How Parent-Parent Relationships, Parent-Child Relationships and the Interactions Among Them Affect Teenagers' Happiness

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Abstract

Previous research has focused on both the relationship between parents and parents and the relationship between parents and children, and how they affect and are affected by various different factors. This study focuses on the interactions between parent-parent relationships and parent-child relationships, specifically how they relate to and affect each other. We approached this study mainly by examining three key relations: how parent-parent relationships affect teenagers' happiness, how parent-child relationships affect teenagers' happiness, and how the interaction between parent-parent relationships and parent-child relationships affect teenagers' happiness, specifically how these two different types of relationships relate to each other. After designing a survey with many questions in it and distributing it to an audience of 32 teenagers, several core relations were revealed. Firstly, individual happiness affects overall happiness more than happiness when with family. Secondly, relationships with the child's parents individually and the relationship strength between their parents both factor into the child's happiness when they are with their parents. Finally, the parent-parent relationship is independent of the parent-child relationship; they act independently on the child's happiness. Synthesizing all major and minor findings, it is clear that both a positive parent-parent relationship and positive parent-child relationships are important to maintain the child's happiness.

Keywords: parent-child relationship, parent-parent relationship, teenager well-being, family dynamics, adolescent well-being, teenager happiness, adolescent happiness, life satisfaction

1. Introduction

Several recent studies have explored the critical role family relationships play in shaping teenager well-being. Li et al. (2023) examined the influence of positive parenting behaviors on teenagers' general happiness and found how much the mother and father's supportive parenting were associated with the teenagers' happiness. The difference found was that the fathers' positive parenting had some partially indirect effects on teenagers' life satisfaction, while the mothers' positive parenting influenced teenagers mainly by strengthening emotional attachment. This means that the study found evidence that the mother and father had different impacts on a teenager's happiness. Ratliff et al. (2023) investigated the relationship between parent-child relationships and emotional regulation and

positive psychology in teenagers. Their study shows that teenagers who perceive their parents to be emotionally supportive develop stronger emotional regulation skills, which leads to being generally more happy later in their lives and corresponding to lower rates of depression and anxiety. However, the study only focused on the parent-child relationship. Chiang et al. (2023) found that teenagers were significantly happier on days when they were closer and had less conflict with their parents. This study studied the dynamic of parent-child relationships only, not considering how parent-parent relationships can also affect this in tandem with parent-child relationships.

While the above studies do not explore the parent to parent dynamic, we may find other literature discussing the effect of parent-parent relationships on the child's happiness. Lucas-Thompson et al. (2015) examined the relationship between exposure to conflict between parents and adolescent mental health. The group of researchers found that teenagers who perceived more conflict between their parents were more likely to internalize the stress, leading to signs of anxiety, and depression. The study also found that adolescents who blamed themselves for arguments between their parents often experienced the most harmful effects. This shows the negative effect of excessive conflict between parents, as too much exposure to adolescents could lead to many mental health disorders. However, just a few years later, Lucas-Thompson and George (2017) found that not all parent to parent conflict is damaging to a child. When the individual's parents handled arguments and conflicts with cooperation and approached them in a healthy way, the individual was found to develop better emotional regulation and felt more secure when they were at home or around their family. This suggests that the way in which parents argue could be more important than whether or not they argue. Clark (2011) also studied the parent to parent conflict but focused instead on its effect on parenting quality. The study found that disorder in parent to parent relationships led to reduced parental warmth and connection with the child. This resulted in lower levels of positive social behavior in adolescents such as empathy and cooperation.

This study aims to connect the two different types of relationships explored previously and explore the effects of the interactions between parent-parent relationships and parent-child

relationships on teenagers' happiness levels. We started off with trying to determine three research relations: how parent-parent relationships affect teenagers' happiness, how parent-child relationships affect teenagers' happiness, and how the interaction between parent-parent relationships and parent-child relationships affect teenagers' happiness, specifically how these two different types of relationships relate to each other.

2. Methodology

An anonymous online survey consisting of 2 demographic questions and 14 five-point-scale questions was conducted using Google Forms on 32 English-speaking teenagers aged from 13 to 18 inclusive measuring three main aspects: their relationship with their parents, the relationship of their parents, and their satisfaction with life. Everyone who was surveyed has both parents present in their lives, meaning they currently see both parents at least once a year. All survey questions and their corresponding numbers can be found in the appendix.

Once the data is collected, the following relationships will be determined:

- How individual parent child relationships (HPInd) affect teenagers' happiness when they are with their parents (Q12)

To find this, we have to first give a value to their happiness with their parents in general. Since no questions in the form collect this statistic exactly, a new equation was created to measure general happiness with parents: We will label this as HPInd. This is an accurate representation of their happiness with their parents because how much they like each of their parents is weighted by how much time they spend together. There is a Q2+Q5 in the denominator to keep the value in the original range from 1-5. How happy they are with both their parents is directly measured through Q12. Next, the data will be separated into 2 groups. Individuals with an HPInd value equal to or less than 3 will be put in one group 1, while individuals with an HPInd value greater than 3 will be put in group 2. These groups will separate the people who have a positive relationship with their parents individually and the people who have a negative relationship with their parents individually. Each group's average value of Q12 will be taken, and a one tailed Welch's t test will be done to determine whether the Q12 value of group 1 is significantly higher than the Q12 value of group 2. The null hypothesis will be group 1 =

group 2, and the alternative hypothesis will be group 1 < group 2.

