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Association and comparison of emotional availability of working parents with child and parental characteristics

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Abstract

Emotional availability refers to the capacity of parents to be emotionally present and responsive towards their children despite of their work commitments. Emotional availability is crucial in parent-child relationship as it forms the foundation for healthy emotional development and attachment bonds. Due to work, pressure and lack of time parents are unavailable to their children, which is affecting child's behavior. Hence, the study was undertaken to study the emotional availability of working parents. The study was conducted in Bapatla taluk of Bapatla district with a sample of 165 high school children whose both parents were working. The data was collected through general information schedule, socio-economic status was measured by using the scale developed by Kuppaswamy (2020). In order to know the child's perception on parent's emotional availability, Lum Emotional Availability scale was used. The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics, chi-square, t-test and ANOVA. The findings of the study revealed that mothers were highly ($M = 62.92$) emotionally available compared to fathers ($M = 55.21$) and the difference was found to be significant 1 percent level. Further, a significant association was found between father's emotional availability with age, gender, standard of the child, father's education, occupation and socio-economic status. With regard to fathers emotional availability, a significant difference was found between different age groups (5.23**), gender (11.33**), standard (3.05*) of the child, father's education (2.07*) and socio-economic status (4.39**). Further, a significant association of mother's emotional availability with child's age, standard, mother's age, education and socio-emotional status was found. A significant mean difference in mother's emotional availability was also observed with respect to child's age (14.81**), standard (3.05**), mother's age (2.71*) and socio-economic status (2.64*). The study concluded that fathers were low in emotional availability compared to mothers.

Keywords: Emotional availability, father, mother, socio-economic status

Introduction

Emotional availability refers to the capacity of parents to be emotionally present, responsive, and supportive towards their children despite their work commitments. It encompasses aspects such as attentiveness, empathy, and the ability to provide a secure emotional environment for their children, even amidst the demands and stressors of their jobs. Emotionally available parents are attuned to their children's emotional needs and are actively engaged in nurturing their emotional well-being. Emotional availability is crucial in parent-child relationships as it forms the foundation for healthy emotional development and attachment bonds. They create a safe space for their children to express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns, fostering

open communication and trust in the parent-child relationship.

The connections between parental behaviors and children's emotional/behavioral functioning have been established for decades (Schaefer, 1965) [8]. This emotional connection serves as a foundation for healthy socio-emotional development and psychological resilience in children. However, when parents are heavily involved in demanding work schedules or are emotionally distant due to stress or other factors, their emotional availability may be compromised. This can result in feelings of neglect, insecurity, and detachment in children, as they may perceive their parents as unavailable or inaccessible for emotional support.

The construct of emotional availability represents a significant element in the quality of parent-child relationship reflecting healthy parenting. Although there are somewhat different conceptualizations of emotional availability in the literature, the primary features of emotional availability focus on the level of parental responsiveness, sensitivity, and emotional involvement (Biringen & Robinson, 1991) [2].

Presently, most research has focused on investigating the emotional availability between mothers and infants and its correlation, however there has been a notable absence in examining the emotional availability between parents and children. Hence in this context this current study aims to fill this gap by addressing issues pertaining to emotional availability and its effect on socio-emotional competency and behavioural problems among high school children, with the following

Objectives

1. To assess the emotional availability of parents.
2. To study the influence of child and parental variables on emotional availability of parents

Methodology

The aim of the study is to know the emotional availability of working parents among high school children. A total of 165 high school children who are studying 8th, 9th and 10th standard were selected randomly. Children of both working parents were selected purposively. The study was carried out in Andhra Pradesh. To gather general information like age, gender, ordinal position, standard, parents age, parents education and parents occupation general information schedule was developed by the researcher and socio-economic status scale developed by kuppaswamy (2020) [5] was used to know the SES. To assess emotional availability, Lum emotional availability for parents questionnaire (2005) was used. The tool was administered to children in order to know their parents emotional availability. The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics, chi-square and t-test/ANOVA by using SPSS.

