

Parent-Adolescent Interaction in Iranian Adolescents Born Since 2001: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: The parent-adolescent communication is an essential element in transitioning the adolescent to adulthood. This study aimed to illustrate a new ongoing parent-adolescent structure that is happening in Iran, and examines changes in family patterns.

Method: A qualitative thematic analysis was performed on data collected from 24 interviews with adolescents, and their parents in 2021. The samples were recruited through purposeful sampling. This study was conducted within nine months. The interviewees were four boys and eight girls (M=17) and one of their parents, whether their mother or father. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The method of data analysis was the Colaizzi descriptive method.

Results: Thematic analysis revealed a new interaction pattern that did not exist in the previous generation. There were four main themes in parental patterns namely; adaptive pattern, influenced-pattern, democratic pattern, expertise-centric pattern, and also nine sub-themes. In adolescence, the only pattern was the democratic pattern with four sub-themes, which leads to new expectations from adolescents, like having an equal power hierarchy.

Conclusion: Conversely, to what has been thought, parents have a significant and distinct role in parent-adolescent interaction changes. A large part of this was due to their bad memories or deprivation of good parenting when they were a child. These results can be used for planning macro-political, and socio-economic policies concerning future parent-adolescent interaction trends.

Keywords: Adolescent, Parents, Interaction, Iranian Adolescent, Qualitative Study

Introduction

Parent-adolescent communication is a crucial aspect of effective parenting in adolescence, and is associated with youth outcomes in different research [1, 2]. Adolescents' relationship with their parents play a fundamental role in their functioning [3, 4]. Understanding parent-adolescent interaction is important during the early adolescent transition as parent-child interaction often declines during this time and brings solicitation and disclosure [5].

The parent-child relationship is the primary and essential relationship that is a place to create security and love. This relationship can represent the interaction with the outside world for the child [6]. Parent-adolescent relationships can be one factor in adolescent development and affect emotion, excitement, and cognition [7, 8, 9]. The better the adolescent perceives the image of the parents and counts this relationship with intimacy, warmth, and receptivity, the more effective they will be [10]. One of the effects of the parent-child relationship is determining adolescent well-being. The quality of this relationship is related to specific behavioral, psychological problems in adolescents. In girls, the problems of the parent-child relationship are internalized, such as depression and withdrawal mechanisms. In boys however these problems are externalized, such as aggression and lawlessness [11]. Neuroscience research on the importance of parent-child

relationships has shown that this relationship affects brain development and adolescent behavior [12]. The quality of parent-adolescent relationships can predict adolescent academic achievement and performance [13]. Good family relationships and interactions cause self-esteem in adolescents [14]. Adolescents who receive less emotional support from their parents have less emotional adjustment. Interaction between family factors and environmental context plays an important role in developing behavior, cognitive style, and personality traits [15]. The parent-child relationship is an interaction that affects both sides of this interaction. The type of interaction and behavior that children have with their parents affects the mental well-being of parents. A study on parents over 50 showed that parents who have a weak relationship with their children, experience a high rate of depression and a greater sense of loneliness [16]. The quality of parent-adolescent interaction impacts adolescent satisfaction with life [17].

Accordingly, parents often need to adapt their interaction strategies. As youth spend less time with their parents, so parents should adapt to support new autonomy needs [18]. In this domain, as Iran has confronted new changes in the culture that are intensified by the entrance of modernity, there is an enduring change in traditional families in the Iranian society [19]. What has affected today's family more than anything else is the entry of modernity into the personal and social life of people and its impact on the individual, family and society. It should be mentioned that despite the studies done on the importance of the consequences of modernity in families, in Iran there are few studies about this issue [20].

Modernity refers to ways of life or social organization that were found in Europe from the 17th century onwards and gradually gained more or less global influence [21]. With the entry of modernity into different fields of culture, many aspects of living have undergone extensive changes. Moreover, generational differences in outlook and attitude appear to be a universal feature of human society. Youth and their parents are expected to relate to each other in predictable ways based on the different positions along the life course. Due to the gap between generations, it is universally presumed that youth less bond with tradition and are more open to new ideas [22]. In this regard, Iranian adolescents have been impacted the most by this modernity. These elements caused changes in the relationship between the adolescents and their parents. This new generation of adolescents in Iran is experiencing a whole new interaction structure with parents. This is while research on these constructs are limited, so this study intends to scrutinize this new structure in Iran.

