



Fathers parenting styles and locus of control amongst malaysian adolescents: the moderating role of number of children

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 22 November 2011;

Received in revised form:

28 December 2011;

Accepted: 10 January 2012;

Keywords

Adolescent,
Parenting style,
Locus of control,
Number of children.

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to determine the relationships between fathers' parenting styles and locus of control, and the role of number of children in the family as a moderator. Sample consisted of 382 school-going adolescents with an average age of 14 years. A self-administered questionnaire was prepared for the participants at their selected schools. Results demonstrated that adolescents with higher internal locus of control perceived their fathers at higher levels of authoritative parenting. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the influence of the fathers' parenting style on the adolescents' locus of control was stable across number of children. Regardless of family size, fathers' contribution in child development is fundamental. Findings from the study call attention to policy makers to take into consideration the 'father factor' in formulating policies related to child and family well-being.

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Introduction

Adolescents comprised at least a third of the 27 million population in Malaysia. As such, they are considered to be an important part of Malaysia's social structure and future leaders. With increasing reports on externalizing and internalizing problems among adolescents especially those that are still in school, their well-being is increasingly becoming a concern by many sectors including researchers. Baharudin et al. (2005) showed that conduct problems such as fighting, gangsterism, drug abuse has been increased amongst secondary school students in West Malaysia and will be worsen without intervention. They proposed that conduct problems are often a symbolic way for students to convey their conflicting desires or is a sign of their lack of positive skills regarding self-expression. Furthermore, the other study conducted amongst Malaysian adolescents indicated that adolescents with high scores in bullying also recorded high scores in depression (Uba et al., 2009). Therefore, fostering internal locus of control as one of the indicators of well-being in adolescents is one way to eschew adolescents to be involved in health problems and deviant behaviors. Individuals with internal locus of control are less apt to consider negative events as factors out of their control (Rotter, 1966). Therefore, internal locus of control associates positively with capability to cope with stress and negatively with different aspects of psychopathology including anxiety, depression and interpersonal problems (Wu et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2008).

Many factors may influence the development of an adolescent's internal locus of control. Of interest to the present study is the contribution of fathers' parenting style and the extent to which the number of children in the family would make a difference in the way a father would interact with their adolescents. For instance, authoritative parenting which is characterized by high warmth, responsiveness and demandingness is often related to positive child's outcomes (Supple & Small, 2006; Pong et al., 2010). These parents apply

verbal reasoning and emotional support which lead to high level of moral reasoning, self efficacy and internal locus of control in children (Carlo et al, 2007). In contrast, it has been revealed that authoritarian and permissive parenting appear unsuccessful in enabling children to develop a range of self-directing and self regulatory abilities that underlie a strong sense of self-efficacy and academic success (Diaz, 2005). Therefore, it has been shown that familial influences on locus of control have enduring effect throughout life. However, associations between parenting and child outcomes might vary when the number of children in the family is taken into account.

Previous research indicated that large family size is a risk factor for families (Flake & Forste, 2006). Naturally, it seems reasonable that the amount of the time a parent spends with any one child in various activities is influenced by the number of children in a family. In other words, parents have to divide their attention when there are more children present in the family and as a consequence parenting resources are challenged (Downey, 2001; Verhoeven et al; 2007). It has been proven that parents with small number of children are more supportive and pay more attention to their children as well as provide high quality family environment (Amato, 1990; Baharudin & Zoolilawati, 2003). Nonetheless, studies have generally looked at the direct relationships between parenting styles and adolescents' outcomes (Marsiglia et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2008) and largely ignoring the moderating or indirect influence of number of children on these relationships. Thus, the present study would illustrate the moderating role of number of children on the relationships between paternal parenting style and locus of control.

Purpose of the Study

The current study extends previous research by assessing the indirect influence of number of children on the relation between perceived paternal parenting styles and adolescents' locus of control.