Tool Used for The Study

Emotional availability scale

The Emotional availability scale developed by Lum (2005) [7] was used for assessing the emotional availability of parents. The scale consists of 15 items for both parents separately. The scale was administered to high school children. The items were scored based on 6 point scale where 1 stands for never, 2- rarely, 3 – sometime, 4 - often, 5 - very often and 6 – always. The scores of fathers and mothers were measured separately.

Higher the score indicated higher the emotional availability and lower the score indicated lower emotional availability.

Results

Percentage distribution of demographic variables of high school children

With respect to age of high school children, it was found that more than half (58.79%) of the children belonged to 13-14 years age group and 41.21 percent belonged to 15-16 years age group. With respect to gender of high school children, more than half (56.37%) of the respondents were boys and 43.63 percent of them were girls. With regard to ordinal position, 47.88 percent of the high school children were first born followed by 46.06 percent second born and 06.06 percent later born. With regard to standard of high school children, more than half (56.96%) of them belonged to 9th standard, 32.74 percent were 8th standard and 10.30 percent of them were 10th standard.

Considering age of father, it is evident that more than half (51.52%) of the respondents belonged to 31-40 years age group followed by 47.87 percent to 41-50 years age group and only 0.61 percent of them belonged to 51-60 years age group. Looking at the education of father, less than one third (31.53%) studied up to high school, 36.96 percent of them completed graduation, 16.36 percent studied up to intermediate/ diploma, 4.25 percent completed primary school, 3.03 percent middle school and only 7.87 percent of them completed professional degree. With respect to occupation of father, 46.66 percent were professionals, 20.62 percent were clericals/farmers, 19.39 percent were skilled workers, 13.33 percent were semi-professionals and none of them were semi skilled workers. Considering age of mother, it is evident that more than three fourth (78.78%) of the respondents belonged to 31-40 years, 11.53 percent to 41-50 years and only 9.69 percent belonged to 51-60 years age group. Looking at the education of mother, more than one third (35.15%) studied upto high school, 27.87 percent of them completed graduation, 10.30 percent studied upto intermediate/ diploma, 7.87 percent completed primary school, 12.12 percent middle school and only 6.69 percent of them completed professional degree. With respect to occupation of mothers, 40.61 percent were professionals, 26.06 percent were clericals/farmers, 20.00 percent were semi skilled workers, 13.33 percent were semi-professionals and none of them were skilled workers. Taking into account the socio-economic status of the respondents, it was found that, more than half (56.98%) belonged to upper followed by 41.81 percent upper middle and only 1.21 percent of them were lower middle. None of them belonged upper lower and lower.

Table 1: Influence of child and parental variables on emotional availability of parents

