

Parenting Style in Single-parent Family Influence on the Development of Adolescent Depression

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Abstract: Parenting styles have been shown through empirical studies to be a central determinant in the depression of youth throughout the past decades. This review examines the two most dominant negative parenting styles in single-parent families and explores how single parents with two negative parenting styles contribute to adolescent depression. Based on the special economic constraints and excessive parenting responsibilities, single parents are apt to adopt authoritarian parenting and neglect parenting styles, in which authoritarian parenting styles presenting restrictive rules and harsh punishments will lead to low-level parenting self-esteem and high levels of emotional disturbances for teenagers. Also, neglectful parenting styles which are characterized by fewer parental involvements will significantly impair the adolescent's disability to express and manage emotions. The conclusion is that authoritarian parenting style and neglectful parenting style negatively influence adolescent depression in single-parent families. This review provides a perspective on the impact of single-parent family background on adolescent depression. Future research should focus on how to help parents develop appropriate parenting styles to decrease the risks of suffering depression for adolescents.

Keywords: adolescent, depression, single parent, parenting style, single-parent family

1. Introduction

Depression among adolescents has been the focal point of psychological research for years. In 2019, 23 million children and teenagers are among the 280 million people with depression [1]. Depression creates difficulties and profoundly interferes with schoolwork and daily life for adolescents. For example, the physiological changes brought about by depression, such as irregular diet and sleep disturbance can negatively affect physical development in puberty [2]. Moreover, fatigue and poor concentration are probably detrimental to academic performance in school, and adolescents in a school environment who have been diagnosed with depression are also taking a high risk in traumatized by too much attention and ridicule [3].

It is believed that adolescents who live in single-parent households tend to develop depression than teenagers raised in two-parent families [4]. Single parents are apt to be disadvantaged to parents who live with a spouse or partner because they tend to experience financial difficulties with a lack of partner's support. Meanwhile, excessive obligations and distressing circumstances may result in some deviations in parenting behaviors toward their children, thus contributing to negative outcomes for adolescent growth [4]. While a great deal of research has investigated extensively

regarding family-imposed influences contributing to the development of adolescent depression, there are limited review articles published addressing the issue of the single-parent family perspective in the understanding of depression during puberty. Consequently, this review explored two negative parenting styles that occur in single-parent families and how these two prominent parenting styles affect the development of depression in adolescents.

2. Depression in Adolescence

Depression is one of the mood disorders which prevail increasingly in the world [5]. Unlike the regulated emotional fluctuations, individuals with depression must be experiencing other symptoms for at least 2 weeks, including the poor ability to concentrate, reduction of physical movement suicidal attempts or behaviors, and so on. Depression is particularly prevalent among adolescents, and it is one of the significant contributory factors of illness and disability in puberty [6].

Notably, the manifestations of depression for teenagers are different from the symptoms of adults. Twivy, Kirkham and Cooper have claimed that it is necessary to understand the symptoms of adolescent depression combined with the context of the development in adolescence, such as anger being the main distinctive manifestation of adolescent depression [2]. Although it has been recorded in the diagnostic criteria of DSM-5, adolescents can easily perceive it and result in impulsive and aggressive behavior toward others or themselves. Also, fatigue is one of the symptoms often reported by adolescents with depression. As mentioned earlier, sleep disorders and lack of concentration can directly affect academic achievement in school [3]. However, some parents will avoid and reject admitting their child's depressive symptoms, thinking that this is normal behavior or regulated mood fluctuation at that age. For example, anger is a normal emotional rebellion in adolescent boys and girls rather than a manifestation of depression; some parents even blame their children who have depressive signs, such as poor concentration resulting in poor grades, which are the implications of children's lack of perseverance and hard work [7]. Undoubtedly, the depression stigma from parents can make adolescent depression develop in a more negative direction.