Additionally, this study addresses another important gap in the literature regarding the specific role of father as a main member of family in the development of adolescents' locus of control. More specifically, the present study aimed to (1) examine relationships between paternal parenting styles with locus of control in adolescents, (2) determine if these relations are moderated by number of children and, (3) to assess the specific conditions under which this moderating effect exist.

Methodology

Participants

The Participants consisted of 382, secondary school students with the mean age of 14.27 and standard deviation of 1.26 from selected public schools in the district of Petaling. There were about equal proportions of female and male participants. Most of the participants were Malay (63.4%) which followed by Chinese (22%) and Indian (14.7%) respectively.

Procedures

At the beginning of the semester, the researchers visited all the chosen classes at the schools. Each time before the administration of the questionnaires, a brief explanation was given prior to the survey to inform the respondents on the objectives of the study and also on the content of the instrument. The questionnaire was divided into several sections including background information, parental authority questionnaire, and the respondent's locus of control. The back translation procedure was used to translate the instruments into Malay language. Students filled out the questionnaires in the class, and they were reminded that their attendance is voluntary, and their grades will not be influenced by their responses. Additionally, each respondent was given a gift in appreciation for his/her participation in the survey after they completed the questionnaire.

Measures

Demographics

Fathers completed a demographic form including information about level of family income, fathers' level of education, age and number of children in the family. Adolescents filled out the questions about their date of birth, gender, and ethnicity.

Perceived paternal parenting style

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) was used to examine perceived paternal parenting style which is designed to assess Baumrind's parenting prototypes (Buri, 1991). It includes 30 items per parent, however; in this study the father form was used. This scale is 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliabilities of the three dimensions of this scale in the present study exhibited acceptable internal consistency (alphas of 0.73, 0.75, and 0.74 for adolescents' ratings of their fathers respectively).

Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Control Scale for Children

Locus of control in the current study was evaluated by the Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Control Scale for children (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973). This scale includes 40 questions which are answered by "yes" or "no" responses. Statements that represent an external orientation to locus of control receive a score of "1" and those which indicate an internal orientation receive a score of "0". Therefore, lower scores are indicative of internal locus of control orientation. In this study, a Spearman-Brown split-half reliability was 0.70.

Results

Table 1 presents a descriptive analysis such as mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum as well as possible range of scores for paternal parenting style and locus of control. A review of the descriptive statistics indicated that the leading style of parenting as perceived by adolescents was authoritative parenting followed by authoritarian and permissive parenting respectively. Furthermore, the mean score of 14.89 have been found for the locus of control scale. This descriptive statistics showed that students in this sample tend to indicate more internal locus of control orientation.

Furthermore, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated in order to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables of study. Following the scientific research tradition, the level of confidence for all calculations was set at alpha 0.05 (2-tailed). As presented in Table 2, the findings indicated the significant and negative relationships between paternal authoritative parenting styles with adolescents' locus of control ($r = -0.24$; $p \leq 0.01$). It means that adolescents tend to develop stronger internal locus of control when they perceived their fathers as highly authoritative. The study findings also revealed that neither the main effect of paternal authoritarian nor permissive parenting significantly predicted locus of control.

Regression Analyses

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether number of children moderated the links between paternal parenting styles and locus of control. As recommended by Aiken and West (1991), prior to data analyses, the predictor variables were centered in order to reduce multicollinearity. The mean was subtracted from each individual scale score to generate variables with means of zero. These centered variables were then multiplied to create the interaction term. In addition, hierarchical multiple regression analysis provides the statistical testing of a moderator effects by including their product or interaction term at a last step in the regression equation (Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Baron & Kenny, 1986). Therefore, in the current study paternal parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian and permissive—entered in Step 1 followed by the number of children in Step 2 and two-way interactions in Step 3.

