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CHILD-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS IN FAMILIES WITH
NEUROTYPICAL ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Pandemic-induced events have unveiled these problems in functional (neurotypical) families. In families, several conflicts provoked by teenagers' pastime, their activities, being in close contact in a limited space, inability to interact with each other for a long time, etc. has increased. This calls for preventive and corrective work that will not be effective unless problem areas in parent-child relations are pinpointed. The study aimed to evaluate the system of parent-child relations in neurotypical families with adolescents. The research methods included a logical-theoretical analysis, Wasserman's methods of Parent's Behavior and Teenager's Attitude towards Them (Teenagers about Parents) and a Parent and Teenager questionnaire as the main empirical toolkit. A total of 136 people participated in the study, including 63 parents raising teenagers and 73 middle schoolchildren in grades 7–8. The findings showed that parents tend to underestimate their leading role in upbringing their children and overestimate their abilities to feel their children, consider that they are always right in most interactions with them, failing to admit they are unfair or impetuous. The adolescents believe that, regardless of a boy or a girl, the father is perceived as a person who tends not to demonstrate his warm feelings and acceptance of his child, to be prone to strict control, not to respect their opinion and to be unpredictable in educational care. Assessing mothers, adolescents of both sexes highlight their high positive interest. Mother's bossiness, hostility, autonomy towards sons and daughters are assessed differently.

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1. Introduction

Forced social isolation during the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the problem of child-parent relations, showing that not only in dysfunctional families, but also in functional families, parents have difficulties in getting along with their children.

2. Problem Statement

Forced social isolation during the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the problem of child-parent relations, showing that not only in dysfunctional, but also in functional (neurotypical) families, parents have difficulties in getting along with their children. The number of conflicts in families has sharply increased, parents have difficulties in getting children instructed, especially teenagers isolated from social interaction with their peers. In turn, the children were not ready for total parental control. Parents who came to spend a lot of time at home faced, firstly, with the fact that their children spent time not the way they thought they would and wanted them to. Secondly, they themselves, failed to understand how to behave in these conditions and could not explain this to their children. Finally, being bounced out of usual life, some parents have extremely negative feelings (fear, anxiety, depression, etc.), which have a high rate of contagion. Another reason intensifying the negative relations in many families was the need to stay in a confined space for a long time. All this cannot but affect parent-child relationships, making them more stressful and causing an urgent need to provide professional psychological and pedagogical aid to parents in finding new ways and means of interacting with adolescents in these new settings.

3. Research Questions

Child-parent relationships can be considered as continuous, long-term and indirectly influenced by age-dependent characteristics of the child and by parents' attitude. Unlike other types of interpersonal relationships, these relationships are highly significant for both the parent and the child.

A special relationship between parents and children develops during the teens years mostly aimed at shaking off parental care, achieving emotional differentiation in the family, building new relationships with parents based on mutual respect and equality (Slepukhina & Petushkova, 2015). As the child grows up, there is an objective need to transform the child-parent relationships, which, if kept as they were, appear inadequate to new opportunities and aspirations of the teenager towards expanding his rights, responsibility and autonomy. An exploratory parenting style is becoming typical of many parents of adolescents, "groping" through trial and error for new child-rearing tactics (Karabanova, 2017). With this style, parents can act both helping the teenager to come a productive way from childhood to adulthood, and deforming not only child-parent relationships, but also a teenager's personality, his self-conception.

Restructuring child-parent relations often gets problematic, due to overcoming several objective difficulties. Things that impede restructuring parent-child relationships during the teen years include (Shcherbinina & Ignatova, 2016):

- i. keeping the former social status – the status of a schoolchild, thereby maintaining material and economic dependence on parents;

