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## A Study on Parent Child Relationship and Adverse Childhood Experiences of Psychology and Non-Psychology Undergraduate Students

**Anjali Chand**

Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences,

Amity University Uttar Pradesh Lucknow Campus

**Dr. Soni Kewalramani**

Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences

Amity University Uttar Pradesh Lucknow Campus

### ABSTRACT

Parent-child relationship refers to the unique and unconditional bond between a guardian and their child. The relationship includes how parents and children interact with one another physically, emotionally and socially. The uniqueness is caused by factors such as the parent's past experiences, self-confidence, parenting style, compatibility, age, culture and individual traits of both child and parent. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) encompass various forms of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunctions experienced in childhood. This study's main objective is to study the child's relationship with their parent and their adverse childhood experiences of students from psychology and non-psychology backgrounds. This research focuses on understanding if there are any differences in the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences of psychology and non-psychology students. The tool used for this study was the Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS) developed by Dr. Nalini Rao (1989) and Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACE) by Felitti et al., (1998). The sample size comprises of 50 students. The data is gathered from Amity University, Lucknow Campus. The research study will indicate how healthy a child's relationship is with either parent. Children have varied experiences with each family member. Therefore, the relationship with the father and mother are being studied separately to understand how they behave in a given situation. The

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study may further provide insight into the adverse childhood experiences students have gone through in their life.

## INTRODUCTION

Parent-child relationship refers to the unique and unconditional bond between a guardian and their child. There are various kinds of parents, biological, single, foster, legally agreed and many more. The relationship includes how parents and children interact with one another physically, emotionally and socially. Over the years, a great deal of study has been done on parent-child to understand how every individual child develops. An individual starts to change and develop right from the innate stage till their adolescence and so on. The parents play a very significant role in shaping their personalities.

Quite some theories were formed concerning child development. Some of the notable theories are: **Freud's psychoanalytic developmental theory (1890)**, mainly focused on instinctual factors. He suggested that early experiences played the biggest role in shaping an individual's personality.

**Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory (1950)**, was made on lines of Freud's theory. Just instead of instinctual factors, it focuses on environmental factors and examines how social factors affect child development. This theory involves eight stages that describe growth and change throughout life, focusing on social interaction and conflicts that arise during different stages of development.

**John Bowlby's attachment theory (1958)**, suggested that children are born with an innate need to form strong emotional and physical attachments and receive warmth from their caregivers. He believed this played a significant role in child development as it could affect social relationships. Children who receive this support and care may feel more secure in any relation, than others (Cherry et al.).

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**Bandura's Social learning theory (1977)**, suggests behavior can be learnt via observation. By observing the actions of parents, peers and others, children learn new information and develop new skills.

**Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978)**, focuses on how adults and peers influence an individual's learning. Also how cultural beliefs and attitudes impact how instruction and learning take place.

**B.F skinner's operant behavior & conditioning theory (1930)**, believed in using rewards and punishment to modify or reinforce a behavior. Parents have acknowledged that their children respond to the system of rewards and punishment, as described by Skinner in his research. These two techniques are often used by parents to control and condition their children's behaviour. When a behaviour is rewarded, children are more likely to repeat the behavior happily and willingly as they know it's a favourable behaviour (Grace 2018). Whilst, in case of a punishment for a behavior, children will be less likely to repeat the behavior unless they want to go through its consequences again. Most parents have used more of negative reinforcements to modify their child's behavior. However, new studies emphasis that positive reinforcement should be used more than negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement should be kept as a last resort, as it affects a child's development emotionally and physically.

During these studies, it was found that the family's relationship with their children has a consequential role in an individual's personality and socio-psychological developments. To study that **Cox & Paley** researched on the family as systems and how it affects child development (Tomo Umemura, 2013).

The parent-child relationship is a relationship that supports the physical, emotional and social development of the child. It is a unique bond that every child and parent can appreciate and support. This relationship forms the basis of the child's personality, life choices, and general behavior. It also affects their physical, mental and emotional health.

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**Some of these benefits include:**

Children who grow up in safe and healthy relationships with their parents are more likely to have happy and fulfilling relationships with others in their lives.

Children who have a good relationship with their parents learn to control their emotions in stressful and difficult situations.

Supports children's brain, language and thought development.

Helping children have hope and confidence in leadership.

Healthy parental involvement and influence in a child's daily life lays the foundation for better social and academic success.

