment quality on parent-adolescent conflict was investigated in this study. A cross-sectional design was employed. Participants were 111 males and 128 females. Information on gender and parents' level of education were collected from the biographical data while Parental Attachment Questionnaire was adapted to measure attachment quality. Also, the Parent-Adolescent Conflict Scale developed by the researchers was used to measure parent adolescent conflict. ANOVA results showed that parents' level of education had a significant influence on parent adolescent conflict $F(2, 227) = 4.89, p < .01$. The result also showed significant interaction between gender and parents' education on parent adolescent conflict, $F(2, 227) = 3.58, p < .03$. Both gender and attachment quality had no significant influence on parents' adolescent conflict respectively. The result also showed that there was no significant interaction between gender and attachment quality, attachment quality and parents' education, and between gender, parents' education and attachment quality on parent adolescent conflict. Implications of the study and suggestions made for further study were stated.

Key words: *Gender, level of education, attachment quality, parent-adolescent conflict.*



Introduction

Human life undergoes several stages and phases. Each stage and phase has some peculiarities. Every family is expected to experience the peculiarities of these stages. If a family is said to be functional, it does not imply the absence of the peculiarities and differences of these various life stages. It is the ability to accommodate them which makes the difference. These stages of life comprise of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Children depend solely on the decisions made by their parents (adults). On the contrary, adolescents want to be independent of their parents in terms of decision making simply because of their quest for autonomy and desire to show that they have grown. Parents (adults) feel challenged by their adolescents when their (parents') decisions are not implemented. This is because of the differences in perception and understanding between the adolescents and their parents. Parents in trying to spare their adolescents from their "perceived" pains and mistakes in life tend to uphold history and past experiences without considering changes in the time between them and their adolescent children. In this situation, conflict results. Ralph Waldo Emerson said that "in youth, we clothe ourselves with rainbows, and go brave as zodiac". Parents need not feel inadequate when facing these changes in their adolescents, rather they should be supportive in building effective decision making and good sense of direction in them. On the other hand, adolescents should not discard the wealth of experience from parents.

Review of related literature

Santrock, (2006) posited that adolescence is a transitional period in the human life span linking childhood and adulthood. For Papalia, Olds & Feldman (2001), it is a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood. This entails major physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes. For this development to be feasible there must be relationship.

Freud (1959) observed that no relationship has received greater attention in the field of psychology than the relationship that exists between parents and their children. Family relationships also seem to be altered as the process of differentiation begins to take place. Adolescence is a time when young persons rely more on peers, seek increased independence and are less willing to see themselves as part of a hierarchy that is headed by their parents (Fulgini & Eccles, 1993; Collins & Repinski, 1994). As a result of this, parent-adolescent relationship experiences increased conflict and decreased closeness (Steinberg & Moris, 2001). Developmental psychologists (Peterson & Leigh, 1990), viewed conflict in adolescence as a vital component of healthy development which they referred to as the "storm and stress of adolescence". Most of the adolescent problems are not with them; only that they opt for access to a wide range of legitimate opportunities and to long term support from adults who care deeply about them. This development in human being has not been easy and the puzzle is why there has to be conflicting interest between adolescents and their parents? Why would there be a deviation from the family rules which the individual has been conforming to from childhood?

Vickie, a sixteen year old girl feels that her parents do not understand her choice of dressing as she exclaimed "it is not too short, you're just being old fashioned". She ran off to her room because of the quarrel over a skirt and blouse she wanted to wear. George also felt the same way that his mother does not understand his need for personal autonomy and jurisdiction in regard to choosing friends, choice of music, television watching, e.t.c. All she (George's mother) does is to turn it off. "You mustn't relate with those guys, I need your attention for an errand" she maintains. "So I turned them and her off because I'm not a baby anymore". George complained.