- ii. inertia of child-rearing practices and insufficient parental flexibility being a habit to run things, control, make decisions, patronize, instruct;
- iii. divergent intentions, when the teenager seeks to limit parental control whereas parents seek to keep controlling their child;
- iv. failures, mistakes, blunders made by teenagers trying to live on their own, due to the lack of expertise, cause stagnation or return to the old forms of leadership and control by the parents;
- v. inconsistency and unpredictability of child-rearing practices, which may cause teenager's growing anxiety and, as a result, desire to limit the amount of information about his/her life and interests;
- vi. parents' uncertainty and doubt as to whether their parenting style is right or wrong, resulting in hesitations over decisions taken, attempts to shift responsibility for upbringing to other people, reverse decisions due to external pressure or changes in their own opinion;
- vii. underestimation by parents of the teenager's need for emotional intimacy and acceptance, the need for independence and freedom of decision-making;
- viii. inadequate image of the child – a distorted idea of teenager's capabilities.

Despite the fact that teenagers most commonly take initiative in restructuring parent-child relations, the way the relations will further develop depends on what attitude parents take in response:

- i. rejecting teenager's claims to get autonomy and independence, giving rise to protest and resistance;
- ii. easing and tightening requirements simultaneously, viewed by the teenager as inconsistent and unpredictable behavior, that leads to conflicts and instable relationships.

Harmonious child-parent relationships during the teen years is possible provided that preferred interactions with peers are combined with confidential communications with parents on life experience, career guidance, reaching out for adults' help in a problem-solving situation, "neutral" response and obedience to "soft" parents' instructions. In turn, parents should be willing to accept their children's self-conception as an already self-regulated and self-control individual (Danilova & Rykman, 2018). Conflict-based parent-child relationships are characterized by a low level of trust with parents, resistance to any advice, instructions, offers of help. Destructive relationships in families with teenagers are characterized by persistent negative feelings of children towards their parents and parents towards their children, family members cease to adequately perceive each other, which triggers a chain of mutually conflicting behaviors (Arpentieva et al., 2018).

Mayorova-Shcheglova believes that the nature of these relations in modern society depends on changes in parental consciousness and behavior when exposed to societal legal and information transformations (Ermolaeva & Smirnova, 2020). Modern parents and society suffer from a decline in general pedagogical (folk, everyday) culture. The generation of modern parents is a socio-demographic group that grew up in a demographic decline and many of them did not have brothers or sisters and did not take care of relatives, as before when extended families had lived together densely (Shcherbinina & Ignatova, 2016). Positive, harmonious parent-child relationships turn out to be hard to build, since there is a lack of knowledge about physical, psychological and social development of children at different age.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to evaluate the system of parent-child relations in neurotypical families with adolescents.

5. Research Methods

An empirical study was based on Wasserman's methods of Parent's Behavior and Teenager's Attitude towards Them (Teenagers about Parents) and a Parent and Teenager questionnaire. Wasserman's methods aim to study the attitudes, behaviors, and methods of parenting as children see them during the teen years. The Parent and Teenager questionnaire measures parents' views on interactions with their children. The respondents were tasked to answer the questions "Who is responsible for raising a child?", "Who in your family deals with issues related to raising a child?", "Do you react "explosively" to child's bad behavior, and regret it afterwards?", "Do you happen to ask for forgiveness from your child?", "Does your child participate in discussions of family matters?", "What does your child do in his/her spare time?", "Do you know what kind of professional advice you will seek to align child-parent relationships?"

A total of 136 people participated in the study, including 63 parents raising teenagers and 73 middle schoolchildren in grades 7–8.

6. Findings

The feedback on the questions about responsibility for raising a child show that only a little more than half of the parents surveyed (65 %) recognize their leading role in raising a child, 35 % of parents think that society and school are more significant. It can be assumed that these are the parents who do not feel strong enough to counteract the negative impact of the environment or have pushed care of their children down to social institutions.

The answers to the question "Who in your family deals with issues related to raising a child?" show that in 65 % of the families, mothers are in charge of upbringing children with only 20 % of respondents saying that father is a leader in their families. A third of parents recognize their equal responsibility in raising children. The answers indicate the lack of fathers' involvement in child-rearing practices.

