The effects of social support reciprocity between parents and adolescents on independency and depression of undergraduate students

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ABSTRACT. The effects of social support reciprocity between parents and adolescents on undergraduate students’ independency and depression were investigated. The results indicated that independency increased and the depression score was significantly lower in the group that received and provided more support, compared to the group that received and provided less support. The results of multiple regression analysis indicated social support from adolescents to fathers had negative correlations, whereas, in men, social support from adolescents to mothers had positive correlations with depression scores. Moreover, in women, social support from mothers to adolescents had positive correlations with dependency on parents. Overall, social support from adolescents to fathers had positive correlations with independency.

KEY WORDS: Reciprocity, Parent-adolescent relationships, Independency, Depression

Introduction

In recent years, adolescents that postpone becoming independent, such as NEETs and those with social withdrawal have been increasing. Adolescents that postpone becoming independent fail to achieve economic and psychological independence, and are totally dependent on support from their parents (e.g., Kato & Takagi, 1980; Wakashima, 2009).

Psychological weaning is a concept used for explaining the developmental aspects of parent-child relationships in adolescence. It implies that young people from 12 to 20 years of age become eager to leave their family control for independence (Holingworth, 1928).

Ochiai and Satou (1996) suggested that “equality in the parent-child relationship” implies that psychological weaning has been achieved. Moreover, Usami, Kozuka, Hiraizumi, Morikawa, Huruyama and Wakashima (2011) have indicated through cumulative family research using Family Relationship History Graphs (FRHG) that children acquire power in the family after adolescence. Furthermore, Kozuka (2013) has demonstrated that a type family structure with a power-balance and strong ties between family members was related to low stressors inside and outside of the family. The establishment of an equal parent-child relationship is considered important in independence and mental health of adolescents.

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Studies on social support have suggested that individuals should be perceived as both passive support receivers and active support providers (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994), which is an index of equal parent-child relationships. Antonucci and Jackson (1990) have indicated when the amount of social support received by a person is much higher than which is provided (unequal conditions), they develop a sense of indebtedness, whereas when the situation is reversed, they become disturbed and feel that their independence threatened. According to La Gaipa (1990), excessively small benefits (i.e. provided support is much more than received) causes a sense of burden and frustration in support providers, whereas excessively large benefits (i.e. received support is much more than provided) causes a sense of guilty and dependence on support providers. Buunk and Doosie (1993) indicated that individual health would improve if the amount of received and provided social support were equal. When applying above findings to parent-child relationships, the balanced condition could be considered a reciprocal relationship between parents and children, i.e. parents and children mutually provide and receive support.

This study examined correlations between reciprocity of social support which is considered to be equal in parent-child relationships, independence and depression, from the perspective of adolescents. Ochiai (1996) suggested that parent-child relationships in the latter half of adolescence, change from the parents supporting children to an equal relationship, as a result of children acquiring trust and approval from parents. Reciprocal relationship in which adolescents receive and provide social support from and for parents is regarded as an equal parent-adolescent relationship that would increase adolescents’ independence. On the other hand, excessive social support from parents might inhibit the development of independence and make adolescents more dependent. It has been demonstrated that independent adolescents provide more support to their parents than dependent adolescents (Lang & Schütze, 2002).

Moreover, even when there is reciprocity of social support, mental health might be inhibited when “the amount of both acquisition and
provision is small” (Katake & Shoji, 2000). According to the family systems theory, parents and children interact with each other. However, most studies on parent-child relationship have been conducted on the assumption that parents support their children. As a result, children’s effect on parents and support provided by children to parents have not been investigated to date (e.g., Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2002). It has been indicated that emotional support from family sometimes increases the risk for illnesses in children that have a high level of stress (e.g. Jones & Moore, 1990). It is possible that excessive support from family for adolescents under negative conditions, and considering adolescents as weak because they have a risk for illnesses, decline their independence and maintain their negative feelings. The negative feelings in adolescents might be improved by an increase in their dependence, by providing support to parents, instead of being provided with support by parents. Therefore, it is considered important to improve awareness of independence and decease depression to maintain high reciprocity.

Based on the above perspectives, two hypotheses were developed. H1: participants with high social support scores both from parents to adolescents and from adolescents to parents would show higher independence and lower depression. H2: participants with high social support scores from parents to adolescents and low social support scores from adolescents to parents would show higher dependence and depression. Furthermore, reciprocity of social support was classified into father - adolescent, and mother - adolescent relationships, and the effect of each type of social support on the independence of adolescents and on depression were explored.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Questionnaires were distributed during university classes. There were 222 respondents (boys=104, girls=118, mean age=20.9 years, SD=0.74) after excluding respondents giving obviously incomplete responses.