From experience and observation, parents seem to maintain their grasp of the individual at this period as it were in the childhood stage which results in reactions. Secondly, parents fail to reason and understand the factors underlying adolescence. Adolescents likewise fail to reason or communicate their feelings effectively and feel that parents are not interested in and aware of the reasons behind their behaviour. Santrock (2006) observed that the factors



involved in such behaviours include: biological changes of puberty, cognitive changes involving increased idealism and logical reasoning, social changes focused on independence and identity, maturational changes in parents as well as adolescents that are violated by both. However, the ability to gain autonomy and control over one's behaviour in adolescence is acquired through appropriate adult reactions to the adolescent's desire for control (Laursen & Collins, 2004; Zimmer - Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Thus, a decrease in the level of closeness between parents and their adolescents do not place this relationship at lower position. Noller (1994) also found that family relationship remains important throughout adolescence as proper supervision is vital. Noller (1994) observed that adolescents whose parents lovingly enforce rules are more likely to excel academically, interact well with others and to be happy.

In the context of this study, variables such as parents' level of education, gender of the adolescent, and attachment quality are to be considered as the factors that may influence parent-adolescent conflict. Going by this, attachment is a reciprocal, enduring emotional link between an infant and a care giver, each of whom contributes to the quality of the relationship (Papalia et al., 2001). Bowlby (1969) in his extensive research conceptualized attachment as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings. Following this evolutionary component, attachment aids in survival and the propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individual(s) serve a basic component of human nature (Bowlby, 1988). To Erikson, this attachment serves as a base for the establishment of a trusting relationship between parents and their children (Erickson, 1968). In this regard, it could be seen that the family environment in which individual belongs is the source of attachment and socialization because parents act as control and teach their children socially accepted behaviours.

Conger and Ge (1999) observed that understanding parent-adolescent conflict is not simple but Small (1990) postulated that competent adolescent development is most likely to happen when adolescents have parents who demonstrate sustained interest in their lives, show them warmth and respect, recognize and adapt to their cognitive and socio-emotional development, communicate expectations for high standards of conduct and achievement and display constructive ways of dealing with problems and conflict. With this, attachment to parents plays a vital role in adolescents' development.

Another variable to be considered is gender. Gender refers to the social and psychological dimensions of being male or female (Santrock, 2006). Santrock, posited two aspect of gender exist

- * Gender role - a set of expectations that prescribe how females and males should think, act and feel,
- * Gender identity - the sense of being a male or female, which most children acquire early in time. Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn, (1991) observed that conflict with families occur more often between adolescents and their mothers and between mothers and their daughters in particular. Researchers have proved differences in conflict frequency and intensity throughout adolescent stages, the types of issues creating conflict and its variation across families (Barber, 1994; Montemayor, 1983; Smetana, 1989; Steinberg, 1981). This could be as a result of parents' level of education and other factors.

However, Laursen and Collins, (1994) reported that conflict reaches its highest levels in early adolescence and its lowest levels in later adolescence (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Mother-female adolescent conflict seems to be for the fact that they know more about their children changing qualities and their self perception than fathers do. Also, interaction between mothers and cultural inclination to gender role might be the cause of big tension and conflict. Nevertheless, this also creates greater intimacy in relationship between mothers and adolescents (Youniss & Ketterlinus 1987). The sixteen year old Vickie after the contention on her choice of dressing flashed back to memories as she commented "I had no absolute report with older people other than my



peers, but I made a point tagging along with my parents when they associated with me and me with them. In time, I developed friendship deep inside that they really care and look out for me and this gave me a more rounded out look. It became easier to carry on conversation with them and the atmosphere at home improved dramatically”.

The levels of education acquired by parents influence their knowledge, understanding, beliefs, values, and goals about their children's development. Nwoke (2007) observed that education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. It also entails the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. The level of formal education consists of the lower level (primary school and secondary school education), middle (Diploma, NCE, and OND) and higher education level (tertiary degree). Intuitively, higher education level may seem to enhance parents' overview, insight, modification and dynamism in culture, and lifestyle which has a way of adjusting parents to pattern of family orientation and idealism that tend to carry adolescents along. On the contrary, low level of education of parents may encourage such parents to upholding their primitive idealism tenaciously without giving room for changes and adjustment. Research showed that parents with higher education are more likely to believe strongly in their abilities to help their children throughout life stages. This study aims at finding out the role of attachment quality, gender and parents' education in parent-adolescent conflict

