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## Attachment of Adolescents with Parents: Case Study on University Students

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### Abstract

Adolescents are undergoing a variety of physical, mental, and social changes. They are also a group that is at risk of becoming involved in social problems with the people around them. One of their social environment's problems is their attachment relationship with their own parents. They are easily rebellious in adolescence and confuse their own will with the will of their parents. As a result, they may become involved in social problems that violate their family's norms and rules. The purpose of this study is to investigate the level of attachment between parents and their university-aged children or adolescents. The method used is a quantitative method; through a survey using a questionnaire instrument. The sample of the study is a public university student, namely a student from Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia who was randomly selected. The data obtained from the sample was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science Version 27 software using the descriptive analysis method. The results of the study have found that the overall mean for the level of attachment between parents and adolescents is at a moderate level of 3.10 and is not at a high-risk level. This also shows that the relationship between parents and teenagers is not too close. This study is expected to be beneficial to the community, especially parents, adolescents, and program planners to plan a more effective relationship strategy.

**Keywords:** Attachments, Parents, Adolescents

### Introduction

Parents should play a role in nurturing, educating, and shaping the positive behavior of adolescents. According to Rozumah (2008), parenting duties include aspects of socializing children and ensuring their safety and development on physical, intellectual, and emotional levels. This is consistent with Saleebey's (1992) Perspective of Strength, which suggests that adolescents should balance their cognitive, physical, educational, and social development (Hezzrin, 2019).

In order to empower the duties and roles of parents so that they are effective in the development of adolescents' lives, there is a need for close ties or strong, good relationships between them. This is intended to influence adolescents toward a healthy and positive life development in accordance with parental guidance. However, if the parents and family are dysfunctional, adolescents are more likely to engage in social crimes and develop personal issues such as stress and depression.

As an example of the case of juvenile social crime, which is based on statistics from the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM), the rate of involvement in social crime among teenagers is currently worrying. Among the criminal cases involving these juveniles are cases of theft, rape, motorcycle theft, drug involvement, and armed robbery. In Malaysia, for example, the state of Johor recorded 1388 cases of teen crime in 2018, compared to 1230 cases in 2017. Statistics also show that 95 percent of juvenile perpetrators are male, and the rest are female. This level of statistics is concerning and must be addressed at the source.

One of the causes of adolescent social problems is the social institution factor, namely parents and family. The bonding pattern of parents and adolescents is able to influence their behaviour. Therefore, this attachment relationship is also a factor in emotional adjustment and physical development so that they can behave negatively, that is, get involved in social crimes if the attachment relationship between parents and teenagers is neglected. Based on the issue of attachments between parents and adolescents which leads to increasing social crime among adolescents, there is a need for a study to see the level of attachment between parents and adolescents who are still studying at university or college. Adolescents who are at this level of university studies are those who are going through the transition from school to the more challenging world of university.

### **Parent-Adolescent Attachment**

The moral decline among adolescents can occur due to individual factors and environmental factors such as family, academic, cognitive, and emotional motivation. However, the basis for the personal formation of teenagers is the family institution factor. If the family factor is fragile, conflicts easily occur around them. They are also easily affected by things that happen, even trivial things are also considered big things and burden them. So, to ensure the well-being of adolescents, they need to have a good parental relationship.

Based on attachment relationship theory, it is referred to as a situation where there is a quality in a relationship with a significant individual, such as a parent or peer relationship (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). This theory was initially used in the context of the relationship between the baby and its caregiver, the mother. According to Bowlby (1969), the infant-mother attachment relationship affects the interpersonal relationship between them and the environment when they become adults.

An attachment is usually reciprocal, which means that there is giving and receiving between two parties until they have a high level of trust in each other. Attachment is an important element in family relationships, especially between parents and children. They have a relationship that will last a lifetime. If this relationship is affected, then the moral values between them are also affected, thus affecting the child's personality and psychology. Communication effectiveness, social support, emotional support, and safety from monitoring

and social care are all aspects of bonding relationships. Adolescents also need attention and monitoring as a platform to obtain a harmonious relationship between parents and family.

According to Bean et al (2004), the effect of a good attachment between parents can increase positive emotions such as love, trust, and kindness in adolescents. In addition, effective communication through spending a lot of time with the child is able to increase good attachment relationships. The time spent also gives adolescents space to discuss and share problems.

In Xiang and Han's (2019) study, problems in the relationship between parents—conflict, dysfunction, and family violence can contribute to social problems for adolescents to the point of having long-term effects at university. This bad situation also causes stress and changes the pattern of children's behavioral problems when they grow up (Xiang & Han, 2019).

Koehn and Kerns (2017) stated that a good parental attachment relationship shapes and fulfills adolescents' needs in the form of safety, such as responsiveness and support of adolescents' autonomy. Parents who create avoidance attachment, i.e., parents who are not sensitive to their adolescent's circumstances and needs, will tend to develop negative behavior control strategies or problems in their children (Koehn & Kerns, 2017).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the level of parent-adolescent attachment in the context of adolescents who are currently studying. With the findings of this study, it becomes a guide for social planners to understand the relationship between parents and adolescents at the level of adolescents in the university. The average age of adolescents at the university is between 18 and 22 years old. This age group is in late adolescence, where they are seen as a group at risk of being involved in various social problems. This is because, at this time, they have been exposed to a wider external environment by always being in contact with friends on the university campus rather than with parents and family.

### **Methodology**

The design of the study is quantitative, which is a survey method. This study uses a questionnaire method to obtain research data. The study location is Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Kuala Terengganu. In order to represent the sampling of the study, the study sample is adolescents aged 18 to 22 years old who are UniSZA students. The sampling method of the study is done randomly. The sample size involved in this study is a total of 196 respondents which is based on the (Kricjie and Morgan Table, 1970).