When asked about the reaction to teenager's misbehavior, 55 % of parents answer that they occasionally scold their children, 35 % do it all the time and only 10 % of parents believe they try other disciplinary ways when their children do disapproved things.

More than half of the parents think they are right in all situations and are not ready to admit they are unfair towards the child, while 35 % are ready to apologize if they were wrong or emotionally unrestrained.

The answers to the question on whether they know the child are amusing. 70 % of the parents surveyed believe that they certainly know their child, and only a third doubt it. Given that only 10 % of parents are ready to use other methods of influence, except for making claims that easily turn into

conflicts, and only a third of parents are ready to admit they are wrong and emotionally unrestrained, parents can be said to overestimate their awareness of teenager's inner world and feelings. By adolescence, children learn to skillfully hide their feelings, hobbies, interests and tend to trust their peers rather than anyone else.

The answers to the question about teenager's involvement in solving family issues show that only 25 % of parents do this all the time, 45 % of parents occasionally involve teenagers in discussions of intra-family problems and 30 % of parents do not consider it necessary, which indicates their unwillingness to change their views in relations with the child.

Answering to the question about free-time activities, 35 % of parents believe that their children do not leave I-pads and phones, thereby being exposed to games or entertainment content all their free time. The same number of parents say that their child attends clubs, study groups, and other after-school classes. Only 10 % of parents mention help around the house, 5 % of parents simply do not know what their children do in their free time. In 65 % of families, adolescents do not have regular household duties, which means that they do not take part in household chores; parents do not delegate responsibility for household chores to them, which promotes and reinforces the teenager's consumerist and infantile attitude.

65 % of parents know what kind of professional advice they will seek to align parent-child relations. Psychologists, teachers, "some centers with psychologists", "family assistance center", "can be found on the Internet" are mentioned. It is interesting that parents almost ignore resources provided by an education institution, in particular, a school psychologist as a professional called upon to help families. Lack of time (60 %) and funds (25 %) are mentioned as the main obstacles to contacting professionals. In addition, parents indicate a lack of trust in professionals, inconvenient location, and awkward time.

Most parents believe that they know their children and their feelings well. Only a quarter of the parents surveyed involve their children in discussions of domestic issues and are ready to hear their opinion. Given that only 10 % of parents are ready to use other methods of influence, except for making claims that easily turn into conflicts, and only a third of parents are ready to admit they are wrong and emotionally unrestrained, parents can be said to overestimate their awareness of teenager's inner world and feelings. The findings suggest that parental child-rearing practices are prerequisites for problems and conflicts in child-parent relationships, exacerbating the feeling of being misunderstood in adolescents and, as a result, loneliness in the family.

The findings into the attitude of teenagers towards their parents show that, regardless of gender, teenagers perceive their father as a parent who does not display any positive interest in their welfare. Sons do not see they are eager to understand them as individuals, to hold a dialogue, to discuss issues and problems that are important for the teenager. Teenage girls mention a lack of warmth and openness in their relationship with fathers. The father's bossiness is perceived by the sons as an exercise of authority, a desire to control their behavior, without delving into the situation and the problem as such. The teenage boys believe that their fathers tend to pretend that they are resolving problems in their relationships peacefully, but, in fact, they are irritated. These are confirmed by the results on the autonomy scale. It is the boy's opinion that the father often takes a flimsy stance, being unnecessarily aloof in everyday situations with his son. The father "notices" his children only when they behave ill, and he does not have

enough time even to analyze what happened. He is not interested in his son's hobbies, circle of acquaintances, school affairs. He only makes it seem that he is not pleased but he is simply annoyed when his son comes to talk to him. Teenage boys think that they often hear from their fathers that they "should know best everything on their own" and "should already understand".

The daughters perceive their father as a person who encourages them to obey the norms and rules of behavior accepted in society. A father's autonomy in relations with his daughter is perceived by them as aloofness that makes him inaccessible for interactions. There is a tendency to characterize the father as a person who steps back from psychological problems in the family, whose actions are often not consistent with the needs and interests of other family members.