2. Measures

(1) Social support between parents and adolescents scales

Four social support scales were developed to assess “social support from fathers to adolescents,” “social support from mothers to adolescents,” “social support from adolescents to fathers,” and “social support from adolescents to mothers,” by referring to Social Support Scale for the Social Support Scale for College Students (Shima, 1991). Participants were required to respond to items using a five-point scale consisting of 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Often), and 5 (Always).

(2) Awareness of independence scale

Awareness of independence was assessed by using the scale developed by Kato and Takagi (1980). The scale consists of 37 items. Participants were required to respond to the items using the five-point scale; 1 (Very untrue), 2 (Untrue), 3 (Neutral), 4 (True) and 5 (Very true).
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Depression was assessed by using the Japanese version of Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS) developed by Zung (1965), and translated by Hukuda and Kobayashi (1973).

Procedures

The survey was conducted during university classes. Prior to the survey, students were notified of the purpose of the survey and that all data would be statistically processed. Moreover, they were assured that their privacy would be protected, and that they were expected respond voluntarily. They were also told that their responses would only be used for research purposes. Furthermore, participants were informed that they did not have to respond to any items that were difficult, and that they could stop responding at any time.

Results

1. Factor analysis of the scales

First, the mean value and standard deviation of each item were calculated and items indicating ceiling or floor effects were excluded. Next, factor analysis was conducted on social support scales (from fathers to adolescents, from mothers to adolescents, from adolescents to fathers, and from adolescents to mothers) using the maximum likelihood method with varimax rotation. The results indicated that all the social support scales had a single factor structure (Table 1, 2). The Cronbach’s coefficient alpha of each scale was sufficient high reliability: from father to adolescents: α = .94, from mothers to adolescents: α= .91, from adolescents to fathers: α=.94, and from adolescents to mothers: α=.93. Furthermore, factor analysis was conducted on the Awareness of Independence Scale using the principle factor method and promax rotation. Results indicated a three-factor structure. Contents of items in each factor were judged as similar to the results of previous studies (Kato & Takagi, 1980). Therefore, we adopted Factor I as

### Table 1. Factor analysis of social support from parents to adolescents scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My parents always admire and acknowledge my abilities.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents comfort me when I feel depressed.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents are happy with me when I have something good.</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents praise my good points.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents give advice to me when I have an relations problem.</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents give advice to me when I have an relations problem.</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents invite me to go out together.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents support me when I make a mistake.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents always understand my feelings.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents help me with my work.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents give me affirmative information and evaluations of me by others.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents listen to my talk about school and my part-time job.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents call me for dinner.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents show interest in my hobbies and interests.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents attend on me when I am ill.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents give me presents on my birthdays and anniversaries.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents point out my bad points and problems.</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
adolescents to parents. Participants with higher
regarded as the social support score from
to fathers and from adolescents to mothers was
The mean score calculated by adding social
support scores from adolescents
from parents to adolescents, and the mean score calculated by
adding social support scores from adolescents
to fathers and from adolescents to mothers was
regarded as the social support score from
adolescents to parents. Participants with higher
social support scores than the mean were
classified into the H group and those with lower
scores were classified into the L group.
Combining H and L groups for social support
from parents to adolescents and from adolescents to parents formed four groups, i.e.
HH, HL, LH, and LL. One-way ANOVA was
conducted with scores of the awareness of
independence scale and the depression scale as
dependent variables (Table 3). Independence
indicated significant differences between the
four groups (F (3, 219)=2.89, p<.05, η^2 = .04).
Multiple comparison was conducted using the
tukey method, which indicated that the score
of HH group was significantly higher than the
LL group. There were also significant
differences in dependency on parents among
the four groups (F (3, 219)=5.50, p<.001, η^2
= .21). Multiple comparison was conducted,
which indicated that the scores of HH and HL
groups were significantly higher than LH and LL groups. On the other hand, resistance/inner confusion did not show significant differences among the groups. Depression scores also indicated significant differences among the groups (F (3, 219)=6.94, p <.001, η²=.12).

The result of multiple comparison indicated that scores of LH and LL groups were significantly higher than HH group.

3. Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were conducted for expressions of the four types of social support between parents and children as explanatory variables and the scores of independency and depression as criterion variables (Table4). The results indicated that in men, social support from adolescents to mothers had positive effects on depression (β=.55, p <.05), whereas social support from adolescents to fathers had negative effects on depression (β= −.66, p <.05) (R²=.11, F (3, 101)=3.13, p <.05). In women, social support from mothers to adolescents had positive effects on dependency on parents (β=.51, p <.001) (R²=.35, F (3, 115)=15.52, p <.001), whereas social support from adolescents to fathers had negative effects on depression (β= −.48, p <.01) (R²=.13, F(3, 219)=8.39, p <.001).