Most previous research have focused on parental behavior and its impact on child behavior, regardless of changes in the parent-child relationship [23, 24]. However, this study attempts to provide an interpretation of the new structure of parent-adolescent interaction in Iran. The current research is willing to find out what is going on in this generation in the parent-adolescent interaction domain. The finding of the current study can be used for

cultural policies for those who are in charge of cultural designing and also social and psychological scientists for more investigation of what would be the outcome of these elements of the new parental communication with the new generation of adolescents.

Method

This research attempts to reach the main structure of an experience, namely the parent-adolescent relationship, with a phenomenological approach and in-depth interview. Due to Covid-19 and quarantine, all interviews were done via video calls. Participants in this study included 12 adolescents (eight girls and four boys) and 12 parents who lived in different provinces in Iran during 2021-2022. All of the participants were told about the aim of the study, and that their transcript will be shared by another researcher. They were told that they are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. The population of this study were adolescents born after 2001; the participant's age range were from 13 to 18 years old. Sampling and interviewing continued to the level of data saturation, and by reaching the repetitive data, the process of interviewing stopped. The code system was checked by another researcher and reached an agreement upon them. Each interview lasted between 45 to 95 minutes. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data (sample questions: How do you feel about your relationship with your mom and dad? For more, see Appendices). The researcher recorded the participants' answers and used follow-up questions to keep the focus on the details of the lived experiences of the participants. The participants' interviews were transcribed and then read several times to gain an overall meaning. The process of epoche or bracketing, where the researcher puts aside previous knowledge about the subject of the study was applied. Then the researcher tried to both hold a psychological mind and be imaginative to transfer the natural language of the participants to psychological components. One of the parents of each adolescent was selected to be interviewed. Since Iran is a multicultural country, participants were selected from different cities in Iran to avoid the impact of cultural and religious differences on results. The sampling technique with maximum diversity was considered to obtain the transferability. The sampling method in this study was non-probability and purposeful. Sampling continued until concept saturation so that no new concept code was received and eventually reached 24 individuals. Criteria for entering the research were: 1. Adolescents born after 2001. In this way, the ages of early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence were selected, according to the literature review. 2. The adolescent should be without any problems or mental disorders. 3. Middle-aged and upper-middle-class social adolescents are to be selected to examine the research background and the impact of economics on parent-child relationships and whether it is considered an influential factor. The interview focused mostly on how a parent and the adolescent comprehend a parent-adolescent interaction; this includes how their interaction is in the

current time and what expectations they have in the parental relationship. While interviewing, adolescents were told to be alone in a room where their speaking could not be heard by others.

After each interview and writing the data, the data were encoded and analyzed by the Maxqda2020 program. The participants entered the study by their willingness and were told that they had the right to abandon the interview at any time. All the recordings after interviews were verbatim and checked and reviewed by university professors in family counseling and a qualitative expert after their approval until the interview process was completed. Each transcript was checked by another researcher, and the researchers reached an agreement upon each stage of analysis. The interviewer after each interview shared her understanding of the participant's beliefs, and received feedback on the validity of her understanding. By emerging a new code or concept, the interviewer asked previous participants about their beliefs or idea about it. The questions of the interview were gathered from previous studies and books and then were consulted by an expert in qualitative methodology (See Appendices). The method of data analysis was the Colaizzi descriptive method. The point is that this study was not based on a special theory or approach. The researchers wanted to study the phenomenal world of teenagers according to their parental interaction. Therefore, the researchers tried to be neutral and hold a neutral view while interviewing the participants.

Results

By explaining each code, some of the participants' statements have been presented below in order to show what exact concept the participants mean. This study shows that some new structures play a fundamental role in the process of parent-adolescent change. The most important results of this study are to recognize the parental role, which is a dominant key in constructing changes, which means that parents are one of the main reasons why adolescents in the new generation act and think differently. By asking exploring questions, we tried to recognize why parents are the founders of this change. By interviewing the parents, we found out that having bad

memories in teenage times makes parents make a new structure in their interaction with their children. Due to the religious beliefs in Iran, parents were at the top of the power hierarchy, which made them not have friendly interaction with their children. For example, a parent said: *“My father insulted me in front of the new groom in our family to show him who has the most power in this house. Now I have become a mother, and I decided to build a friendly relationship with my son. I do not want my children to suffer the way I did”.*

Or a father said that, “I don’t remember that our father has ever kissed us or cuddled us. Their pride did not let them be friends with their children. Now, I have built a friendly relationship with my daughter where she can talk about anything she wants, without any embarrassment”.

In general, the parent-adolescent interaction according to the participants in this study consisted of four constituents: expertise-center pattern, democratic pattern, influenced pattern, adaptive pattern, and for adolescents in this study the only recognized pattern was the democratic pattern.