In this study, a set of questionnaires was used in the collection of quantitative data. The research instrument is a set of structured questionnaires. Reliability values for all variables measured with this instrument show values above 0.7. Next, the findings of the actual study were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Science Version 27 (SPSS) software. The data is presented in a descriptive manner by describing the level of parent-child bonding. The degree of tendency to measure the mean score based on the interpretation of the mean score of Landell (1977) as in Table 1

Table 1

*Mean score tendency level*

Mean	Tendency Level
1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate
3.68 - 5.00	High

### Result and Discussion

Based on the results of the study, overall the level of adolescent social relationships in the family is at a moderate level which is Mean= 3.10; Standard deviation= 0.767. From Table 1, the item "My parent helps me in making decisions" shows the highest mean of 3.30 and Standard deviation of 0.684. While the item with the lowest mean value is the item "Parents have asked about what I want" which mean= 2.30; standard deviation= 0.923.

Table 2

*Analysis of mean values, standard deviations and mean levels related to parent-adolescent attachments*

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1.	My parents give me emotional support	3.00	0.614	Moderate
2.	My parents helps me in making decisions	3.30	0.684	Moderate
3.	I don't feel like I'm left out by my family	2.56	0.697	Moderate
4.	My parents always make time for me	2.94	0.630	Moderate
5.	I think my parents love me	3.10	0.640	Moderate
6.	My parents always monitor my outdoor activities	3.18	0.619	Moderate
7.	My parents always praise me	2.50	0.831	Moderate
8.	My parents were fair to me	3.21	0.869	Moderate
9.	Parents have asked about what I want	2.30	0.923	Low
10.	I feel appreciated by my parents	3.00	0.822	Moderate
11.	My parents are willing to listen to my opinion	2.59	0.852	Moderate
12.	My parents always give opportunities to share problems	3.50	0.841	Moderate
Total		3.10	0.767	Moderate

Based on the findings of the study, shows that the level of attachment between parents and adolescents among students is at a moderate level, which means that their relationship is neither too close nor too strained. Adolescents who are studying at university, try to live independently and not depend too much on their families. In fact, they are said to be closer and more comfortable with their peers than with their own families. In the Theory of Human Needs, a person who has obtained basic needs such as food, drink, parental love, and security will then seek love and attention outside of the family system. So, when they become adolescents, especially late adolescents, they try to explore the outside world by expanding their social network, especially when they are in university. The learning system at the



university that emphasizes cooperative evaluation between classmates and spending a lot of time on campus causes them to be closer to their friends than their own parents and families.

The findings of the study for the item " My parents have asked about what I want" are at the lowest level, showing that most of the relationships between parents who have adolescents in university are not very close and they do not communicate with each other. The presence of adolescents at a university or college far from home is a factor in their relationship not being as close as when they were still in school under the care of their parents.

The situation becomes even worse when parents are busy at work. Busy careers are one of the factors that make them less likely to ask about their children's wishes or problems. Parents are too focused on their careers and spend a lot of time at work, so much so that they forget about their adolescent's close relationships. Parents who are stressed by their careers, environments, and families may be the driving force behind this lack of two-way communication. Parents who come home late from work have little time to spend with their children, so the two-way communication between them is seen to have happened in a short time. Parents may only ask about important things. A lack of awareness of adolescents' development is also the cause of forgetting to socialize, chat, and learn about the adolescent's wishes. This causes adolescents to feel that their parents ask less about what they want.

Relationship problems between parents and adolescents can lead to negative impacts if not curbed from the beginning. Adolescents among students, who are between 18 and 24 years old, are at risk of engaging in negative behaviors or social crimes such as drug abuse, engaging in pornography, and so on. This also puts them at risk of mental health problems such as depression, sadness, and a lack of confidence. These risk factors are also capable of causing academic failure at the place of study (Walker & Shepherd, 2008). If they fail at university, this is very detrimental to themselves, their families, and the communities.

When adolescents face problems, parents and family need to play a role in facing the problem. They need attention, love, and support from the family, and effective communication influences the behavior of adolescents. If the interaction is rough between the adolescents and the family, they will be more aggressive when they face any problem. This is so because it is the most important change agent to deal with adolescent behavior problems. This is also because the family social institution is the most important unit of society or community and the starting point for the formation of adolescents' attitudes and development. This is in line with the McMaster Model, the family plays a role in problem-solving, communication, role-playing, response, affective involvement, and control of the negative behavior of adolescents.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Overall, this study found that adolescents among students have a moderate quality of parental bonding and can be said to be less close. This situation can harm the community if attachments with families, especially parents, are not improved. This is because, as the most significant agent of positive change in a child's life, parents need to show the best role models and be the influencers who shape the lives of children who are growing up. This is also because adolescents are seen as the new generation that will lead the country's leadership.

Therefore, social institutions such as parents and families need to play an important role in the relationship between adolescents. According to Asmawati et al (2015), parenting skills affect psychological well-being and also the role of each family member in the formation of adolescents' behaviors and attitudes. Effective parenting and communication techniques need to be improved from time to time. If their child has done something wrong, parents should replace the punishment that shames the child with positive reinforcement. When an adolescent faces any problem, parents should listen first without judging. Parents need to discuss and give appropriate opinions and advice to solve the problems of adolescents. In this way, adolescents feel loved, and any problems they face with their family or people around them.

Parenting training programs and lifelong education through the planning, promotion, and implementation of family programs need to be improved and strengthened in line with the development of globalization and social changes today. This is also to fulfill the wishes of the government's policy, which is the National Family Policy, which states that every family member needs to be empowered in carrying out their roles and responsibilities and that there need to be good values in the family, as well as the Youth Health Policy, which focuses on the well-being of adolescents.

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