Security leads to social, emotional, intellectual and motivational health.

When children establish good relationships with their parents, they also gain problem-solving skills.

**Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** encompass various forms of physical and emotional abuse, neglect, and household dysfunctions experienced in childhood. The harms of ACEs can be long-lasting, affecting people even in their adulthood. ACEs have been linked to premature death as well as to various health conditions, including those of mental disorders. Toxic stress linked to child abuse is related to a number of neurological changes in the structure of the brain and its function. The concept of adverse childhood experiences refers to various traumatic events or circumstances affecting children before the age of 18 and causing mental or physical harm. There are 10 types of ACEs:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- psychological abuse

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- physical neglect
  - psychological neglect
  - witnessing domestic abuse
  - having a close family member who misused drugs or alcohol
  - having a close family member with mental health problems
  - having a close family member who served time in prison
  - parental separation or divorce on account of relationship breakdown.

The different adverse childhood experiences are not isolated and in many cases multiple ACEs impact someone at the same time. According to Wikipedia,

#### **Biological Changes:**

Because of exposure to ACEs presents many challenges at an early age, the bodies of persons exposed to ACEs differ significantly from those without ACEs. This is most evident in changes in the brain; hippocampus, amygdala and corpus callosum. Because of the density of glucocorticoid receptors in brain regions, these areas of the brain are more affected than others including reduced thickness, reduced size and reduced size of connections in the brain.

#### **Physical Health:**

Greater number of unhealthy behaviors, including sex, smoking, drinking alcohol, and an increased risk of obesity have been reported by researchers.

The association between these lifestyle problems and ACEs showed dose response relationship, with those with four or more ACEs experiencing more lifestyle problems. Chronic diseases such as asthma, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke and migraine are more likely to occur in people exposed to ACEs.

#### **Mental Health:**

A dose relationship with symptom severity and outcome has been observed in a variety of mental health conditions, including depression, negative thoughts/depression, anxiety, suicidality,

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bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia in people who have had exposure to ACEs. Subsequent studies have also shown that the ACE score is associated with psychosis and the occurrence and severity of psychiatric illnesses and disorders.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Kinghorn, Moore et.al, 2011.**

Various studies have found a significant link between the level of the parent's relationship and positive results for children and their families. Although, lack of research has been conducted on various subgroups, particularly the underprivileged communities. The sample size consisted of more than 64,000 candidates having

6-17 years old children. Outcomes suggest that the parents' relationship level is very often strongly connected to a range of child and family, including child behavior issues (externalizing), child social ability, child's school involvement, child's internalizing (depression), parent-child interaction and parental feelings of irritation. The diverse subgroups involved in this study are white, black & Hispanic couples, married and cohabiting couples, families with varied financial capacity, different gender, teenagers and younger children, immigrants and non-immigrants and parent's educational qualifications. In conclusion, it was found that positive parental relationships are often linked to favourable results for children and families amongst all the subgroups in the study. In addition, this is not just limited to the financially or academically benefited families and children, but also to various economic, racial, ethnic and family structure subgroups.

### **Kikuyo AOKI, 2003.**

This study on parent-infant discusses the best ways to nurse and look after an infant. It reviews the significance of early stages of a parent-child relationship. As an example, 3 various stages of mother-infant communication are presented via diagrams. The growth of an infant during the first 2 years, depending on the mother-infant communication is shown in the figures by the 3

primary stages. The basic features of developmental changes in the ability of infants to begin interacting with mother usually start at around the first 2 months, 2-6 months and 6-18 months. The features of the mother-infant communication are majorly corresponding to such changes. The modern-day scenario of the parenting situation in Japan includes issues like lack of father's involvement and clinical duties are also shown in the study.

**A.K., Kowal et.al, 2004.**

Most parents are unaware of the consequences of treating siblings unfairly and not paying much attention to building a stronger relationship with their children. Various parenting styles, perceptions of equality and parent-child relationship quality were all studied from the adolescent sibling point of view and their parents in 74 married families. Structure random constant modelling revealed the extent of differential treatment of siblings was directly linked to a negative parent-child relationship, but only if the adolescent perceived it as unfair. The conclusions drawn gave more weight to studying all family relation's thoughts concerning the justification of differential treatment and motivating families to communicate their viewpoints of such situations internally.