In the following section, each parental pattern will be discussed.

Influence Pattern

In this pattern, parents intended to learn from their teenagers. They were keen on the new behavior they could not have as a teenager in their own times. What was forbidden for them in their teenage times, now parents were willing to see in their adolescence and were open to learn from them. For example, a father said:

“I have learned to say no and have gained the power of decision-making from my daughter. This taboo has now been broken for me. If my older brother asked something that I did not want to do, I could not disagree. Now I can easily say no, but before this, I had the same taboo and kept the sanctity and did not allow myself to say no. This issue has been extremely helpful for me. It has actually solved my problems in many places.”

Another parent noticed, *“We did not even dare to talk to our elder brother easily. With a brother who was maybe four or three years older than us, strange power patriarchy reigned over the families, but fortunately, this is not the case now. In my family, we are happy friends”.*

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes emerged from Data Analysis for Parents

Main theme	Sub-theme	Experience of some participants
Expertise-centric pattern	Mental health-orienting Expert-seeking	Well, I see the expectations he has, so I went to counseling sessions, I went to parenting classes for teenagers and so on, I tried to catch up with his situation.
Democratic pattern	Authenticity in conversation Friendly interaction Care structure	I try to be very close to her and not criticize her too much.
Influenced- pattern	Mutual learning Facilitation	In terms of the ability of understanding and intelligence, I think that compared to myself when I was this age at that time, the level of awareness and intelligence in my teenagers or adolescents are much higher.
Adaptive pattern	Acceptance of renovation Resistance	I said, look, go and think if there is another reason, tell the truth, there is no punishment, I just want to know what the truth is.

Or another parent said, "I'm glad that this generation understands what they want from the world. And with all the firmness that the atmosphere of power patriarchy ruled over us, I thank God a thousand times that this generation does not have the issues that we previously had. They do not have that distance from parents".

In this pattern, we named another subcategory, the Facilitator pattern, which means that parents were aware that parental interaction with the adolescent is changing. Conversely to what is approved in the society, parents were willing to help this process to be changed. In other words, they were the facilitator of this change. There are some examples below:

"Their sense of freedom and the way that they speak well is really good. We could not speak well at all. We could not say what we wanted to say, but nowadays the children can express what they want, and I like this. I like it when I see they can talk about what they want and say their own words. When I was a teenager, I could not talk so much about what I wanted or participate in my parent's decision-making, now I see my daughter can talk so easily, and I like it".

Or another parent said, "I think most of this feeling has been caused by me. I took this border; otherwise, they would not have done such a thing. That's why I think I've opened up more space for something like this to happen".

Democratic Pattern

What is new in this generation is that they both have democratic values in building interaction with each other. The democratic pattern was the major pattern in adolescents. They believed that the relationship between parents and children must be equal in the power hierarchy, which affects the whole interaction pattern. Parents preferred to talk to their adolescents instead of punishment. The reason originated in their childhood experiences that parents mostly used physical punishments. We should pay attention that Iran's culture used to be more religious, which put parents at the top of the power hierarchy where they were allowed to control their children. In this pattern, most parents wanted to comfort their children as much as possible. This pattern showed us essential interpretations. A new phenomenon which is being experienced in Iran is that Iranian parents are not willing to have more than one child; this belief is rooted in the thought of parents that it is better to have one child and make the best comfort for her or him, while the previous generation did not have this belief. Most were keen on having more children without paying attention to providing a high level of welfare. There are some examples from parents below:

"I asked my son why he was feeling depressed today. Then I tried to buy him what he likes, his favorite food or buy him a T-shirt. You know this parental behavior did not exist in my own teenage time, but now I want to act like this now".

In this pattern, parents acted in a friendly manner and tried to open a way to talk to their adolescents, even if their children were not willing to.

A mother said, "I try to be very close to him and not criticize him too much".

Another parent said, "Our mothers had their policies and tried to keep a distance. They wanted it to be their word, we did not dare to speak against them, and they did not allow us to talk much".

Another parent said, "I'm not going hard anymore, for example, once I tell him, 'Look, you've been on the phone from morning until now, this kind of life is not useful at all, and I explain it to him for a moment".

Friendly interactive pattern, which is a subcategory in this pattern, was one of the most prominent parents. Like other patterns, the impact of bad experiences in the past was the most critical element that caused parents to start a new parental interaction with their adolescents.

Professional Seeking Pattern

Another new parental pattern that exists in comparison to previous generations is that now most parents, by the time of feeling that there is trouble, seek to get help from counselors. Even in small cities, where there is hard to get psychological services, parents consulted with the school counselor and were willing to get professional help.