Discussion

1. Hypotheses testing

The results indicated that independency increased in the group that received and provided more support, compared to the group that received and provided less support. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. This result also corroborated findings of previous studies (e.g., Antonucci & Jackson, 1990; Buunk & Doosie, 1993). It is suggested that parent-adolescent relationships that provide and receive mutual support are important for
increasing adolescents' independency.

Regarding dependency on parents, the group with high social support scores from parents to adolescents showed significantly higher scores than the group with low scores. However, the scores were high in both HH and HL groups. On the other hand, dependency on parents was significantly higher in HL group, compared to LH group, which partially supported Hypothesis 2. It is suggested that dependency is developed when there are excessively large benefits (La Gaipa, 1990): i.e. the amount of received social support is larger than that one provides. It could be possible that excessive social support from parents inhibits the development of independence and makes adolescents dependent. On the other hand, dependence on parents was also high in the HH group, suggesting that dependence on parents does not always inhibit independency (Kato & Takagi, 1980). Dependency between parents and adolescents under reciprocal conditions might increase adolescents' feelings of being supported by parents (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993). It might be possible that dependency on parents in HH and HL groups is qualitatively different, because of the difference in the psychological distance between parents and adolescents.

Moreover, the depression score in the HH group was significantly lower than that in other groups, which partly supported Hypothesis 1. Depression was high under when benefits were excessively small: i.e. the support one provides is larger than that one receives (e.g., Katauke & Shoji, 2000). It is suggested that when adolescents are providing too much support to their parents and receiving little support, the sense of burden and frustration towards parents might develop and increase depression.

2. The relations between reciprocity of social support, independency, and depression

We compared reciprocity of social support...
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support between father-adolescent and mother-adolescent relationships, and conducted multiple regression analyses to explore the effect of the two types of social support on adolescents’ independency and depression. The results indicated a positive correlation between social support from adolescents to fathers on independency. Furthermore, a negative correlation was shown between social support from adolescents to fathers and depression. Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke (1997) suggested that usually fathers keep more distance from adolescent children compared than mothers, and this distance facilitates children’s independence, whereas closeness with mothers might inhibit children’s independence.

Father-adolescent relationships are considered important for development of independency in adolescents. Moreover, Usami et al. (2011) indicated that the power balance between children and fathers is equalized after adolescence, whereas that with mothers is not. Adolescents are able to experience an “equal parent-child relationships” by supporting their fathers, which would decrease depression.

On the other hand, social support from mothers to adolescents showed a positive correlation with dependency. Mothers are usually involved with adolescent children more than fathers (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). Approximately three-fourths of Japanese fathers admitted that they were not actively involved with their children (Shwalb, Kawai, Shoji, & Tunetsugu, 1997). The following compensatory hypothesis was developed: when the marital relationship breaks down, or is in conflict and couples cannot satisfy their needs in the marital relationship, parents tend to compensate for their frustrations through their relationships with their children (e.g., Engfer, 1988). For example, Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, and Volling (1991) indicated the state of a marital relationship was related to the frequency of mothers’ involvement with their children. Bell, Bell, and Nakata (2001) suggested disagreement between parents would create a triangular relationship that included the children, and such processes are observed both in Japan and the U.S. This could be because marital discord produces excessive meddling by mothers with their adolescent children, which inhibits adolescents’ independence.

On the other hand, in women, social support from mothers to adolescents had positive correlations with dependency on parents. Girls acquire independency based on a stable and trusting relationships with their mothers (Mizumoto & Yamane, 2010). It is not always the case that dependence on mothers inhibits independency and it is possible that appropriate dependency facilitates independency in adolescent
women.

Social support from male adolescents to mothers showed a positive correlation with depression. Previous studies have indicated that mothers’ power after adolescence remains stronger than that of children (Usami et al., 2011). Moreover, men have higher independency than women (Kato & Takagi, 1980). Because their relationships are not equal, it could be the case that male adolescents support for mothers is not based on intrinsic, but extrinsic motivation, such as mothers’ requests. Extrinsically motivated support from adolescents to parents might cause a sense of burden and frustration, leading to an increase in depression. Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, and Engels (2007) reported that in adolescence, conflicts with mothers were more common than those with fathers. Social support from male adolescents to mothers might be based on extrinsic motivation, in conflicts with mothers, and might increase depression.

3. Directions for future perspectives

This study assessed the reciprocal of social support between parents and adolescents from the perspective of adolescents. However, parents’ perspectives were not examined in this study. It is suggested reciprocity should be examined in the future, by comparing adolescents’ and parents’ perspectives on social support. Furthermore, the balance of power between parents and adolescents should also be investigated.

4. Conclusion

Although there are certain limitations to this study that were described above, the findings of the study are significant for increasing adolescents’ awareness of independence and decreasing depression, through support from parents to adolescents and support from adolescents to parents. This study also fulfilled one of the shortcomings of previous studies, in which the effects of children on parents had not been sufficiently investigated (Cummings et al, 2002).

Reference


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