Independent variables	Fathers emotional availability				Mothers emotional availability			
	High	Low	Total	χ^2	High	Low	Total	χ^2
Age of the child								
13 – 14 years	53 (77.95)	15 (22.05)	68 (100.00)	0.96 ^{NS}	59 (86.77)	09 (13.23)	68 (100.00)	1.14 ^{NS}
15 – 16 years	69 (71.14)	28 (28.86)	97 (100.00)		78 (80.42)	19 (19.58)	97 (100.00)	
Gender								
Boy	77 (82.79)	16 (17.21)	93 (100.00)	8.67 ^{**}	84 (90.33)	09 (09.67)	93 (100.00)	8.04 ^{**}
Girl	45 (62.50)	27 (37.50)	72 (100.00)		53 (73.62)	19 (26.38)	72 (100.00)	
Ordinal position								
1 st born	58 (73.41)	21 (26.58)	79 (100.00)	0.65 ^{NS}	62 (78.48)	17 (21.51)	79 (100.00)	2.46 ^{**}
2 nd born	57 (75.00)	19 (25.00)	76 (100.00)		66 (86.85)	10 (13.15)	76 (100.00)	
Later born	07 (70.00)	03 (30.00)	10 (100.00)		09 (90.00)	01 (10.00)	10 (100.00)	
Standard								
8 th standard	41 (75.93)	13 (24.07)	54 (100.00)	4.82 ^{**}	44 (81.48)	10 (18.51)	54 (100.00)	1.65 ^{NS}
9 th standard	65 (69.15)	29 (30.85)	94 (100.00)		77 (81.91)	17 (18.08)	94 (100.00)	
10 th standard	16 (94.12)	1 (05.88)	17 (100.00)		16 (94.12)	1 (05.88)	17 (100.00)	
Father age/ mother age								
31- 40 years/ 21-30 years	68 (83.96)	13 (16.04)	81 (100.00)	9.49 ^{**}	13 (81.25)	03 (18.75)	16 (100.00)	0.05 ^{NS}
41 – 50 years/ 31-40 years	49 (62.83)	29 (37.17)	78 (100.00)		108 (83.08)	22 (16.92)	130 (100.00)	
51 – 60 years/ 41-50 years	05 (83.34)	01 (16.66)	06 (100.00)		16 (84.22)	03 (15.78)	19 (100.00)	
Parents education								
Primary school	06 (85.72)	01 (14.28)	07 (100.00)	2.62 ^{NS}	12 (92.31)	01 (07.69)	13 (100.00)	15.62 ^{**}
Middle school	03 (60.00)	02 (40.00)	05 (100.00)		11 (55.00)	09 (45.00)	20 (100.00)	
High school	36 (69.24)	16 (30.76)	52 (100.00)		49 (84.49)	09 (15.51)	58 (100.00)	
Intermediate/ diploma	22 (81.49)	05 (18.51)	27 (100.00)		17 (100.00)	-	17 (100.00)	
Graduate	46 (75.41)	15 (24.59)	61 (100.00)		39 (84.79)	07 (15.21)	46 (100.00)	
Professional degree	09 (69.24)	04 (30.76)	13 (100.00)		09 (81.82)	02 (18.18)	11 (100.00)	
Occupation of the parents								
Semi-skilled worker	-	-	-	1.88 ^{NS}	28 (84.86)	05 (15.15)	33 (100.00)	3.99 [*]
Skilled worker	23 (71.88)	09 (28.12)	32 (100.00)		-	-	-	
Clerical/shop/farmer	27 (79.42)	07 (20.58)	34 (100.00)		37 (86.05)	06 (13.95)	43 (100.00)	
Semi-professional	14 (63.64)	08 (36.36)	22 (100.00)		15 (68.19)	07 (31.81)	22 (100.00)	
Professional	58 (75.33)	19 (24.67)	77 (100.00)		57 (85.08)	10 (14.92)	67 (100.00)	
Socio-economic status								
Upper	64 (68.09)	30 (31.91)	94 (100.00)	4.24 ^{**}	76 (80.86)	18 (19.14)	94 (100.00)	1.02 ^{NS}
Upper middle	56 (81.16)	13 (18.84)	69 (100.00)		59 (85.51)	10 (14.49)	69 (100.00)	

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage, ^{**}Significant at 1 percent level, ^{*}Significant at 5 percent level, NS-Non-significant

Table 1 shows the influence of child and parental variables on emotional availability of parents. From the table 1, it is

evident that gender, standard, father age and socio-economic status was significantly associated with fathers emotional availability. Further, gender, ordinal position, mother

education and occupation of mother was associated with mothers emotional availability.

Table 2: Comparison between emotional availability of parents by independent variables