Studies (e.g Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Sroufe, 2001) show that early attachment foreshadows later functioning in relationships. Santrock (2006) posited that secure attachment in infancy is important because it reflects a positive parent-infant relationship that provides the foundation that support healthy socio-emotional development in the years that follow. The influence of attachment quality, gender and parents' level of education to parent-adolescent conflict seem to point out that there is a combination of the role of nature and environment in parent-adolescent relationship since the adolescent's innate disposition intermingle with parental responsiveness and expertise in making them who they are. Till date, parents tend to ignore these factors which are of immense effect on the socio-emotional development of adolescents. The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

*Will attachment quality influence parent-adolescent conflict?

*Will, parents' level of education influence parent-adolescent conflict?

*Will gender influence parent-adolescent conflict?

The purpose of this study is to investigate attachment quality, gender and parents' level of education as factors in parent-adolescent conflict. It was hypothesized that:

Attachment quality will not have a significant influence in parent adolescent conflict.

There will be no significant gender difference in parent-adolescent conflict.

Parental level of education will not significantly influence parent-adolescent conflict.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-nine Nigerian adolescents participated in this study. One hundred and eleven were males and one hundred and twenty eight were females. They were drawn from three schools - 157 were from Maryland Secondary School, 50 were from Government Technical College and 32 from Urban Girls Secondary School, all in Enugu urban area o Eastern Nigeria. They were made up of junior and senior secondary school students. Age range for the junior participants was (11-16) years with a mean age of (13.5) years. Age range for senior participants was (17-20) years with a mean age of (18 .5) years. An accidental sampling method was used based on the participants' availability, accessibility and willingness to participate in the study.

Out of the 239 participants, 68 had parents with high level of education, 70 had parents with middle level of education, and 101 had parents with low level of education. Among the male participants, 48 had parents with low level of education, 32 had parents



with middle level of education, and 31 had parents with high level of education while 53 from the female participants had parents with low level of education, 38 had parents with middle level of education and 37 with high level of education.

Instruments

Two instruments were used for data collection: Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) developed by Kenny (1987) and Parent-Adolescent Conflict Scale which was developed by the researchers. The PAQ was adapted and validated for the present study by the researchers. The validation was done using 59 participants (29 females and 30 males) randomly selected from JS1 - SS3 from a co-educational secondary school in Nsukka, Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state, Nigeria. Seventy questionnaires were distributed but only 59 were valid for scoring. Before the validation, the instrument had 55 items with internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) coefficients of .93 for men and .95 for women. In validating the instrument, the researchers subjected the 55 item scale to item analysis but only 30 items loaded at .30 and it produced full scale reliability with Cronbach alpha of .85. The PAQ is a likert-type scale ranging from 1 -5. Each item has 5 options which include, Not at all, Somewhat, A moderate amount, Quite a bit, and Very much. The value assigned to each option depended to on what extent it measured attachment.

The Parent Adolescent Conflict Scale was developed by the researchers and had 31 items. The face validity of the scale was established when it was presented to four lecturers in the Department of Psychology before it was subjected to item analysis. The scale included 7 items adapted from Adolescent Behavioural Outcome Scale developed by Adejuwon and Ibeagha (2005). The items adapted from ABOS and were retained. The original items were factorially loaded. After being subjected to item analysis the total valid items were reduced to 20 with full scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha) coefficient of .79. All the items in Parent-Adolescent Conflict Scale were directly scored.

The instruments had two sections. The first section covered the biodata, which was considered to be of interest in the study. They are gender, age, class, and parents' level of education. The second section contains the scales items that elicit the participants' attachment quality and conflict with parents. Part A of the second section contains the items of the Parent-Adolescent Conflict Scale, while the part B contains the Parental Attachment Questionnaire.