**Laosa, L. M., 1982.**

It was predicted that schooling really helps shape an individual's behavior that somewhere reflects on their parenting style and behavior later. Parent's behavior has a major impact on a child's cognitive skills development, learning styles and overall personality. Many studies tried to figure if either parental schooling, parent's occupational status or maternal employment had a primal effect on academically connected areas of the parent-child relationship. The research was directed towards the Chicano families. It was done due to issues concerning ethnic diversity, individual differences within them and educational and occupational equity. The results gathered on parental schooling and its link with parent-child relationship suggested various reasons for the repetitive academic failures seen amongst certain ethnic minorities in the US. A broad theoretical

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model is presented that causally links parental schooling, family interaction processes and children's academic performance.

**Alice M. Hines, 1997.**

During adolescence, children go through various hormonal changes. Situations like divorce and its challenges with transition may accelerate or adversely affect a child's growth. An evaluation of various written work on adolescent development, family relations and aftermath of divorces provided the explanation that adolescent and younger children process divorce differently and a good parent-child relationship will aid in reducing the adverse effects of divorce. The past findings did not include differential effects for ethnic and minority youth and families and also the influence of diverse family arrangements on development.

**Kaur, Maheshwari, et.al, 2015**

A child's young age is the most crucial time of their life, as that's when the socializing begins by transferring attitudes, customs and behavior taught by family and community. Parents have a significant part in converting their children into ideal citizens. This researched was conducted on school going children, in order to analyse their relationship with their parents.

**Sarita, Sonia et.al, 2016.**

The research focused on studying the Parent-child relationship of boy and girl students from Private and Government-owned secondary schools in Rohtak, Haryana. The study undertook 200 students (100 males and 100 females). The random sampling method was used to choose respondents from different schools of Rohtak. The Parent-child relationship scale by Nalini Rao (1989) was used. The raw data was examined by converting it into a mean, SD and T-test, to find out the results for the Parent-child relationship of boy and girl students Private and Government-owned secondary schools. The outcome showed no major variation in the Parent-child relationship amongst the boy and girl secondary school students. However, the mean score of boys was slightly more than the girls, and therefore, it can be said that boys have a better relationship with their parents.



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**Sharma et.al, 2015**

Despite of the altering significance in the modern family, children are still majorly affected by their father and mother. This research is aimed at analyzing the Parent Child Relationship in high school adolescent girls. The test was conducted on 60 girl students studying in 9th & 10th grade from Lai L.M. Public school, Jaipur. The standard research instrument of Parent child relationship scale (PCRS) by Nalini Rao (1989) was used. The information gathered by this research was then coded and assessed quantitatively. The outcome disclosed that on the parent child relationship factors, fathers shared a better bond with their children than mothers did. Some factors that were equivalent between mothers and fathers were protective, demanding, symbolic rewards and object rewards for their children. However, negative factors like rejecting, neglecting, and indifferent and object punishment were evident more in mother than fathers. Whilst father's surprisingly received more scores on love and care factor. To conclude, its research revealed that both parents are equally significant for a child.

**Shah et.al, 2018.**

The relation between a parent and child becomes more crucial when the child experiences physiological and psychological changes and they tend to seek more warmth, support and safety from their parents. The targeted age group was between 16- 18, the research is aimed at analyzing their relationship with their parents. The prediction of the research is H1 i.e. Parent and child have a highly cordial relationship. Respondents from diverse traditions, cultures and level of society were examined using the Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS) developed by Nalini Rao. The research was conducted on 200 respondents, for which students from various schools were randomly picked. Once the raw data was gathered, the analysis was carried out on the Microsoft Excel, using the z-score.

**Mattoo, Shaban, 2012.**

The research objective was to analyze the relationship of teenage males and females from Anantnag of Kashmir valley with either of their parents. The test was conducted on a sample size

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of 80 respondents (40 males, 40 females) using the Parent-Child relationship scale by Nalini Rao (1989). In the outcome of the research, a major distinction was seen between the application of symbolic punishment, rejecting and loving factor for different child gender. Whereas, there was no major distinction seen in when the protecting factor was linked to the adolescent's gender.

