

**EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN REJECTION
SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT PATTERN AND SOCIO-
EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF ADOLESCENTS LIVING
IN ORPHANAGE AND WITH THEIR PARENTS**

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ABSTRACT

Rejection sensitivity refers to defensively expect, perceive and over-react to perceived rejection by others and has been theorized to originate from early attachment pattern. However, this hypothesized link remains untested. The present study examines the link between Rejection Sensitivity (RS), Attachment Pattern (AP) and Socio-Emotional Adjustment (SA & EA) among adolescent's living in orphanages and those living with their parents. Adolescents (N=360) ranging between 14-18 years completed self-report measures. The findings suggest that there exists significantly positive and negative correlation as well as significant interaction between gender and living conditions among the variables RS, AP, SA and EA.

Keywords: Rejection sensitivity, attachment pattern, socio-emotional adjustment, orphans, orphanage, adolescents.

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Introduction

Human beings' identity is crucially influenced by the feedback of others. The relevance of interpersonal contact was already stated by the father of psychoanalysis, who focused on the satisfaction of sexual needs as main motive of seeking interpersonal contact^[1]. A famous theorist specified the need of "love and belongingness" as hierarchically arranged behind basic needs like food and safety^[2]. A well-known theorist regards adult social behavior as motivated by early experiences of (maternal) intimate behavior. As a result and depending on early interpersonal experiences, humans strive to build similar structures in intimate relationships^[3].

Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity (RS) is defined as the cognitive-affective processing disposition to defensively expect, perceive and over-react to perceived rejection by others. People with high RS behave in ways that undermine relationships and are more distressed following rejection^[4]. When individuals' needs are met repeatedly with rejection from their significant others, they tend to expect rejection in their future interactions. This makes them hyper-vigilant for rejection cues, such that even minimal or ambiguous signs of rejection are perceived as intentional rejection and make them feel rejected. This would prompt affective and behavioral overreactions, which may include anger and hostility, despondency, withdrawal of support, or jealousy^[5], and inappropriate attempts to control the behavior of significant others^[6].

A link between attachment and rejection sensitivity can be understood from attachment theory. Children's expectations about whether they would be accepted and loved or would be rejected by valued others is the core of internal working models. The researcher spoke of two kinds of working models: working model of others includes representation of the availability, responsiveness, and sensitivity of attachment figures, and the working model of self consists of representations of one's feeling of being loved and valued by the attachment figure and the self's own capabilities for mobilizing the attachment figure's support in times of need. Caregivers who are sensitive and consistently responsive to their infant's needs are likely to foster secure attachment in their children making them confident about being accepted^[7&8]. On the other hand, inconsistent caregivers are likely to foster insecure attachment in their children, who develop a working model of themselves as unworthy or incompetent and/or others are viewed with fears

and doubts about whether they would be rejecting. Based on attachment theory, the RS model postulated by the famous researcher proposes that when parents tend to meet children's expressed needs with rejection, children become sensitive to rejection ^[9].

Recently, new theories regarding developmental changes in attachment in older children and adolescents have been formulated. Contradictory to earlier models of family functioning which emphasized detachment as the developmental course of parent-child relationships in adolescence ^[10], new models, based on attachment theorist's life-span view, emphasizes the importance of attachment or connectedness to parental figures during the adolescent years, despite decreases in shared activities and interactions ^[11]. Although the maintenance of physical proximity and dependency on attachment figure is clearly less essential in older children due to increased physical and mental capacities, maintaining availability of the attachment figure (E.g. belief that the attachment figure is open to communication and responsive if help is needed) was found to remain important for adolescents ^[12].

Social-emotional adjustment

By socio-emotional adjustment, it is meant the relation an individual establishes with respect to the environment, and as such it has positive and negative, social and emotional aspects. Social-emotional development includes the child's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others. It encompasses both intra- and interpersonal processes.

The core features of emotional development include the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, to accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others, to manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner, to regulate one's own behavior, to develop empathy for others, and to establish and maintain relationships ^[13].

Social adjustment

It is generally said that man is a social animal. In reference to this, we may say that a person develops his personality in his social environment, he tries to mold himself according to his society's social values and ideals and to achieve them his activities and behaviors will be the

same as other members of his society, in which he lives and where his social needs and desires are satisfied. And then he feels himself socially adjusted.