Procedure

The researchers produced and administered two hundred and eighty questionnaires with the help of one research assistant who was educated on the nature of the research, the administration of the questionnaire and its collection. Participants were approached in their various classes. The exercise lasted about 45mins and questionnaires were collected after completion and scored by the researchers. From the two hundred and eighty questionnaires collected, 41 were discarded on the basis of inappropriate completion by the participants which reduced the number of the questionnaire used for the study to 239. It is worthy to note that the confidentiality of the participants was upheld by the researchers as they were told not to disclose their names.

Design/ Statistics

The study was a cross-sectional survey design. Descriptive statistics was used for the mean scores. A 2 x 2 x 3 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed for the data analysis.

**Results****Table 1:** Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of gender, parents' level of education and attachment quality

Variable	M	SD	N
Gender (A)			
Male	58.4865	16.35229	111
Female	58.7187	16.70586	128
Parents level of education (B)			
Low	55.6040	16.53063	101
Middle	58.17114	16.31304	70
High	63.5294	15.74088	68
Closeness/ Attachment quality (C)			
Low	56.9576	13.87699	118
High	60.2231	18.63978	121

The result in table 1 showed that female participants reported marginally higher parent-adolescent conflict, (M=58.72 SD = 16.71) than male participants (M=58.47, SD=16.35). The table equally showed that adolescents with parents of high education reported highest parent-adolescent conflict (M=63.53, SD = 15.74) followed by participants with middle parents' education conflict (M=58.17, SD= 16.31), whereas participants with parents of low education reported lowest conflict (M = 55.60, SD= 16.53). The table also shows that participants with high closeness reported higher parent-adolescent conflict (M=60.22, SD=18.64) than participants with low closeness (M=56.96, SD=13.88).

Table 2: Three-way ANOVA Summary on gender, parents' education and closeness on parent-adolescent conflict.

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig
Gender (A)	84.313	1	84.313	.328	.567*
Parent education (B)	2511.403	2	1255.702	4.892	.008 **
Closeness (C)	811.034	1	811.034	3.160	.077*
A X B	1840.094	2	920.047	3.584	.029 ***
A X C	55.099	1	55.099	.215	.644*
B X C	193.449	1	96.725	.317	.689*
A X B X C	1159.104	2	579.552	2.258	.109*
Error	58269.176	227	256.692		
Total	88588.0	239			

* $p > .05$ (not significant), *** $p < .03$ (significant), ** $p < .01$ (significant)