As presented in Table 3, the paternal parenting styles in Step 1 accounted for 8.7% variance to adolescent's locus of control. Number of children in Step 2 did not account any significant additional variance in locus of control. The R^2 change for number of children in step 2 was not also significant. The interactions between paternal parenting styles and number of children in Step 3 were not significant. The examination of Step 3 revealed that number of children did not have any moderating effects on the relationships between paternal parenting styles and locus of control.

Discussion and conclusion

The first hypothesis, regarding paternal parenting styles and their relations with locus of control, was partially supported. These imply that as fathers tend to indicate high level of authoritative parenting, children learn to develop internal locus of control. This is consistent with the findings of previous research which have shown that authoritative parenting style promote internal locus of control in their children (McClun & Merrell, 1998; Marsiglia et al., 2007). Similarly, it has been revealed that authoritative parenting was related to positive child outcomes such as academic orientation, self-

esteem, conformity, and greater academic self-efficacy (Supple et al., 2004; Li, Costanzo, and Putallaz, 2010).

In addition, hierarchical regression analysis revealed no significant moderating effect for number of children. This result is in contrast with the findings of Pinderhughes and colleagues (2001) who found that mothers indicated more consistent and less harsh in their discipline behavior when fewer children were present in a family. One possible explanation for this non-significant finding is that locus of control is formed early in childhood which is epigenetic in nature and extends through the lifespan. If this is so, then perhaps the greatest effect would be the primary caretaker, which is usually the mother (Ainworth, 1969). Thus, number of children may less influence on the father-child relationship and locus of control development.

The current study includes several limitations which need to be considered in future research. The focus here on a paternal parenting style begs for replication in future research with both mothers and fathers, in order to observe any unique associations that may be present across gender of the parents. Future research should also attempt to observe results directly from parents, in regard to their parenting style instead of relying strictly on students' self-report design.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings of the present study have important implications. The current study can assist in the design of appropriate intervention strategies to raise fathers' feelings of personal efficacy with the hope of enhancing the quality of their parenting behaviors which have influence on their children's locus of control. Therefore, family development agents need to persuade fathers to engage in positive and stimulating relations with their children. Such healthy interaction makes both fathers and children happy and satisfied. Fathers who have high level of satisfaction in their relationship with their children tend to perceive themselves as more efficacious compared with fathers with low level of satisfaction. Our analyses also suggest that adolescents who perceived their fathers as authoritative may experience better development of internal locus of control. They also support the notion of enduring influence of paternal parenting styles in the adolescent population. These results can lead to training modules and design interventions to foster and teach the necessary skills of balancing demandingness and responsiveness to fathers that can have far-reaching effects. Thus, findings of this study offer helpful information to educators, policy makers to design appropriate strategies which lead to encourage fathers to perform their child-rearing responsibilities efficiently and can create awareness among fathers about the substantial influence of caregiving on development.

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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Min/Max and Possible Range of Scores for the Predictors and Criterion Variables (N=382)

Scale	Mean (SD)	Min/Max	Possible Range
Paternal Parenting Style			
Permissive	24.48 (6.25)	10/40	10-50
Authoritaria	34.19 (6.22)	20/48	10-50
Authoritative	35.71 (4.96)	22/50	10-50
Locus of Control	14.89 (4.12)	6/26	0-40

Table 2: Correlation between Paternal Parenting Styles with Locus of Control (N=382)

Paternal Parenting Style	Locus of Control
Permissive	0.04
Authoritarian	0.05
Authoritative	-0.24**

** p<0.01; (two-tailed)

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for Predicting Adolescents' Locus of Control from Paternal Parenting Styles, and Number of Children (N=382)

Predictor	R ²	Δ R ²	β
Step 1	0.087***	0.087***	
Paternal Permissive			0.108*
Paternal Authoritarian			0.088
Paternal Authoritative			-0.294***
Step 2	0.095	0.009	
Number of Children			-0.094
Step 3	0.098	0.003	
Permissive x Number of Children			0.030
Authoritarian x Number of Children			-0.005
Authoritative x Number of Children			-0.051

* p<0.05, *** p<0.001