- How teenagers' happiness with their parents (Q12) affects teenagers' happiness in general (Q14)

The value (Q7+Q8)/2 will be taken to get the Parent Relationship Strength (PRS) parameter. This should be accurate because the relationship strength between two people should be an average of how much time they spend with each other and how close they are. This is different from before where we took the proportion because closeness is different from how much they like each other. Closeness is very similar to how much time they spend together and thus an average will suffice. Data will be separated again into 2 groups, with group 1 having a PRS value less than or equal to 3 and group 2 having a PRS value greater than 3. A one tailed Welch's t test will also be run to determine whether group 2 is significantly happier than group 1 when around either parent individually. The null hypothesis will be group 1 = group 2 and the alternative hypothesis will be group 1 < group 2.

- How Parent Relationship Strength (PRS) affect teenagers' happiness affect teenagers' happiness when they are with their parents individually (HPInd)

The value (Q7+Q8)/2 will be taken to get the Parent Relationship Strength (PRS) parameter. This should be accurate because the relationship strength between two people should be an average of how much time they spend with each other and how close they are. This is different from before where we took the proportion because closeness is different from how much they like each other. Closeness is very similar to how much time they spend together and thus an average will suffice. Data will be separated again into 2 groups, with group 1 having a PRS value less than or equal to 3 and group 2 having a PRS value greater than 3. A one tailed Welch's t test will also be run to determine whether group 2 is significantly happier than group 1 when around either parent individually. The null hypothesis will be group 1 = group 2 and the alternative hypothesis will be group 1 < group 2.

- How parent relationship strength (PRS) affects Child happiness with both parents (Q12)

Data will be separated again into 2 groups, with group 1 having a PRS value less than or equal to 3 and group 2 having a PRS value greater than 3.

A one tailed Welch's t test will also be run to determine whether group 2 is significantly happier than group 1 when around both parents together. The null hypothesis will be group 1 = group 2 and the alternative hypothesis will be group 1 < group 2.

- The interaction between parent-parent relationships (PRS) and parent-child relationships (HPInd) teenagers' happiness when they are with their parents (Q12), specifically how these two different types of relationships relate to each other.

A two-way ANOVA test will be run to find the interaction between parent relationships and parent-child relationships on and teenagers' happiness when they are with both parents, and how these two interactions relate to each other. HPInd and PRS are the two independent variables, and Q12 is the dependent variable.

- Q12, Q13, Q14

A multiple regression model will be run with the variables Q12 and Q13 as the independent variables and Q14 as the dependent variable. We will be able to determine which variable is more significant, or even significant at all.

3. Results

In this study, there were three different relations explored: Parent-child relationships and their effect on happiness, parent-parent relationships and their effect on happiness, and the interactions between parent-child relationships and parent-parent relationships.

3.1 Parent-Child Relationships

The relation outlined in the previous section that shows how parent-child relationships affect happiness is relation 1. After taking a one tailed Welch's t test (df = 11.0163, t = -2.9840), a p value of 0.0066 was obtained. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that individuals with worse relationships with their parents individually have significantly worse relationships with both parents together than those with better relationships with each individual parent.

3.2 Parent-Parent Relationships

The relation outlined in the previous section that shows how parent-parent relationships affect happiness is relation 4. After following a similar procedure to the first relation and taking a one tailed Welch's t test (df = 25.1934, t = -2.1279), we

obtained a p-value of 0.0217. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. This means that individuals with a worse parent to parent relationship will often be less happy when they are around both parents.

3.3 Interactions

The rest of the relations all included some interactions between parent-parent relationships and parent-child relationships. First and foremost, interaction 6 reveals that only happiness when the individual was by themselves significantly affected overall happiness, and not the happiness of the individual when they were with their parents. The multiple regression model found that only Q13, or happiness by yourself, was a significant predictor of overall happiness. Q13 had a p value of 0.001, which is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level. The value of Q13 was 0.591 suggesting a high correlation with overall happiness. Q12, happiness with parents, actually did not predict overall happiness at all. A p value of 0.313 was returned for Q12, and so it was not significant at a 0.05 significance level, thus not affecting overall happiness. The intercept was non-significant because its p value was calculated

to be 0.646, far above the 0.05 we need for significance. This was further corroborated when a one-tailed Welch's t test was run on Q12 and Q14 in relation 2 which revealed the same thing: overall happiness was significantly related to happiness alone, and not significantly related to happiness when with both parents. The one-tailed Welch's t test (df = 25.1934, t = -2.1279) conducted in relation 2 obtained a p-value of 0.0217. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. This means that individuals whose parents have a worse relationship will often be less happy when they are around both parents.

