



How Does Childhood Parental Support Affect Self-Image for Transitional Age Youth

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Abstract

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are a time of considerable change and development. As adolescents start exploring identity and self-image, they evaluate themselves amongst their peers as to who they are in this world. A transitional age youth's self-image could have implications on mental health wellbeing. The development of a positive self-image for transitional age youth is vital because this could lead to healthier wellbeing with increased protective factors against mental disorders. The relationship between parental emotional and behavioral support and self-image among transitional age youth can increase resilience and protective factors to support mental health wellbeing. The current study used secondary data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health to analyze Wave I of adolescent-parental relationships in the United States. Wave III data analyzed self-image to make associations of adolescent emotional and behavioral health with their parents and their effects on their adult mental health. A filtered stratified sampling method of middle schools and high schools in the Quality Education Database used responses for data collection. Six instruments were used to collect data from a parent, schools, and Wave 1 and Wave III respondents. The results indicated a positive association between emotional and behavioral support from parents and self-image in transitional age youth's mental health. Emotional and behavioral support needs to be fostered in homes to build stronger attachments and communication between parents and children during adolescence to decrease mental health illness when the child enters the transitional age youth stage.

Objectives

Significance of Study:

- ❖ The development of a positive self-image for transition age youth (TAY) is vital because this could lead to healthier wellbeing with increased protective factors against mental disorders (Boudreault-Bouchard et al., 2013). The more protective factors a person has, the more equipped they will be to cope with life stressors.
- ❖ Adolescents, ages 12-17, had the highest rate of anxiety and depression.
- ❖ Young adults between 18 and 25 had the highest percentage of any mental illness at 29.4% compared to adults between 26-65.
- ❖ Young adults had the lowest percent to receive services for their mental health needs at 38.9%.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge related to parental support and the mental health of TAY.

Research Question:

The research question for this study is, what is the relationship between parental support and self-image among transitional-age youth?

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis for this study is that youth receiving higher levels of parental support will have higher levels of self-image to help support mental health wellbeing.



Literature Review

Ecological Systems Theory:

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development (1979), multi-systems in a person's life affect their growth potential. Social workers use the biological-psychological-social-spiritual perspective as a working model, which is the foundation of Bronfenbrenner's theory to support clients.

Adolescent Attachment:

Adolescents need a secure attachment to maintain self-compassion and decreased self-criticism to prevent mental health illness or maladaptive self-processes. The foundation of all their relationships is based primarily on the relationship with their parents as their internal working model (Peter & Gazelle, 2017).

Parent-Child Relationships:

Parents are the primary influencer of a child's understanding of relationships, culture, and society. Children can manage their emotions, use adaptive coping, use social support, cognitive coping, and problem-solving skills when they have secure attachments with their parents (Kerns et al., 2015). Adolescents are learning to build their agency with the guidance of parents to have a strong sense of self, self-monitoring, openness to explore, creativity, internal locus of control, and responsibility for personal actions.

Self Image:

A positive self-image supports the value of self-concerning love and fulfillment and the confidence of one's capability to overcome adversity. Adolescents need to build a healthy self-image with self-respect and confidence to help their future development of self-actualization to a healthier and content wellbeing (Simel, 2013).

Gaps in Research:

There is now more research on the specific time of transition from childhood to emerging adulthood, however, more research is needed during this time to identify supports our society can provide for families during a child's adolescence.

Methods

Research Design:

The current study examined secondary data from the Add Health longitudinal study to analyze Wave I with adolescents in 7-12th grade and Wave III with emerging adults 18-26 years old. The multi-wave and multi-site information predicted positive health behaviors in adolescence with parental support to improve positive self-image as the participants emerged into adulthood.

Sampling:

The current study used a sample size of 4,539 respondents from Wave I and Wave III. The current study filtered the sample to exclude respondents who did not have complete data from Wave I and during the interview of Wave III.

Measures:

The independent variable is childhood parental support; the variable consisted of two sub-scales: parental behavioral and parental emotional support.

The dependent variable for this study is self-image for young adulthood. Self-image is defined as how we view ourselves internally and externally.

Results

- ❖ Spearman rho correlations indicated a positive and statistically significant association between parental behavioral support and self-image. The strength of the correlation was weak, yet parental behavioral support was related to higher levels of self-image. The results also indicated a positive and statistically significant association between parental emotional support and self-image. Although the strength of the correlation was weak, parental emotional support was related to higher levels of self-image.
- ❖ Multiple linear regression indicated parental emotional support and being a non-White single-parent were statistically significant predictors of self-image, while age and gender were not significant predictors in this model.
- ❖ Multiple linear regression indicated parental behavioral support and being non-White were statistically significant predictors of self-image, while age, gender, and being a single-parent were not significant predictors in this model.

Regression Model for Parental Emotional Support and Self-Image

| Predictor | B | SE | β |
|-------------------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Constant*** | 14.291 | .455 | |
| Age | .042 | .025 | .025 |
| Gender | .005 | .087 | .001 |
| White*** | -.804 | .090 | -.133 |
| Single-parent* | .237 | .096 | .037 |
| Parental emotional support*** | .458 | .058 | .118 |

Reference groups: Female, non-White, Two-parent. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Regression Model for Parental Behavioral Support and Self-Image

| Predictor | B | SE | β |
|--------------------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Constant*** | 15.486 | .389 | |
| Age | .020 | .025 | .012 |
| Gender | .136 | .087 | -.023 |
| White*** | -.833 | .090 | -.138 |
| Single-parent | .107 | .097 | .017 |
| Parental behavioral support*** | 1.573 | .215 | .109 |

Reference groups: Female, non-White, Two-parent. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Discussion

Significance of Findings:

Parental support during adolescence had a positive correlation to the effects on self-image in TAY. Although it was a weak correlation, this was expected based on previous research and the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner.

There were two unexpected findings from this research:

- ❖ Behavioral support of parent/s showed that non-White children had a higher self-image than White children.
- ❖ A single-parent home with a mother had a higher self-image based on emotional support than those in a two-parent home. A possible reason for non-White adolescents having higher self-image is that collectivist cultures emphasize family heritage, group success, and unity which promote family-oriented activities. Secure attachment in the parent-child relationship increase during family time, and close family relationships decrease the negative effects of stressful life events and transitions (Crandall et al., 2020).

A possible reason for a single-parent home with a mother having higher self-image is mothers tend to be more nurturing and observant of their child's emotional wellbeing without undivided attention or marital conflict.

Strengths and Limitations:

The strengths of this research are the sample size and representativeness of the sample. The sample selection also oversampled selected target groups from sub-populations based on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Harris et al., 2019).

The limitations of this research were the use of a modified self-image scale, secondary data, and generalizability to the larger population.

Implications for Future Research:

The results from this study suggest future research is needed to address the unexpected findings from this research. Future research can also focus on the TAY period of a person's life to improve support during this critical time and improve overall mental health wellness by building safety nets to support our youth and provide added interventions based on the findings.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy:

Emotional and behavioral support needs to be fostered in homes to build stronger attachments and communication between parents and adolescents. Interventions that focus on communication strategies and interpersonal skills help alleviate miscommunication and foster the healthy expression of thoughts and emotions to build resiliency, self-regulation, and executive functioning.

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