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LIVE AND LET'S LIVE: PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES IN PARENT-ADOLESCENT CONFLICT.

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Abstract

This study investigated adolescent impulsivity, parenting styles and marital satisfaction as determinants of parent-adolescent conflict in the home. 120 adolescents and 120 parents drawn from Lagos and Ibadan were used in the study. 5 scales were used in data collection; Omocha (2001) authoritative/authoritarian parenting styles scale, Emelogu (2002) parent-adolescent conflict scale (adolescent version), Olapegba-Emelogu (2002) adolescent impulsivity scale, Mehrbiam (1998) marital satisfaction scale and parent version of the parent-adolescent conflict scale by Emelogu (2002). 2-way ANOVA and Pearson r were used in analyzing the data. There was significant interaction of adolescent impulsivity, authoritative parenting and marital satisfaction on parent-adolescent conflict. The results as well revealed that authoritarian parenting is significantly related to parent-adolescent conflict. It is therefore suggested that a good conflict management mechanism be put in place to reduce conflict to a manageable level.

Introduction

In between childhood and adulthood is what is known as period of adolescence, it is an important transition period that has been found to determine the type of adult that will emerge later in life. It is a period of turbulence, which is characterized by physical, biological and psychological changes regardless of sex and socioeconomic background. These changes lead to conflicts with authority, emotional upheavals and social readjustments (Hall, 1904).

The conflicts in adolescence are both intra and inter, although one can lead to the other. The intra conflict can be about the search for identity, which may then lead to attempt to exert autonomy. A situation that may set the adolescent on collision course with parents and other authority figures. Whether adolescent conflicts are properly resolved or not depends not only on the adolescents but also on social factors prevailing in the circumstance. Parents who engage in give and take with adolescents during this crisis period help to bring about better outcome in resolving the conflicts (Santrock, 1996).

Steinberg (1988) sees much of the conflict as involving everyday events of family life like keeping a bedroom clean, dressing in a particular manner, getting home at a certain hour, not staying on the phone for too long and so on. Erickson (1968) suggests that as children grow into adults, they begin to define themselves less by what they look like and more by what they believe and feel, they become more preoccupied about achieving a sense of their own identity and avoid role confusion.

Apart from the search for identity and assertion of autonomy that have made the period of adolescence a storm and stress period, impulsivity is another internal factor implicated in parent-adolescent conflict (Caspi, Henry, McGee, Moffit and Silva, 1995; Thomas and Chass, 1991). Impulsivity is a temperamental characteristic that has been found to be common in adolescents. It is characterized by explosive, uncontrolled behaviour and a tendency to react intensely and without weighing the consequences of the actions. Thomas and Chass (1991) have found that impulsivity is related to difficulties in parent-adolescent conflict. According to them adolescents who become easily angry and have difficulty controlling their impulses elicit overt conflict with parents more frequently than adolescents who react with less intensity and whose display of emotion is more tempered.

Although the factors stated above have been implicated in parent-adolescent conflict, yet whether the conflict will actually take place will depend on parental reactions to the adolescents and the changes taking place in and about him/her. In other words, parenting style is an important factor that determines the level of parent-adolescent conflict and how the conflict is resolved. During adolescence, the parent-adolescent interaction is bound to undergo changes, with the adolescent tending more toward asserting autonomy. Resolution of the resulting conflict will largely depend on the ability of the parent to strike a balance between providing a safe, warm and affectionate environment where the adolescent is encouraged to explore new physical, cognitive and social potentials on the one hand, and to set and enforce reasonable rules and standards as well as supervise the child's activities.

Parents are known, as major agents of socialization to their children and as such the importance of parenting styles cannot be overemphasized. Thus, Maccoby and Martins (1993) state that adolescents' social, emotional and cognitive development are a function of both the quality and type of parenting and child rearing practices adopted during childhood. Different types of parenting styles produce different adolescent reactions to parents and by extension the levels of conflict that will be experienced. For instance, parents who allow their adolescent children a great deal of freedom may deprive them of some of the direction and support they both need and crave, while adolescents who have no freedom and too much supervision and surveillance may feel thwarted in their effort to be independent.

item scale in the Likert format with options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. It has a reliability coefficient of 0.79.

4. Marital Satisfaction Scale (Mehrabian, 1998). It is a 14-item scale measuring satisfaction in marriage, it is in the Likert format with response pattern ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The higher the score, the higher satisfaction derived in the marital relationship. The scale has a reliability coefficient of 0.83.