Relation 3 shows that when 2 parents do not have a good relationship, it can translate into negative relationships with the child as well. The one-tailed Welch's t test (df = 23.4761, t = -2.6803) obtained a p-value of 0.0066. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. This means that individuals whose parents have a worse relationship will often have a worse relationship individually with their parents.

After the 2-way ANOVA was conducted for relation 5, here are the findings from the model.

Table 1. ANOVA for HPInd and PRS on Q12

Source	SS	df	MS	F-Value	P-Value
HPInd	12.847	1	12.847	8.624	0.006
PRS	7.892	1	7.892	5.301	0.028
HPInd + PRS	0.953	1	0.953	0.640	0.430
Residual	44.226	29	1.400	n/a	n/a

Both HPInd and PRS have significant p values at the 0.05 significance level. This means that they both significantly affect Q12 or happiness of the individual when around both parents. HPInd also has a stronger effect on Q12 than PRS did. The interaction between HPInd and PRS was insignificant as the p value was 0.43, much higher than the 0.05 needed to be significant. This means that HPInd and PRS are independent of each other and are additive instead of interactive.

4. Discussion

It would be beneficial to first list out each individual result found, and explain the implications. The first result we found was between parent-child relationships and

happiness when with both parents. We found that individuals with worse relationships with their parents individually have significantly worse relationships with both parents together than those with better relationships with each individual parent. This is fairly intuitive because we are stating that if a child has a worse relationship with the parents individually then they will also have a worse relationship with both parents present. There is not much to dig into here.

The second result we found was that individuals with a worse parent to parent relationship will often be less happy when they are around both parents. This is also fairly intuitive because we are finding that the unstable relationship of the

parents does not translate well onto the child's relationship with their parents either. Therefore, it is important for parents to have a good relationship if they want the child to have a good relationship with them.

Similarly, we also found that individuals whose parents have a worse relationship will often have a worse relationship with their parents individually. So, a bad parent to parent relationship can really affect the child's relationship with parents in every sense. If the parents are not close with each other, the child will not fit properly in the family dynamic, leading to the child feeling more unhappy when around their parents both individually and together. We also found that happiness with parents individually and relationship strength of parents are independent of each other, meaning their relation is additive, and they do not interact in a special way.

The third result we found was that overall happiness was affected significantly by happiness when the individual was by themselves and not by happiness when the individual was with both parents. This was very surprising because many teenagers spend a lot of their time at home around both parents, so it is natural to think that their happiness around their parents would significantly affect their overall happiness. A possible explanation for this result would be that teenagers attribute more of their happiness to their happiness alone or with their friends as compared to when they are with their parents. This is because they spend more time with friends or alone in their room than with both parents around, so they think of negative or positive experiences with both parents as occasional and not a major determining factor of their happiness.

Our three research questions are now answered. Negative parent-parent relationships affect teenagers' happiness negatively, and positive parent-parent relationships affect teenagers' happiness positively. However, it only affects their happiness when they are around their parents, not their overall happiness.

Parent-child relationships affect teenagers' happiness in the same way as parent-parent relationships. If a child is not happy around their parents individually, they will also not be happy around both parents. Again, it only affects their happiness when they are around their parents, not their overall happiness.

Finally, the interaction between parent-parent relationships and parent-child relationships affects teenagers' happiness proved to be nothing special. Parent-parent relationships and parent-child relationships both affect the child's happiness, albeit to different degrees. Parent-child relationships affect the child's happiness more than parent-parent relationships, and a possible explanation for this would be that the parent-parent relationship affects how parent-child relationships occur.

However, there is one pressing issue with this survey, and it is that there are not enough participants. 32 is a very small sample size to get any convincing data, and so with a larger sample size and more time, I believe this study could be revisited and reconducted to discern real, meaningful results. Since the sample size is so small, there is much more room than desirable for type I and II errors in every test conducted. The sample size was also mostly Chinese or other Asian races. It would have been better to include people from different backgrounds and demographics because not all demographics have the same traditional parenting values as Chinese people, so the data could be biased in that way.

Overall, the data shows that interparental relationships are extremely important in building the teenager's happiness around their parents, both individually and together. It also shows that the teenager's relationship with each parent individually is extremely important in building the teenager's happiness around their parents together. This study suggests that parents need to maintain a positive relationship with each other as well as with the child to make the child feel comfortable at home and to be able to provide the emotional support and help the child may need to navigate challenges.

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Appendix

Form Questions:

Demographic questions:

How old are you?

What are your pronouns?

Q1: How much do you like your mother?

Q2: How much time do you spend with your mother?

Q3: How happy are you when you are only with your mother?

Q4: How much do you like your father?

Q5: How much time do you spend with your father?

Q6: How happy are you when you are only with your father?

Q7: How close are your parents with each other?

Q8: How much time do they spend with each other?

Q9: How much can you share about your daily life with your parents?

Q10: How regularly do you spend family time?

Q11: How busy are you?

Q12: How happy are you when you are with both your parents?

Q13: How happy are you by yourself?

Q14: How happy are you in general?