Teenagers of both sexes see their father's inconsistency in that they cannot foresee how he will behave every time a similar situation occurs – whether he will punish them strictly for a minor offense or just give them a slap on the wrist for something rather serious, accepting their assurances that this will not happen again. Notably, sons are more sensitive than daughters to their father's inconsistencies.

As per teenager's attitude to their mother, data indicate that they feel her high positive interest in them. Moreover, daughters rate him even higher than sons do. Thus, teenage girls say that the mother welcomes them when they turn to her for advice or assistance in any other harsh situation.

There are large discrepancies in teenager's assessments of mother's bossiness towards sons and daughters. Male adolescents rate their mother's bossiness more highly than adolescent girls (5 grades and 2 grades, respectively). Daughters are much less likely to be tightly controlled or strictly punished by their mother. Sons see their mother's bossiness in constant control over their behavior, including learning activities, imposing feelings of guilt, constantly pointing out that she does it because the child is not capable of being responsible. It is as if the mother accepts that her status, by default, depends on her child's conformity to a certain benchmark. In mothers' perception, boys' behavior during the teen years is much more likely to go beyond the norms and needs to be controlled and limited. Thus, in order to feel like a competent parent, mothers tend to stop their son's inappropriate behavior as they see it (Karabanova & Poskrebysheva, 2011).

The mother's hostility is rated as low by daughters, whereas sons feel it more intensely, but it is within the norm. A mother's autonomy in relations with her children is assessed differently by sons (grade 5 – high) and daughters (grade 2 – low). Teenage girls are much less likely to encounter mother's aloofness, non-involvement in their problems and feelings. Teenage sons perceive mother's autonomy as a kind of dictate, since, without fully delving into the situation, she imposes her opinion on her son's proper behavior. The mother is believed not to treat them as individuals, with feelings, thoughts, ideas and life experience, but acts as a power to be obeyed.

The study of teenager's attitude to their parents' behavior indicates that teenagers of both sexes lack an emotionally positive attitude from their father, child-first attention to their thoughts, feelings, and problems they are worried about. This may be due to the fact that women are used to taking lead positions in upbringing children in Russia. Hence, they are more involved in their children's lives and find it easier to navigate their interests and needs. With this stance, the mother safeguards the child's emotional comfort, opportunity to feel accepted, regardless of the problems both inside and outside of the family. However, the mother's high positive interest, her desire to be fully informed about her child's life is

directly related to the teenager's emotional discomfort and does not allow teenagers to be properly emancipated from parents, thereby creating difficulties in determining their place among peers and accepting themselves (Ermolaeva & Smirnova, 2020).

The findings suggest the need for harder work towards prevention and correction of violations in child-parent relationships. Moreover, this work should combine both information and advisory and corrective and developmental classes. Information and advisory sessions should be aimed at developing a cognitive component of parental attitudes, raising the level of psychological and pedagogical competence of parents on educating teenagers and building collaborative relations with them. Advisory work with parents ensures that they become aware of their own psychological problems that might ruin their relationship with the child (Sokolova, 2016).

Corrective and developmental classes promote parents' personal resources, their ability to control their behavior, realize what feelings the child has, predict the child's behavior, and anticipate the results of their learning impact. However, for prevention and correction activities to be effective, teenagers should be encouraged to participate.

7. Conclusion

During the teen years, due to being awkward and sensitive, positive relationships between adolescents and their parents are crucial, as they still influence their further mental development. However, being not prepared for their children to grow older during the teen years, most parents prevent transforming their parental attitude towards the child, parental style, organization of control, etc. Parents' inconsistency, uncertainty and doubt about whether their child-rearing practices are correct, underestimation of teenager's need for emotional intimacy and acceptance, for independence and freedom of decision-making, a distorted idea of teenager's abilities, etc. all have a negative effect on parent-child relations. This is also facilitated by the fact that parents often overestimate their actual knowledge of child's inner world and their place in the system of child-parent relations. All these features of parental attitudes influence the way teenagers perceive parental attitudes.

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