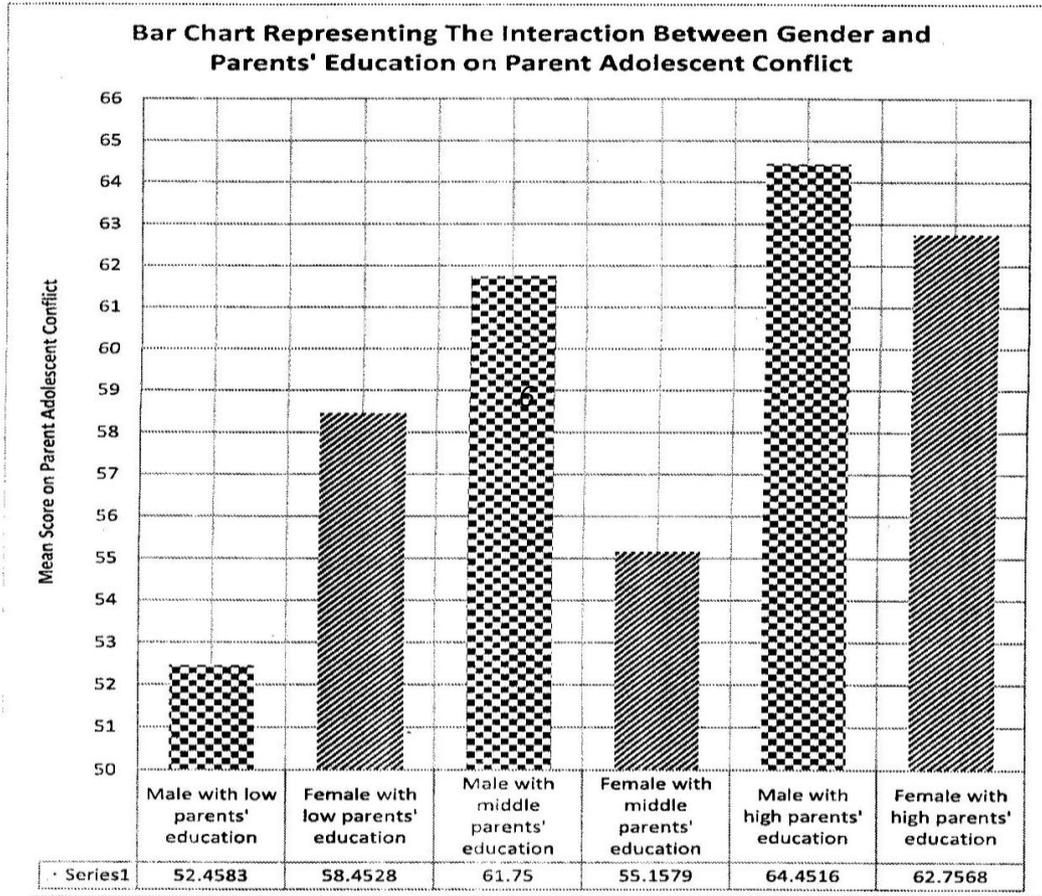


ANOVA summary table showed that participants differ significantly in parent-adolescent conflict on the basis of parents' education, $F(2, 227) = 4.89, P < .01$. The table also showed a significant interaction effect of gender and parents' education $F(2, 227) = 3.58, P < .03$. There was no significant effect of gender on parent-adolescent conflict. It was also found that participants did not differ significantly in parent-adolescent conflict on the basis of closeness. There was no significant interaction between gender and closeness, parents' education and closeness, and gender, parents' education and closeness on parent-adolescent conflict.

Table 3: Table of means (M) showing interaction between gender and parents education.

Gender and parents' education	Mean (M)
Male with low parents' education	52.46
Female with low parents' education	58.45
Male with middle parents' education	61.75
Female with middle parents' education	55.16
Male with high parents' education	64.45
Female with high parents' education	62.76

Table 3 above showed that on parent-adolescent conflict, males with low had lower mean score of 52.46 than females with low parents education with a mean score of 58.45. Also male with middle parents' education had higher mean score of 61.75 while females with middle parents' education had lower mean score of 55.16 on parent-adolescent conflict. The table equally showed that males with high parents' level of education had higher mean score of 64.45 than females with lower mean score of 62.76 on parent-adolescent conflict. The table is illustrated in the figure below although there seem not to be much evidence empirically to buttress the interaction.



Discussion

The findings of this current study showed that gender did not play a significant role in parent-adolescent conflict. Thus, the first hypothesis which stated that there would be no significant difference between males and females in parent-adolescent conflict was accepted. This finding supported the previous research finding of Furman & Buhrmester (1992), Steinberg & Hill (1978) and Galambos & Almeida (1992) which on using 549 male and female youths, 7th grade girls and 7th grade boys, and 80 adolescents, respectively found that pattern of conflict was the same in both male and female adolescents. The present finding seem to contradict the findings of (Clark - Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991, Smetana & Asquith, 1994), who used a sample of 1, 100, and 68 adolescents, respectively, and found that parent adolescent conflict was reported more by daughters (females) than sons (males).

The findings of the present study showed that parents' level of education played a significant role in parent-adolescent conflict, with adolescents whose parents had high level of education indicating the highest conflict followed by adolescents whose parents had middle education. Adolescents whose parents had low education reported the lowest level of conflict. Thus, the second hypothesis which stated that there would be no statistically significant influence of parents' level of education on parent-adolescent conflict was rejected. This finding, although with dearth of literature, seem to suggest that parents who had high level of education are principled and have rules for their families which attracts discipline when the family deviates from it. In other words, parents with high level of education tend to be more authoritarian and/or autocratic, in their parenting skill and tend to discipline their children more, which adolescents do not like, which also result in conflict. For example, they are not allowed to watch television or play games of their choice and whenever they wish to. On the other hand, low level of conflict among adolescents with low parents' education tend



to denote that these parents adopt neglectful and/or indulgent parenting which allow their children whatever they want and like to do with little or no restraints.