Some physical changes and characteristics marked in adolescence are probably associated with depression. For instance, research indicated that teenagers are more likely than adults to be influenced by their emotions when interacting with others and making a decision, although the amygdala which is a brain region involved in emotion perception and expression may reach maturity in adolescence, the prefrontal cortex (important region for emotional regulation) does not mature until the age of 25, they also pointed out the increases in estrogen and testosterone combining with receptors in the limbic system, which contributes to emotional swings and impulsivity in teens [8]. Consequently, the inconsistent physiology of the maturational state among the amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and sex hormones allows developing adolescents to perceive emotions as adults, but not to control and manage them stably.

In addition, adolescent depression is also easily affected by the family environment and parenting behaviors, due to the vital role in shaping behavior as well as encouraging psychological growth. Aufseeser et al. proposed that moderate parental attention (such as learning about the adolescent's friends and activities at school) combined with parental support can help the adolescent develop a correct self-concept and gain higher self-esteem for academic success; a closed parent-child relationship with regular communication would decrease the risk of depression [9].

As a result, depression in adolescents may be misunderstood in the context of adolescence, and parents may not detect teenagers' depression in time, which may delay the time to acquire the proper treatment and intervention. Also, some parents may not be able to recognize some particular

changes in adolescence as well as the importance of family circumstances in providing support. Therefore, depression in adolescence ought to be recognized correctly and widely.

3. Parenting Styles in Single-Parent Families

3.1. The Representations of Parenting Styles

Parenting style is the collection of parental attitudes, goals, and behavioral patterns that create the emotional bond of the parent-child relationship [10]. Individuals in puberty may be negatively affected by the care provided by their parents if the care provided is inappropriate [11]. A model comprised of four parenting styles was proposed by Maccoby and Martin which are based on the levels of demand and responsiveness: democratic, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglect [12]. To be specific, the democratic style has high demands and responses, as opposed to neglect with low demands and responses. Authoritarian parents are good at being strict with their children but not responsive while pampering parents are overly responsive but not strict.

3.2. The Dominant Parenting Styles in Single Families

Unlike partner families, it is not easy for a single mother or single father because she/he is playing both roles without any help or support from the others, thereby leading single parents to adopt inappropriate parenting styles in the process of raising their children [13].

Muslihat and Listiana have demonstrated that authoritarian and neglectful styles can occur in single-parent families with a high probability, and they believed that authoritarian single parents tend to require their children to obey all rules and orders, and everything must conform to their wishes, regardless of the children's desires and expressions; parents with authoritarian styles also are deficient in establishing positive emotional bonds with their kids, because they are apt to provide less emotional support and intimate communication [11]. A range of basic needs and stressors can tend to the development of this authoritarian style. Daryanani et al. emphasized that single parents are prone to be devoid of emotional support in the face of stressful life events because they have to balance financial support and take care of their offspring alone, so they have heightened risks of experiencing depression, anxiety, substance abuse than partnered parents, and that poor mental health would make it easier for single mothers to control their children and punish them inappropriately [4].

In contrast to authoritarian parenting styles, neglectful parenting styles mean that parents provide less strict discipline and supervision to their children. However, they also do not have enough time to accompany their children and satisfy their demands in emotional communication. Musick and Meier maintained that single-parent families are more shrouded in the shadow of financial insecurity due to the lack of second potential earners and caregivers at home, and single mothers or single fathers have to focus on how to support the family instead of how to provide better companionship and guidance to the offspring [14]. Furthermore, busy working single parents are always neglecting and underestimating the impacts of children's negative emotions, which may provide breeding grounds for more serious psychological problems in adolescence [15].

4. The Relationship Between Two Negative Parenting Styles and Adolescent Depression

4.1. Adolescent Depression from the Perspective of Authoritarian Parenting Styles

Across numerous studies, the authoritarian parenting style occurred in single-parent households and was strongly associated with higher levels of depression [4, 10, 11, 16]. To be specific, the physical

control and psychological control present in authoritarian parenting styles are associated with more internalizing symptoms in adolescents such as depression.

