

The Relationship Between Attachment and Adolescent Depression

Literature Review

Depression is a condition that affects more than 25% of adolescents. It is a type of disorder which disturbs their focus and mood, causing a loss of pleasure and interest in doing activities that they are supposed to enjoy, making them quite irritable. Different things are thought as related with the feeling of depression among adolescents. Among those examples are a failure to identify as an individual, insecure relationships and attachments, negative representations, etc. (Milke & Lawner, 2003; Olsen, Northen, Arphel, & Knorr, 2001). In this thesis, the role that attachment plays among adolescents experiencing depression will be investigated. It is being hypothesized that adolescents who are attached insecurely, either avoidant or ambivalent, has the tendency to display a higher level of symptoms that are depression related, as well as behaviors compared to adolescents that are attached securely.

In a research article presented by Seltzer (1998), two questions surfaced during the study. These questions were selected to serve as a guide. First, would those in the age group of 18 to 21 correspond in quality and frequency to different attachment patterns that are being reported by other professional researchers? Second, would characteristics and personalities of secure adolescent attachments be related with personality characteristics of child and infant studies? The focus of the investigation was on the late female adolescent patterns, particularly maternal, with the use of a semi-structured interview. It has been hypothesized that females who are securely attached will often have a strong positive identification, especially towards their mother, lower scores on depression and higher ratings of self-esteem.



The sample originally consisted of 1001 random students of psychology at a college. However, after performing some procedures in screening, as well as the importance to have equal numbers across all categories of attachment. As a result, the number was reduced to 28 in the study.

The results used in this study supported the main hypothesis that relative percentages of attachments involved, including avoidant, ambivalent and secure, would correspond to the reported data by the infant studies (Stephenson, 2003). The results also showed that there was a relative difference in personality characteristics in between the ambivalent and secure groups. Females that are ambivalently attached were more depressed, and have been reported to have lower rates of self-esteem compared to adolescents who are securely attached (Faulkner, 2002). On the other hand, the avoidant attachment group was also in the middle of both ambivalent and secure groups in relation to self-esteem and depression, though they were not significantly different from either of the groups. It has also been reported that female adolescents who are securely attached have a relatively more positive and maternal identification compared to those who are ambivalently attached, and avoidant female adolescents who are categorized in the middle (Salazar, 2010).

All of these results are combined together to give confirmation to the hypothesis that personality and characteristics such as interpersonal skills, positive affect, and self-esteem correlates to child and infant personality characteristics of those under secure attachments (Singh, 1999). One limitation to this study, however, is that the results are not longitudinal. This means that it rests on the current situation rather than at the start of childhood, following the lives of the females as they were developing. Another study limitation is that the sample only consisted of all female participants. These correlations may be significantly different if boys were involved (Peters, 2007).



Next, the topic on attachment related to adolescent depression is also addressed depending on social networks. In a study by Owner et al. (2001), two questions surfaced. First, do adolescents suffering from depression have more limited or insufficient social network? Second, do they view emotional status of their family as negative? The goal of this study is to further investigate on the social networks involving depressed adolescents, with and without conduct disorder, comparing the results with social networks of the control group.

The results show that an adolescent dealing with major depression does not significantly differ from the controls. There are no deficiencies in attachment, social interactions as well as family climate. This finding is not explained easily other than the individuals who are less affected by depressive thinking. Also, adolescents who are dealing with dysthymia, or double depression feel that their main caregiver is available, though inadequate at times (Matthews, 2001). These results give confirmation to the hypothesis that adolescents who are depressed usually have a limited, insufficient social network, and that they usually view the conditions of their family as negative. Parents had no involvement in these studies. Another obvious limitation is that the controls were selected from the entire group after screening as having a score under moderate depression. The controls may also not be completely free from depression.

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