Area of social adjustment is influenced by social maturity of the person. Maturity in social relationship means to establish good relations with members of the society.

Emotional adjustment

A balanced personality is one which is emotionally adjusted. Every instinct is followed by some emotion and in this way various emotions play an important role in the personality of individuals. Emotionally guided personality is not sound in nature and disciplined in manner.

A person is emotionally adjusted if he expresses emotion in a proper situation in a proper form. An emotionally stable person may be well adjusted and emotionally unstable conditions causes mental disorders and maladjustment. Emotional adjustment is essential for creating a sound personality. It is the roof of personality adjustment and physical, intellectual mental and esthetical adjustments are possible when emotional adjustment is made^[14].

Orphans

UNICEF and global partners define an orphan as a child who has lost one or both parents. By this definition there were over 132 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean in 2005. This large figure represents not only children who have lost both parents, but also those who have lost a father but have a surviving mother or have lost their mother but have a surviving father.

This definition contrasts with concepts of orphan in many industrialized countries, where a child must have lost both parents to qualify as an orphan. UNICEF and numerous international organizations adopted the broader definition of orphan in the mid-1990s as the AIDS pandemic began leading to the death of millions of parents worldwide, leaving an ever increasing number of children growing up without one or more parents. So the terminology of a 'single orphan' – the loss of one parent – and a 'double orphan' – the loss of both parents – was born to convey this growing crisis^[15].

Orphanages

Institutionalized children are considered as highly deprived class of society ^[16]. These children are left helpless, abandoned, neglected due to social, economic and personal. Reasons by the parents/ caregivers and they are deprived of one or more necessities of life. Early separation from parents, deprivation of parental care, love, affection, warmth, security, acceptance and discipline during childhood disrupts their normal socio-emotional development So it becomes necessary to know whether institutionalized children who are devoid of family life with the emotional warmth grow up normally and how well they are able to cope with himself and adjust to the demands of the environment or society around them^[17&18]. The practice of placing deprived children having minimum or no emotional and material resources, in large residential institutions like orphanages, destitute homes and charity educational institutions has since long been prevailing in socio-economically poor countries ^[19].

An orphanage is an institution dedicated to the care and upbringing of children who have lost their parent(s). Historically, such institutions were quite prevalent in western societies in the past. With regards to growing up in an orphanage, recent studies from Africa suggest that the children who grow into adults in orphanages have remarkably good long-term life adaptations. Losing a parent exposes a child to long-term psychological disturbances, which is greater if the parent is of the same sex. It has been suggested that it is not always the traumatic event as such but disruption and chronic pressure surrounding the traumatic event that are responsible for adverse long-term outcomes. Giving such children warm and good relations can ameliorate their psychological disturbances^[20].

Adolescence

The term adolescence comes from the Latin word '*adolescere*' which means to grow or to grow to maturity ^[21].

From the biological point of view, adolescence is the stage when pubertydawns.

Chronologically, adolescence is a span of life ranging from 12 to 19 years and having individual and cultural differences.

Sociologically, adolescence is a transitional period from dependence on parents to self-sufficient adulthood.

Culturally, adolescence period varies from community to community. In some communities marriage among boys and girls takes place quite early (as early as 13 to 16 years of age.)

Psychologically, adolescence is the marginal situation which involves psychological disturbances and problems of adjustments. It differentiates the childhood behavior from the adulthood behavior^[22].

The study was conducted on adolescents because of several reasons. Adolescence is viewed as a time of storm and stress^[23]. Of all the phases in the developmental trajectory in which adjustment is intriguing, adolescence captures the spotlight. Fundamentally, adolescence is one of the most compelling and yet complex developmental phases.

The present study

The primary aim of the foregoing study was to ascertain the link between Rejection Sensitivity, Attachment Pattern and Socio-Emotional Adjustment of Adolescents living in Orphanages and with their Parents.

