Parental Acceptance and Adolescents’ Adjustment Problems: Mediation via Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Security

Alberto Alegre, Ph.D.,
East Stroudsburg University (aalegre@po-box.esu.edu)

Núria Pérez, Ph.D. & Arantxa Ribot,
University of Barcelona

**Introduction**

Adolescents problems:
- Depression and suicide attempts (Kessler & Walters, 1998; Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003),
- Aggressiveness and antisocial behavior (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Millstein & Litt, 1993; McCord, 1993),
- Drug use (Newcomb & Bentler, 1988).

Clear relation between adolescents’ adjustment problems and their parents’ parental acceptance (Parmar & Rohner, 2005).

Theory explaining the mechanisms of this relation is still not complete. Two potential mediators,
- Emotional insecurity (Cummings & Davies, 1995; Davies & Cummings, 1994, 1998; Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002; Davies & Forman, 2002; Davies, Forman, Rasi, & Stevens, 2002)
- Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Alegre & Benson, 2010).

**Hypothesis**

Parental Acceptance

- Emotional Insecurity
- Emotional Intelligence
- Adolescent Internalizing
- Adolescent Externalizing

**Participants**

- 283 early adolescents, their mothers, and their homeroom teachers
- Seven different schools in a city in Spain.
- 10 to 15 years of age, with a mean of 13.5 years of age.
- Boys represented 55.3% of the sample.
- 72% lived with both their biological or adoptive parents. 11.7% with remarried parents, 11.7% with a divorced parent
- 86.8%, Spaniards, 13.2% other.
- Socioeconomic status: Low (15.7%), Medium (70.3%), and High (13.9%).

**Measures**

- Parental acceptance (PARQ; Rohner, 1986)
- Emotional security (SPCS; Alegre & Benson, 2004)
- Emotional intelligence (TMMS-C; Rockhill & Greener, 1999)
- Internalizing and externalizing problems (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991)
- Demographic data (SES, Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Family composition)

**Preliminary Analyses**

- Regression imputation for missing data. Missing data less than 5%.
- Factor analyses with Varimax rotation.
- Cronbach’s reliabilities for all measures above .80.
- Data reported from more than one informant submitted to a principal component analysis (Kraemer, Measelle, Ablow, Essex, Joyce, & Kupfer, 2003)
- Parental acceptance = PAC (mothers, adolescents)
- Internalizing and externalizing problems = PAC (mothers, adolescents, teachers)

**Correlational analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Insecurity</th>
<th>Em.Intel.</th>
<th>Internalizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em. Intelligence</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalizing</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.21**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 283. * p < .05, ** p < .01

**Mediation Testing**

Mediation hypotheses tested with Baron and Kenny’s (1986) causal steps approach. $R^2=.12$

Analyses conducted while controlling for gender, age, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity yield nearly identical results and no change in the patterns.

Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 Parental acceptance</td>
<td>-1.91</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-1.62</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 Parental acceptance</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>- .88</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bootstrapping analysis (3000 resamples) showed significant indirect effects for internalizing (99% CI: -2.14 to -.35), but not for externalizing (99% CI: -1.43 to 13)

**Discussion**

Results show partial support for the meditational hypothesis. As proposed by Cummings and Davies (1995), adolescents feel insecure when experiencing negative or inconsistent parental acceptance. Insecure adolescents develop maladaptive emotional and behavioral reactions as well as anxieties and uncertainties about the relationship with the parents. Those responses to insecurity expand to contexts beyond the immediate parent-child relationship and generalize to patterns of internalizing behavior problems. Results have implications for teachers, educators, and clinicians.