Physical control including harsh physical punishment and verbal discipline may damage adolescents' psychosocial adjustment, because the limited rules and strict supervision by single parents may restrict adolescents from making independent perspectives of issues, which undermines perceptions of self-competence [10, 16]. Not only that, but single parents with an authoritarian style also encourage their kids to always submit to their parents without thinking about their desires, and consequently, adolescents are inclined to sacrifice their willingness to satisfy the needs of their parents, which may contribute to low levels of self-esteem and a great number of emotional disturbances [11].

In addition to harsh control, psychological control is also the concern of authoritarian parenting style in single-parent families. Some single mothers would use emotional blackmail or induce feelings of guilt to manipulate adolescents' thoughts and feelings, which leads adolescents to hardly receive the correct emotional support and gain expressed emotional strategies [10]. In that case, expressing disappointment and dissatisfaction to teenagers frequently may instill strong feelings of hopelessness with profound self-doubt, as well as limit the formation of self-identity [4]. Therefore, the authoritarian parenting style of single parents may play a crucial role in bringing about adolescent depression.

4.2. Adolescent Depression from the Perspective of Neglectful Parenting Styles

Neglectful parenting styles conducted by single parents play a crucial part in adolescent depression, and one central reason is that some single mothers and fathers do not have enough time to participate in and monitor their teenagers' studies and lives [11].

From the perspective of learning, more parental involvement in education may exert a positive influence on academic performance. For instance, parents paying attention to academic performance could increase the likelihood of being positively influenced by peers' positive learning behaviors for teenagers, which may help adolescents gain good academic achievement through high communication quality with their partners [17]. Thus, adolescents with a sense of achievement and correct self-cognition may decrease the likelihood of suffering depression. Nevertheless, Musick and Meier [14] suggested that single parents with low participation in education may increase the risks of dropout in adolescents with poor grades, thus contributing to developing externalizing symptoms (aggression and offenses) and internalizing symptoms (anxiety and depression).

Lack of parent-child communication with teenagers also is a major appearance for single parents with neglectful parenting styles. At the stage of adolescence, parental interactions should focus on establishing positive emotional bonds (e.g., caring and support) with teenagers rather than only satisfying their basic needs [17]. Adolescents are more likely to communicate openly without any criticism and belittling from their parents, and the closed parent-child communication styles may reduce the possibility of depression for adolescents [10, 11, 16]. However, in single-parent families, some single parents are trapped in low-income and unstable jobs, so it is difficult to provide basic living needs for teenagers, and undoubtedly, other assistance cannot be provided either. Additionally, ineffective parent-child interactions in single-parent households could negatively affect adolescents, for instance, unconstructive parent-child communication can exacerbate negative emotionality and trigger rumination in the adolescent with the disability to express and manage emotions, which may predict the heightened risks of depression [2, 7]. As a result, the neglectful parenting style of single parents may also exert a significant effect on developing adolescent depression.

5. The Suggestions for Adolescent Depression

Firstly, parental support and acceptance are the greatest assistance for adolescent depression. Singh and Kiran argued that parental neglect and incorrect responses predict deviations in adolescent behaviours and emotions in single-parent households [15]. As mentioned earlier, establishing parent-child communication and maintaining a positive emotional bond is conducive to promoting mutual understanding of themselves. Adolescents are prone to interact actively with their parents who are not autocratic and ignored, which is conducive to facilitating the ability to regulate emotions and avoiding depression. Moreover, as for single-parent families whose adolescents are already depressed, it is integral to improve the acknowledgment of depression for single parents. Parents' stronger depression stigma or misunderstanding of depression will also prevent adolescents from getting better help for depression, and even increase helplessness and the probability of suicide [7]. Parents with higher levels of depression literacy tend to be more emotionally supportive of their adolescents rather than critical or overprotective. Hence, ensuring that single parents are adequately informed about depression can increase the assistance that teenagers receive.