"I have gone to a counselor several times, and sometimes I took my son with me to the sessions. I enrolled in different classes that teach us parental behavior, and I try to live up to my son's expectation".

Another subcategory in this pattern is mental-health-orientated. This subcategory showed us that the present generation of parents put their children's mental health as a priority over anything else.

For example, a mother said, 'I did not get friendly with my son for a couple of days, but then I felt that he is getting depressed, so I tried to come on short, and said to him that okay, at the end I'm a mother, you won't do anything for me, but what shall I do? I'm a mother. By saying this, I tried to build up the relationship again because I do not want to see him suffering".

No matter how small or big the city was or how religious it was, parents were willing to get professional help whenever they felt something was wrong in their parental interactions.

Adaptive Pattern

The adaptive pattern was the least repetitive pattern. Only two of the parents had this pattern. Parents were unwilling to accept these changes in parental interaction and just adopted themselves to these changes. By asking exploring questions, it got clear that parents wanted to keep the relationship with their adolescents, so they felt that they had to adapt themselves so that their adolescent would eventually come along and talk to them.

For example, a parent said: "I try to have a less strict interaction with them so that they feel comfortable coming and talking to me in case of facing problems. I do not want them to go and talk to their friends, they will misguide him".

Another example: "You know, there is no other way. We have to accept this; otherwise, we'll have problems. On the other side, we will suffer too. If we do not behave in a way they like, they will struggle with us and get on our nerves".

"When we were adolescents, it was patriarchy, but now it is children that are at the top of the hierarchy".

I always like a boundary to be between me and my child.'

The few parents who had this adaptive pattern were mostly afraid of not being respected by their adolescents; that's why they wanted to put a boundary between themselves and their children. The interesting point was that when the interviewer asked the parents if they had ever been insulted or disrespected by their adolescents, their answers were No. These parents still believe that parents must be in a power hierarchy and not willing to accept their adolescent as an important element in parental interaction. For example, a parent said: *"Now these teenagers are not listening to what we tell them, they just do whatever they want to. When we tell them that this behavior is wrong, they do not change their mind".* *"They do not care about their family and do whatever they want".*

By interviewing adolescents, it became clear that parents have distorted inferences, and adolescents try to adopt themselves and balance their parent-adolescent interaction. As mentioned before, the frequency of these parents was only two out of twelve. This study showed that in contrast to a common belief, this new parent-adolescent interaction is mostly because of parents themselves. Having bad memories about interaction with parents and also getting informed by social media about parental behavior were two major elements affecting this new structure. Although parental behavior was the main reason that adolescents had their unique patterns, only one pattern was recognized that affected all aspects of adolescents' beliefs.

Table 2. Themes and Subthemes that Emerged from Data Analysis for Adolescents

Main theme	Sub-theme	Experience of some participants
Democratic pattern	Justice and equality	Now it's a time that teenagers know a lot, as adults do, and we are just entering into the society, but the parents think that we know nothing.
	Expecting more	
	closeness with parents	
	Structural differences	
	The need for more independence	

Democratic Pattern

The democratic pattern was not only applied to interaction with parents but also to all aspects of the belief system. For example, some adolescents who live in religious cities said, *"We have a neighbor who is not as religious as we are. They don't cover themselves as women in our family do. My parents are not close to them and warn me all the time not to interact with them. But why? Human is human; we must not judge people by their appearance. Or my father says a bad thing about the... (the girl mentioned a race, but we do not name it in this study to respect all races), and I always ask him why do you act like that? Humans all have the same worth, besides their nations or beliefs".* Conversely to what the public thought, adolescents have democratic beliefs, which caused society to look at them as a reckless generation.

Adolescents had democratic beliefs, which made them want equal power in their relationships with their parents. They take parental interaction as a friendly relationship, not a system in which parents are in a high hierarchy. They wanted to have a friendly relationship with their parents, which is the new desire in the Iranian culture. These adolescents wanted to talk about any topic, even taboo subjects, like sexual questions with their parents, while the previous generation had high limitations to talk about these issues. There are two examples below:

"I love to be the way I talk to my friends and laugh and joke with my mother and father too, to be on the same intimate level and to talk and laugh and say that there is no space between us".

"Having a relationship where you are comfortable with each other. You can say everything to each other as if you are talking to a friend".