Procedure

Two hundred and forty (240) questionnaires were administered to parents and adolescents (individually) in Lagos and Ibadan, the subject were approached in their respective homes. Consent of subjects was sought with assurance of absolute confidentiality; the questionnaires were dropped for subjects to fill and retrieved after a day or two.

Statistical Analysis

A 2-way analysis of variance and Pearson r were used to analyze the data.

Results

Results of the interaction effect of adolescent impulsivity, authoritative parenting and marital satisfaction on parent—adolescent conflict showed that there is no significant interaction effect between impulsivity and authoritative parenting on parent—adolescent conflict ($t(1,112) = .496; P > .05$) (See table 2). There is also no significant interaction effect between adolescent impulsivity and parent marital satisfaction on parent—adolescent conflict, $F(1,112) = .006; P > .05$ (See table 2). The result as well showed that there exist no significant effect of authoritative parenting and marital satisfaction on parent—adolescent conflict, $f(1,112) = .901; P > .05$ (See table 2). However, there exist significant effect of adolescent impulsivity, authoritative parenting style, and marital satisfaction on parent—adolescent conflict, $f(1,112) = 4.671; P < .05$ (See table 2). There is also a significant main effect of adolescent impulsivity on parent-adolescent conflict, $f(1, 112) = 3.007; P < .05$ (see table 2).

Table 2: 2x2x2 Anova summary table showing adolescent impulsivity, authoritative parenting style and marital satisfaction on parent – adolescent conflict,

| source | SS | df | Ms | F | P |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----|---------|-------|------|
| A Impulsivity | 337.356 | 1 | 327.056 | 3.007 | <.05 |
| B Authoritative parenting | 8.688 | 1 | 8.688 | .001 | NS |
| C Marital satisfaction | 37.438 | 1 | 37.438 | .344 | NS |
| AXB | 53.930 | 1 | 53.930 | .496 | NS |
| AXC | .671 | 1 | .671 | .006 | NS |
| BXC | 97.989 | 1 | 97.981 | .901 | NS |
| AXBXC | 507.997 | 1 | 507.997 | 4.671 | <.05 |
| Residual | 12181.495 | 112 | 108.763 | | |
| Total | 13210.667 | 119 | | | |

Result of the Pearson correlation that tested for the relationship between parenting styles (authoritarian and authoritative) and parent – adolescent conflict showed that there is positive significant relationship between authoritative parenting style and parent adolescent conflict, $r = .39$, $DF=118$, $p < .05$. On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between authoritative parenting style and parent –adolescent conflict, $r = -.037$, $df=118$, $p > .05$.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study found that there exist conflicts in parent-adolescent relationship brought about by factors like adolescent impulsivity and the interactions of impulsivity, authoritative parenting and marital satisfaction, although the level of conflict experienced will depend on each factor and how they are managed.

According to the result of this study, adolescents who are high on impulsivity would experience more conflict with their parents. This corroborates the findings of Decovic Maja (1998), in his study of 508 families on parent-adolescent conflict, he found that personal characteristics of the adolescents predict the amount of conflict with parents. Specifically, impulsive temperament is found to be a major

determinant of parent-adolescent conflict. In other words, adolescent that highly impulsive will find it difficult putting their temper under check or holding back from retorting when their parents rebuke them, thus conflict ensues.

Also, a significant interaction was found between adolescents' impulsivity, authoritative parenting style and marital satisfaction on parent-adolescent conflict, meaning that adolescents with high impulsivity, raised by authoritative parents who *are dissatisfied with their marriage will experience more conflict*. However, there exist no significant two-way interaction effect of adolescent impulsivity vs marital satisfaction, authoritative parenting vs marital satisfaction and impulsivity vs authoritative parenting on parent-adolescent conflict.

A significant positive relationship was as well found between parenting styles and parent-adolescent conflict, the findings indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between authoritarian parenting style and parent-adolescent conflict, the higher the authoritarian parenting, the higher the conflict. This finding confirms the findings of Smetana (1995), that authoritarian parenting elicits more conflict among adolescents and their parents.

The period of adolescence is usually marked with physical and psychological changes and expectedly the changes lead to some forms of conflict, however, the conflict can be reduced to a manageable level if the right approach is adopted and the home environment made conducive enough. For instance, the less authoritarian the parents are the less conflict that is experienced in parent-adolescent relationship. Also, good attempt can be made at behaviour modification to help reduce or manage adolescents' impulsivity.

Conflict in any human relationship could be inevitable, and the home front is not an exception, but then a good conflict resolution mechanism must be put in place in order to keep the home from disintegrating.

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