This study also showed that attachment quality did not play a significant role in parent adolescent conflict. Thus, the third hypothesis which stated that, there would be no significant influence of attachment quality on parent adolescent conflict was accepted. The present finding supported the growing evidence (e.g., Morretti & Peled, 2004) indicating that parent adolescent conflict itself is not a sign of poor relationship quality because it will unquestionably arise in healthy relationships as parents exert appropriate levels of behavioural control over their adolescents and negotiating increasing responsibility over them as competence tend to develop. It is suggested that the capacity of parents and their adolescents to maintain "closeness" while disputing on critical issues is the hallmark of attachment quality not really the absence of conflict. Moretti and Peled (2004) stated that the presence of conflict in parent adolescent relationship is normal but how the parent adolescent dyad negotiates conflict and sustains their relationship is diagnostic. For example, adolescents who are very close to their parents may presume extra liberty which they may not receive from parents because parents tend to monitor their children closely for positive outcome which the adolescents misinterprets. Thus, higher closeness tends to attract more supervision and in turn conflict.

Moreover, a significant interaction effect between gender and parents' education seem to suggest that the significance is not really because of the gender identity - the sense of being a male or female, rather, it could be a product of gender role and expectations imposed on adolescents by the environment, particularly culture. For instance, Smetana and Asquith (1994) who found that gender was significant in parent adolescent conflict, reported that conflict occur more between parents and their daughters than their sons over personal issues like music, television, clothing choices and conventions e.g. chores, table manners, e.t.c. In this regard, parents with higher education expect their youth to be up and doing and to utilize every opportunity appropriately. Thus, much time for luxury and inappropriate interaction with others are restricted.

However, it is important to note that parent adolescent conflict has positive and negative effects on adolescents based on how issues relating to adolescents and their parents are addressed and managed. In this regard, the wellbeing of adolescents should be the concern of parents, families, the government, and non governmental agencies, because, the society is becoming unconducive which could be traceable to the level of wellbeing adolescents had from their families. Therefore, the study has implication on the contribution of gender and parents level of education because of their interaction effect on parent-adolescents conflict. Thus, parents who have high education, in attempt to enforce rules, restrictions and discipline should endeavour to have effective communication with their youths on how and why such rules should be. Also, parents should inculcate adequate information concerning their adolescents, knowing that each seem to have characteristics peculiar to them even in their gender preferences and dislikes.

The present study has some limitations, which might limit the generalizability of results. One limitation is that data were collected from adolescents from one geographical location, one ethnic group and a small sample size. Data from several sources would have been more desirable since it would eliminate or minimize common method bias. The study investigated attachment quality and level of education of both parents and not of each parent, which did not give room for the contribution of single parenting. However, some recommendations are necessary to be offered for further studies. Researches that will desire to examine antecedents of parents –adolescent conflict should use more than one geographical location and one ethnic group. Further research should examine the role of cultural value system in parents' adolescents' conflict using larger sample size as to guarantee generalization of the findings. Regarding parents education, future researchers should investigate on the specific parent education separately and with emphasis on the role



of single parenting in parent adolescent conflict. Also, specific attachment quality to each parent should be examined.

Despite the limitations of the research, this present study is one of the first attempts to investigate the influence of gender, parents' level of education and attachment quality on parent-adolescent-conflict. In as much as parent adolescent conflict is inevitable it needed to be checkmated to avoid leading to delinquency and/or behavioural maladjustment and dysfunctional family system. Single individuals should strive to equip themselves with skills in parenting before becoming parents to help in proper development and adjustment of youths so as to promote family interaction and proper social functioning. In, summary all and sundry who are interested in the future generation should contribute positively to the well being of youths in order to enable them acquire good sense of adaptation or adjustment to their families, for harmonious interaction with parents, adolescents, siblings and peers, which will be further extended to the larger society.

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