This democratic thought is rooted in other beliefs that adolescents have. One of these significant beliefs was that adolescents have different structural looks through

parent-adolescent interaction. They have revolutionary ideas about this interaction. This new generation have new expectations that the previous generation did not have. For example, they want complete attention from their parents, like knowing what they want and caring about their favorites and decisions, while these expectations are new and unfamiliar to parents.

"They have raised me for 17 years, so they should know me well; they should understand me without needing me to explain anything to them".

"At the very least, they should know enough about me and what I like or dislike."

Also, they all tried to break this old structure; *"You used to be like this in your time, you used to treat your family in a way that now we should not be like you. Now is a time when everything is very different".*

Discussion

According to the current research, parents have played an important role in changing parent-adolescent interaction. So conducting this research without interviewing parents would provide biased results. Parents and adolescents each have a distinct role in providing this structural change. The results showed that an important fact about parents is the impact of their negative and unpleasant childhood experiences which leads them to adopt a facilitative model.

Since Iran is a multicultural country [25], the research samples were taken from metropolitan cities, religious cities, and non-religious cities to prevent the impact of culture on research results. The results showed that cultural differences or different social statuses did not make much difference in this subject. If an adolescent from a big-non religious city adheres strictly to democratic patterns and values, the adolescent from a small-religious city has the same egalitarian values. The

only pattern identified in adolescents was the democratic model, which affected all aspects of adolescents' value perspective. This pattern is actually the desire for an equal relationship in which the adolescent can be respected and consulted by a parent.

In interviews with parents, the most common interactive pattern was the pattern of influence. Although the effect of the new structure in adolescents has not been ineffective in creating this interaction, parents have been enthusiastic and willing about these changes in many ways. This pattern is the same for many parents, both with higher and lower academic education. Therefore, conducting such a study without interviewing parents would provide incomplete results. Many parents in the present study consulted a counselor and psychologist if they encountered interactive problems with their children. In fact, parents wanted to rectify what they were deprived of.

Regarding the type of interaction of adolescents with parents, the main model was a democratic view of parent-child interaction. Adolescents believed that there should be some equality in power with parents and hierarchy of power should be adjusted. Adolescents tend to build parent-child relationships based on friendship, not power-based interaction. Actually, one of the hallmarks of intimacy and friendship is having a sense of being the first priority for the other person, ensuring that the other person's characteristics and interests are understood and recognized by the other person. The expectation of the adolescent is to be consulted by the parents on various issues (an expectation that teens did not have in previous decades).. Even in the small number of parents who had a pattern of resistance, adolescents saw the democratic model as a prerequisite for interaction with parents. On one hand, the changes in the parents' generation today, and on the other, the new structure of adolescents, and their expectations and the way they look at parent-child interaction, have formed a new pattern of parent-adolescent interactions.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research. The results of previous research showed that the need for an encouraging environment, having supervised freedoms to gain identity, the need to be unconditionally accepted, dealing with emotions and emotions, and a safe and accessible relationship with parents, were the needs of adolescent in communication with their parents [26]. In consistent with a previous study, adolescents benefit from having parents who are authoritative: warm, firm, and accepting of their needs for psychological autonomy [27]. According to the qualitative methodology of this study, the results cannot be generalized to all population studies in Iran. This means for further studies, it will be suggested that the dimensions of parental motives for seeking changes in their communication be further studied. The practical use of the results of this study can provide fundamental information about the significant changes in parent-adolescent interaction in the new generation of adolescents according to the sample size of the current study. The researchers who are interested can analyze these results with quantitative methodology and using a

massive sample size, including different cultures and religious seeking.

This study like any other research faced some limitations. The concept of invisible loyalty from Boszormenyi-Nagy was seen in several adolescents. This means that many adolescents felt upset and remorseful when talking about interacting with their parents. In the interview with such a teenager, the interviewer tried to mention and talk about the feeling of remorse of the teenager or tried to warm up the session to make the adolescent feel comfortable. Due to the coronavirus pandemic during the research, all interviews were done via video calls, so communications were limited. Moreover, some interruptions during the interviews like the low speed of the internet or interruption caused pauses while interviewing. Furthermore, the participants were at home and it was difficult to provide a safe environment for talking as some adolescents and parents felt insecure while talking about one another.

Conclusion

This study shows that the change in parent-adolescents of teenagers born since 2001 is mainly due to the parent's role. Actually, parents have played a fundamental role in this change. It has been proven that having bad memories and experiences from their childhood made them eager and open to accepting their teenager's new behavior.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

The research has received the approval of the Institutional Ethics Committee for Research Involving Humans Subjects of the Allame Tabatabai University. Approval Ethic ID: IR.ATU.REC.1399.066

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