**Boullier & M Blair , 2018 – Elsevier.**

The long term poor health outcomes in people who have experienced multiple adverse events in childhood have been well documented since the original CDC-Kaiser study in the late 1990's. Those people who have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are at significantly increased risk of chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes as well as mental illness and health risk behaviours. The ACE pyramid is a model that describes the relationship between ACEs, disease and potentially early death. There is growing evidence of the ways in which adversity and toxic stress, cause these poor outcomes. Exposure to adversity has been shown to alter the molecular and genetic makeup of a child as well as changing the way the neurological, immune and endocrine systems develop and function. Adverse events in childhood are of great public health concern given the evidence of their long term impact on health. This article describes the significant impact of ACEs on the health of future generations outlining the research background to ACEs. It also explores how we are finding ways to mitigate their adverse effects by prevention and promotion of resilience against the effects of adversity.

**Marilyn Metzler, Merrick et.al**

Substantial research shows that early adversity, including child abuse and neglect, is associated with diminished health across the life course and across generations. Less well understood is the relationship between early adversity and adult socioeconomic status, including education, employment, and income. Collectively, these outcomes provide an indication of overall life opportunity. We analysed data from 10 states and the District of Columbia that used the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) module in the 2010 Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System to examine the association between ACEs and adult education, employment, and income.

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Compared to participants with no ACEs, those with higher ACE scores were more likely to report high school non-completion, unemployment, and living in a household below the federal poverty level. This evidence suggests that preventing early adversity may impact health and life opportunities that reverberate across generations. Current efforts to prevent early adversity might be more successful if they broaden public and professional understanding (i.e., the narrative) of the links between early adversity and poverty. We discuss our findings within the context of structural policies and processes that may further contribute to the intergenerational continuity of child abuse and neglect and poverty.

### **Bellis, Karen Huhes et.al**

A growing body of research identifies the harmful effects that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; occurring during childhood or adolescence; ex, child maltreatment or exposure to domestic violence) have on health throughout life. Studies have quantified such effects for individual ACEs. However, ACEs frequently co-occur and no synthesis of findings from studies measuring the effect of multiple ACE types has been done.

### **RATIONALE**

This study aligns towards a newer direction of understanding the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences of students. Specifically, to understand if there are any differences in the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among psychology and non-psychology students.

The idea behind it was to know and understand any consistent patterns in students' relationship with their parents and exposure to childhood adversity that might have led half of the students in this study to choose psychology as their major subject in University.

This study will help us in understanding and reaching to a quantitative ground and ultimately leading us to gain a finer approach to discuss about the affect of parent child relationship and

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adverse childhood experiences largely on psychology students in the matter of choosing to study it as their major subject.

No similar study has not been conducted prior this, at a university level, hence, making it an important approach to understand the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences of students from psychology and non-psychology backgrounds.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Objective:**

To study Parent Child Relationship and Adverse Childhood Experiences among Psychology and Non-psychology Undergraduate students. To assess if there are any differences in the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among psychology and non-psychology students.

#### **Hypothesis :**

H1 – There exists a difference between the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among psychology and non-psychology students.

H0 – There exists no difference between the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among psychology and non-psychology students.

#### **Variables :**

Independent variable – parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences

Dependent variable – psychology and non-psychology students

#### **Sample :**

Stratified sampling technique was used for this study. It consists of 25 psychology and 25 non-psychology students of undergraduate level from Amity University, Lucknow Campus.

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## TOOLS

Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS) by Dr. Nalini Rao,1989. This scale was adapted from the revised Roe-Seigalman Parent-child relationship questionnaire. After gaining a thorough understanding, Dr. Nalini Rao formulated ten parent-child relationship dimensions, namely, protecting, symbolic punishment, rejecting, object punishment, demanding, indifferent, symbolic reward, loving, object reward and neglecting each of which has 10 items. This tool consists of total 100 items and requires the subject to score their mother and father separately using the 5 points Likert scale ranging from “Always” to “Very Rarely”.

The Adverse Childhood Questionnaire (ACE) by Felitti, et.al is intended to measure ACEs and the association between them and risk behaviours in later life. ACE is designed for administration to people aged 18 years and older. Questions cover family dysfunction; physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect by parents or caregivers; peer violence; witnessing community violence, and exposure to collective violence.

## ADMINISTRATION

Tests applied : Z -Test – A z-test score is a numerical measurement that describes a value’s relationship to the mean of a group of values. Z-scores may be positive or negative, with a positive value indicating the score is above the mean and a negative score indicating it is below the mean. This was used in order to find out the results of parent child relationship of students.