Methodology

Collection of Data

Tools used

1. Children's Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire^[24]

CRSQ consists of 12 hypothetical situations involving interactions with peers and teachers. It measures defensive expectation of rejection from peers and teachers. Each of the 12 scenarios is read out loudly to the adolescents and then they answer three questions related to that situation. For example, one of the vignettes in CRSQ is: "Now imagine that you're back in class. Your teacher asks for a volunteer to help plan a party for your class. Lots of kids raise their hands. You wonder if the teacher will choose YOU". The three questions that follow the vignette are as follows: 1) "How NERVOUS would you feel, RIGHT THEN, about whether or not the teacher will choose you?" gives the anticipatory anxiety 2) "How ANGRY would you feel, RIGHT THEN, about whether or not the teacher will choose you to read?" gives the anticipatory anger and 3) "Do you think the teacher will choose YOU?" gives the expectation of rejection. The responses are indicated on a 6-point scale. Higher scores indicate greater expectation of rejection

and higher negative affect accompanying it.

2. **Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment** ^[25]

Adolescents completed attachment to mother and father scale of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. The measure assesses adolescents' perceptions of the positive and negative affective/cognitive dimension of relationships with their parents and close friends -- particularly how well these figures serve as sources of psychological security. The parent scale consists of items that assess adolescent perceptions of trust, communication, and alienation within the parent-adolescent relationship. The degree of mutual trust in a relationship designates a level of security in the ability of attachment figures to understand and respect an individual's needs and desires (e.g., "My mother respects my feelings"); Quality of communication is determined by an attachment figure's sensitivity and responsiveness to a person's emotional states and concerns (e.g., "I tell my father about my problems and troubles"); the extent of anger and alienation in an attachment relationship refers both to anger toward and to emotional detachment from the person's attachment figure (e.g., "My mother does not understand what I am going through these days").

3. **Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS)** ^[26]

The inventory consists of 60 items out of which 20 items measure emotional adjustment, 20 measure social adjustment and 20 measure educational adjustment. All the items are arranged randomly. The tool has been constructed for the age group of 14-18 years.

Each item of the inventory has two answers: 'Yes' and 'No'. The subject is to encircle one response out of the two. There is no time limit for the inventory but in average 10 to 12 minutes are taken by examinee to give complete responses for all the 60 items.

Sample Characteristics

For the proposed study, deliberate sampling method was employed. It was also known as purposive sampling or non-probability sampling. A sample consisting of 360 school-going adolescent boys and girls living in orphanages and those with their parents, and who meet the criteria were included in the study. Out of 413 adolescents, the data for only 360 were considered as some of the questionnaires were incomplete while others did not fulfill the inclusion criteria

which were taken into account while collecting data.

| S.No. | Name of Institution | Sample Size | Class | Gender | Age(years) |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| School | | | | | |
| 1 | Saifee Hall | 147 | IX-XII | Boys and Girls | 15-18 |
| 2 | St. Mary's | 53 | VIII | Boys | 14-16 |
| Orphanage | | | | | |
| 3 | The Refuge | 124 | VIII-XII | Boys and Girls | 15-18 |
| 4 | Calcutta Muslim Orphanage | 25 | VIII-XII | Girls | 15-18 |
| 5 | Dakshin Kalikata Sevashram | 11 | VIII-XII | Boys | 15-18 |

Results and Discussions

Relationship of Rejection Sensitivity with Emotional Adjustment

The result obtained from Pearson's Correlation indicates that there is a significant correlation between the variables Rejection Sensitivity and Emotional Adjustment ($r = 0.243^*$) among adolescent girls living with their parents. Hence, indicating that as rejection sensitivity is higher, emotional instability also increases. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. The adolescent girls, who are sensitive to rejection, tend to easily perceive social rejection cues and expect to be repeatedly rejected. They either avoid situations in which rejection is potentially possible or intensively seek assurance that they will not be rejected (again). Following rejection they may experience emotional instability, however the adolescent girls may express their anger or anxiety by sulking, refusing to speak, or loudly criticizing those who had made them angry. It may also happen that they might not be able to manage, understand and express their emotions subsequently perceiving rejection cues.

Relationship of Rejection Sensitivity with Attachment Pattern

The result of the present study suggests that there is a significant correlation between Rejection

Sensitivity and Attachment Pattern among adolescent girls living in orphanages. Hence, it can be said that the greater the adolescent girls perceive rejection, the lower is their attachment pattern ($r = .212^*$). As we know, that the adolescents living in orphanage may have disorganized attachment with the caregiver. There is a great discrepancy between the ratios of caregivers to children in the orphanages. Hence, there might be times when the need of the children were not met and the love affection and care required by the growing child might also be absent giving rise to disorganized attachment pattern. This perhaps further leads them become hyper-vigilant to rejection cues.