In addition, parental adjustment and modification of negative parenting styles can reduce the incidence of adolescent depression [10, 11]. A common feature of authoritarian parenting and neglectful parenting is the inability to properly balance and control the needs and responses of offspring. Parents ought to cultivate a parenting style that is adapted to the features of the adolescents, and democratic parents have an accepting and responsive attitude and can control the needs of their children [11]. Parents with democratic styles are open, and flexible, and encourage their children to be independent psychologically. They are also willing to provide their children with adequate opportunities to communicate and emotional support. Research has shown that authoritative parenting styles are less correlated with depression, and it is easy to form a better psychological adjustment in adolescents [10]. Therefore, in some single-parent families, if single mothers or fathers can change their attitudes and ways of treating their children, establish a good and intimate parent-child relationship with teenagers, and accompany teenagers through a special stage of life with an open or democratic parenting style, then teens will also be effective in depression prevention.

Besides the support from parents, another necessary assistance for confronting adolescent depression is school resources, such as teachers and peers. Adolescence is marked by increased interaction with teachers and peers, and research introduced that teachers' spontaneous support which leads to adolescents experiencing more self-expression contributes to reducing adolescent depression, and teachers can help students develop a sense of autonomy by acknowledging students' feelings and minimizing the use of teaching methods that induce shame or guilt [18]. Adolescents who have a positive and active school climate are more likely to receive social-emotional support from peers, which can help them cope with study stressors, thereby counteracting or reducing the likelihood of depression.

6. Limitations

Based on a great deal of research, it is not difficult to find that many parenting styles for single parents are measured by scale rather than self-report [7, 11, 17, 18]. In addition, the investigation of parenting style was only carried out on single parents but did not consider adolescents. The offspring's interpretation of parental behavior and styles may be a more robust indicator of adjustment than the parent's report [4]. So, it is necessary to consider measuring and adopting children's explanations in future research.

Most studies or reviews have focused on "single-parent families" or "single mothers" [14, 19]. Conversely, how single-father parenting styles play a role in adolescent depression is unknown. In

addition, studies have shown that girls are more likely to be depressed under the authoritarian control of single-parent families than boys [4, 10], and the possible causes and influencing factors are also poorly understood. Are there gender or biological differences in the symptoms of depression in male and female adolescents?

Cultural context may be a potential variable for adolescent depression, especially in some Asian countries where the cultural background of collectivism is privileged. In Asia, the stigma has been linked to thoughts of “losing face”, especially among family members of sufferers, and depressive sufferers in Asian countries have a stronger sense of stigma than patients in Western countries [19]. For example, Chinese people have more difficulty in expressing emotions, and often attribute depression to their weak personality and lack of willpower, thus tending to depressive symptoms develop in a negative direction. How to combine the local cultural background to help people increase the correct understanding of adolescent depression is very important. Future research can be carried out on the influence of social culture on adolescent depression.

7. Conclusions

To conclude, this paper explored the influences of single-parent families on the development of adolescents' depression by considering the parenting style perspective. A significant number of studies have revealed profound influences of negative parenting styles on vulnerability to depressive symptoms among adolescents. Specifically, authoritarian parenting style and neglectful parenting style which dominate in single-parent families are highly associated with adolescents' depression. Authoritarian single parents with physical control and psychological control adopt strict discipline and supervision, which may limit the development of self-esteem and psychological independence for teenagers, as well as induce emotional disturbances. Also, adolescents who are raised in a single family with neglectful parenting may produce self-doubt and a sense of hopelessness, which may increase the risks of depression and suicide.

This paper mainly focused on the single-parent family background and investigated what kind of parenting styles single parents are more likely to be brought up in the case of low economic status without partner support, and the effects on the development of adolescent depression. Previous studies have always focused on the impact of cohabiting or married parents on the development of adolescent depression, and this review may provide a reference for related research on the relationship between adolescent depression and single-parent family structure.

In the future, it is called on single parents to explore their proper parenting styles which are suitable to their offspring. Regardless of the style, good parenting is a process in which parents control, guide, and accompany their children to fulfill their responsibilities based on the child's developmental stage and maturity. It is also necessary to improve parental depression literacy and eliminate their prejudice against depression, to provide appropriate support at the life and psychological level for adolescents.

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