A Single-factor ANOVA (i.e. The analysis of variance) checks if the means of two or more groups are significantly equal or different from each other. In this study, a Single-factor ANOVA was used to find out if there was any difference between the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among psychology and non-psychology students.

## SCORING

Parent Child Relationship Questionnaire :

It is a likert scale in which the score of 5 was interpreted as behaviour to be occurring always, 4 as most likely, 3 as moderately, 2 as less likely and 1 as very rarely or never.

Scores for mother and father were calculated separately according to the 10 dimensions. A final score was obtained on which statistical techniques like calculation of mean, standard deviation and z-test was applied for both of the parents and a final score was obtained in order to interpret the data according to the norms of z-test given for this test.

Adverse Childhood Experiences :

A response of Yes was awarded as 1 and a response of No was given a 0.

All the scores were added and the total score obtained was interpreted in order to find out the result. A total score of 4 and above was considered clinically significant and interpreted as the student having an exposure to adverse childhood experiences and scores below 4 were considered as clinically insignificant and hence, interpreted as the student not having exposure to adverse childhood experiences.

## **RESULTS**

**Z – test :**

Table 1.1 : Norms for interpretation of level of Parent Child Relationship.

Range of z-score	Grade	Level of relationship
+2.01 and above	A	Extremely Cordial
+1.26 to +2.00	B	Very Cordial
+0.51 to 1.25	C	Above Average
-0.50 to 0.50	D	Moderate
-0.51 to -1.25	E	Below Average
-1.26 to -2.00	F	Unfavourable
-2.01 and below	G	Extremely Unfavourable

Table 1.2 : Results of z-score.

Students	z-score	Grade	Interpretation
Psychology	-0.50 to 0.50	D	Moderate
Non- psychology	-0.50 to 0.50	D	Moderate

\*Note – These results are indicative of the average results of the data i.e of the majority of students.

Through calculation of data using this test, it was observed that the majority of students had received a Z score from -0.50 to +0.50 which means that they have moderate relationship with both of their parents and came under the grade D.

#### ACE :

Calculation of ACE scores showed that more than half of the students fell under the category of “clinically insignificant” as they had the score below 4 which means that they have not had adverse childhood experiences.

#### One way Anova :

According to this, if the P value < 0.05 then the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected.

After scoring, the P value was found to be 0.26 which is greater than 0.05, hence, null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected.

This states that there exists no significant difference between the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences of psychology and non-psychology students.

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## **DISCUSSION**

Parent Child Relationship – The majority of students had a moderate relationship with both of their parents. A moderate relationship is indicative of lack of healthy communication between the parents and the student at most of the times,, the parents are not necessarily involved in the upbringing of the their child , the student has an average attachment with their parents, sheltered and given a shield of protection for situations assumed to be hostile and oppressing but not always and is not given enough space and freedom to have an individualist opinion and follow his/her own principles and ethics.

Most of the students felt that they received negative feedback and comments even about minor things which can lead to, if continued feelings of guilt and shame. Neglecting theirs needs and emotions was a visible pattern in majority of students ‘responses.

Certain dimensions like symbolic punishment and rejecting were the most noticeable dimensions in which the students responded with higher scores. This suggests that these areas need to be worked upon more.

Adverse Childhood Experiences – Most of the students have not had adverse childhood experiences while growing up. Although, some of the students had clinically significant scores which indicates the future possibilities of addiction to smoking and alcohol, depression and health problems etc as stated in many studies if not taken care of. These few students might be in need of counselling or psychotherapy.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The reliability of the answers given by students cannot be 100%. Since there are 100 questions, it’s best to assume that the last few questions might have been filled in a hurry or just randomly due to fatigue.

The PCRS test made by Nalini Rao is a bit irrelevant and outdated in some ways. The new generation has some different experiences with their parents. The age group she targeted was 12-



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18 years old. Some of the questions are less relevant after age 14 itself. I came across these limitations while conducting the study.

The questions are made for very young children, not very applicable to college students. Many sentences had to be edited.

This result may not apply to students outside Lucknow.

The comparison between a single & both parent, concerning parent-child relationship was not drawn due to insufficient data of single parents.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted to understand the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among psychology and non-psychology students.

Through this, it can be concluded that there exists no difference between the parent child relationship and adverse childhood experiences among students from psychology and non-psychology backgrounds.

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