Relationship of Attachment Pattern with Social Adjustment

As anticipated, the findings of the present study indicates that there is a significant correlation between the variables Attachment Pattern and Social Adjustment among adolescent ,girls living with their parents ($r = .232^*$). The findings confirm that the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. From the result, it can be said that the more securely attached the adolescent girls feel with their parents, the better they are able to adjust socially and vice-versa. Hence, area of social adjustment is influence by social maturity of the person. Maturity in social relationship means to establish good relations with family, neighbors, playmates, classmates, teachers and other members of the society. Hence, adolescent girls who scored high in social adjustment may be submissive in nature while those scoring low may be aggressive in their behavior.

Relationship of Social Adjustment with Emotional Adjustment

In the present study, a significant correlation was found among the variables Social and Emotional Adjustment in the adolescent girls living with their parents ($r = .248^*$). In other words, it can be assumed that when social adjustment increases then the emotional stability of the individual also increases. The findings of the present study indicate that the adolescent girls living with their parents are able to manage their own emotions as well as understand the emotional state of others and hence, they tend to establish positive and rewarding relationship with others in the society.

Relationship of Attachment Pattern with Emotional Adjustment

The findings of the foregoing study suggests that there is a significant correlation between the variables Attachment Pattern and Emotional Adjustment where, $r = .223^*$ among boys living in orphanages. Therefore, it can be said from the present result that the adolescent boys living in orphanages might express their emotions in a proper situation and in a proper form if they experienced a secure attachment pattern with their parents or caregiver.

From the result of two-way ANOVA, it can be reported that there is significant interaction between gender (boys and girls) and living condition (living in orphanages and with their parents) in the construct Rejection Sensitivity (where, $p= 17.39$) and Attachment Pattern (where, $p= 0.629$). On the other hand, there was found no significant interaction between gender (boys and girls) and living condition (living in orphanages and with their parents) with regard to Social Adjustment (where, $p= 0.629$) and Emotional Adjustment (where, $p= 0.042$).

Therefore, it can be concluded from the findings of the present study that there exists a link between the variables Rejection Sensitivity, Attachment Pattern and Socio-Emotional Adjustment. And, on the other side it was also found that is significant interaction between gender (boys and girls) and living condition (living in orphanages and with parents).

Conclusion

The present study is an attempt to capture the theorized link between rejection sensitivity, attachment pattern and socio-emotional adjustment in adolescents living in orphanage and those living with their parents. The findings of the present study suggest that there is a significant correlational relationship between the following variables with regard to gender and social backgrounds:

1. Rejection sensitivity and attachment pattern of adolescent girls living in orphanages.
2. Rejection sensitivity and emotional adjustment of adolescent girls living with their parents.
3. Attachment pattern and social adjustment of adolescent girls living with their parents.
4. Social adjustment and emotional adjustment of adolescent girls living with their parents.
5. Attachment pattern and emotional adjustment of adolescent boys living in orphanages.

6. Social adjustment and emotional adjustment of adolescent boys living in orphanages.
7. Attachment pattern and emotional adjustment of adolescent boys living with their parents.
8. Social adjustment and emotional adjustment of adolescent boys living with their parents.

On the other hand, from the two-way ANOVA analysis, the following result was obtained:

1. There is a significant interaction effect of gender (boys and girls) and living condition (orphanage and parents) on rejection sensitivity of adolescents living in orphanages and those living with their parents.
2. There is a significant interaction effect of gender (boys and girls) and living condition (orphanage and parents) on attachment pattern of adolescents living in orphanages and those living with their parents.
3. There is no significant interaction effect of gender (boys and girls) and living condition (orphanage and parents) on social adjustment of adolescents.
4. There is no significant interaction effect of gender (boys and girls) and living condition (orphanage and parents) on emotional adjustment of adolescents.

The findings of the proposed study also indicate that the mean value of rejection sensitivity is higher among adolescent girls living in orphanages than others. On the other hand, attachment pattern seems to be lower in adolescents living in orphanages in comparison to adolescents living with their parents. While, on the contrary, from the mean value it could be concluded that there is no significant difference found in the mean of adolescents living in orphanages and those living with their parents with regard to social adjustment. Lastly, girls living with their parents report higher emotional instability comparatively. Overall, boys living with parents report lower mean value with regard to emotional adjustment. .

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