Independent variables	Father emotional availability		Mother emotional availability	
	Mean ±SD	t-value/ F-value	Mean ±SD	t-value/ F-value
Age of the child				
13 – 14 years	57.70±22.53	1.22 ^{NS}	66.35±20.51	1.70 ^{NS}
15 – 16 years	53.46±21.30		60.52±22.28	
Gender				
Boy	58.95±21.75	2.54*	67.17±19.91	2.92**
Girl	50.37±21.16		57.44±22.79	
Ordinal position				
1 st born	54.94±21.17	0.09 ^{NS}	58.75±22.40	3.82*
2 nd born	55.09±21.76		65.61±19.84	
Later born	58.20±29.30		75.40±23.66	
Standard				
8 th standard	54.81±19.00	0.02 ^{NS}	62.87±21.10	0.04 ^{NS}
9 th standard	55.54±24.43		63.03±22.80	
10 th standard	54.64±15.06		62.52±18.11	
Father age/ mother age				
31- 40 years/ 21-30 years	60.79±19.72	5.54**	53.25±20.78	1.78 ^{NS}
41 – 50 years/ 31-40 years	49.58±22.69		63.93±22.08	
51 – 60 years/ 41-50 years	53.00±22.52		64.15±18.50	
Parents education				
Primary school	69.14±24.71	1.85 ^{NS}	72.38±14.05	7.23**
Middle school	48.40 ±24.48		52.10±30.26	
High school	56.11±25.57		67.32±22.55	
Intermediate/ diploma	61.25±21.19		81.29±9.87	
Graduate	52.91±18.12		54.86±15.50	
Professional degree	44.92±16.38		53.54±13.22	
Occupation of the parents				
Semi-skilled worker	-	3.61*	65.51±25.50	3.29*
Skilled worker	56.34±25.68		-	
Clerical/shop/farmer	63.76±23.89		70.18±21.34	
Semi-professional	58.77±27.69		61.09±26.01	
Professional	49.94±15.39		57.59±16.78	
Socio-economic status				
Upper	66.36±15.64	4.39*	71.59±14.46	4.36**
Upper middle	70.57±12.23		74.87±11.64	

Significant at the 0.05 level ** Significant at the 0.01 level NS- Non-significant

Table 2 shows the comparison of mean scores between parents emotional availability with independent variables. From the table it is explained that boys, later borns had high mean scores compared to their counter parts. Fathers with 31-40 years age group had high mean scores, mothers who were educated upto intermediate/diploma had high mean scores, both fathers and mothers who belonged to clerical/shop/farmer category and with upper middle socio-economic status had high mean scores. Further, a significant mean difference was found between gender, fathers age, fathers occupation and socio-economic status with fathers emotional availability. Similarly, gender, ordinal position, mothers education, mother occupation and socio-economic status with mothers emotional availability.

Discussion

Both fathers and mothers were less emotionally available to girls. This may be because, parents may be less emotionally available to girls due to ingrained gender stereotypes that expect girls to be more emotionally self-sufficient and nurturing. Societal norms often prioritize boys’ emotional

needs, assuming girls are naturally more resilient. Parents might also unconsciously project their own experiences and expectations onto their daughters, leading to lack of recognition of their emotional needs. Babore *et al.* (2014) [1] too in his research work highlighted that gender had weak effect on emotional availability wherein girls scored lower than boys. Mothers and fathers were less emotionally available to first borns. Parents may be less emotionally available to first-borns due to inexperience and the pressures of adjusting to parenthood for the first time. The study carried out by Heral *et al.* (2002) [4] also revealed a significant link with emotional availability and birth order. Specifically mother’s level of sensitivity tended to decline between the first and third born children. Father were less emotionally available to 9th standard children. This may be due to work-related stress and time constraints, which limit their involvement. Fathers who belonged to 41-50yeras age group were less emotionally available to high school children. This may be due to several factors such as older fathers may often face heightened career responsibilities and job-related stress, limiting their time and energy for

emotional engagement. The study conducted by Babore *et al.* (2014) ^[1] too found significant effect of parent's age on emotional availability where older group had lower scores than younger group. Mothers who were educated upto primary school were less emotionally available to high school children. The findings are in line with a study carried out by Li and Zhan (2023) ^[6] who revealed that, mothers educational background was significantly associated with positive mother-child relationship. It is also evident from a study conducted by Biringen *et al.* (2000) ^[3] wherein it was found that mother's education is also predictive of emotional availability. mothers who belonged to clerical/shop/farmer category were less emotionally available to their children. This may be due to demanding careers at higher levels which often require longer working hours, travel, and professional commitments, leaving less time for quality interactions and emotional connection with children.

Conclusion

The emotional availability of parents is crucial for the healthy development of the children. Due to their busy work schedule parent were less emotionally available to their children. Father were less emotionally available to their children. Both the parents were less emotionally available to girls. Balancing work demands with responsive parenting can enhance children's emotional security.

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