



Mental Health of Children In Preteen Years: Effects of Parental Support and Conflict

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Abstract: Parents and caregivers shape a child's emotional security, values, behaviour and development. They need to provide guidance, support, protection, and a nurturing environment. This study examines the mental health of children in the preteen years (9-12), with a focus on how parental support or conflict influences their emotional well-being. The primary objective of the study was to understand the role of parental behaviour in shaping mental health of preteens, to identify the effects of supportive versus stressful home environments, and to suggest strategies that can help improve emotional stability among children. Because of the changing economic demands and necessity for both the parents to work outside of home, preteen children are expected to show more maturity, while given very little independence. A conceptual paper was chosen for this study because the aim was to analyze and integrate existing theories, research findings, academic discussions, and personal experiences, related to preteen mental health and parental influence. The discussion highlights that supportive parenting, open communication, and stable family environments contribute positively to children's emotional security, confidence, and coping ability. On the other hand, frequent parental conflicts and stressful home situations may lead to anxiety, insecurity, and behavioural problems. The study concludes that parental involvement, a nurturing family environment, awareness among parents, and caregivers is very important in supporting children during this sensitive developmental stage.

Key words: preteen mental health, parental support, family environment, emotional well-being, early intervention

I. INTRODUCTION

The preteen stage (9-12years) is an important phase in a child's development that occurs between childhood and adolescence. It is often referred to as preadolescence. During this stage, children begin experiencing significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes as they gradually prepared for the teenage years. Although they are still children, preteens start developing greater independence, stronger opinions, and increased awareness of themselves and the world around them.

The preteen stage is also a time when children develop values, habits, and social skills that can shape their future behaviour. They learn to cooperate with others, follow rules, manage responsibilities, and develop a sense of fairness and empathy. School experiences, family environment, and peer relationships all influence how children grow during this stage. This is a transitional period between childhood and adolescence characterized by important physical, cognitive, and social changes.

Understanding the characteristics of the preteen stage helps the parents, teachers, and caregivers in providing the support and guidance the children need to navigate this phase successfully. This helps them to be prepared for the challenges of adolescence and later adulthood.

The earlier studies demonstrated that supportive learning environments can significantly influence behavioural outcomes, including academic achievement, social skills, and self-control. Family support, open communication, and a nurturing environment play an important role in maintaining good mental health among preteens. Encouraging children to express their feelings, providing emotional support, and teaching healthy coping strategies can help them manage stress and build resilience.

Mental health is an important aspect during preteen stage as children experience many physical, emotional, and social changes. Preteens may experience mood changes, increased sensitivity, and a growing desire for independence. Family environment plays a very important role in shaping a child's emotional stability. Parenting style, discipline methods and emotional support can have an impact of how children cope with stress.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For understanding the mental health of preteens and the influence of parental support or conflict, application of several psychological and developmental theories is required. According to Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1959), children between the ages 6 and 12 develop a sense of competence through achievements, social interactions, and encouragement from parents and teachers. John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969), emphasizes on the emotional bond between children and their caregivers. According to this theory, children who experience positive attachment with parents tend to develop stronger emotional regulation, confidence, and resilience. Inconsistent or conflict-filled parenting environments may lead to anxiety, fear, and difficulty in social relationships. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), proposed that children learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional responses by observing and imitating the action of others, particularly parents. So preteens observe the ways of communication and conflict resolution within their family and are more likely to imitate similar behaviours. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), has an interesting theory of called as microsystem, which includes family, school and peer relationships. A supportive system can promote psychological well-being while conflict may negatively affect mental health of the preteens. Family Systems Theory also view the family as an interconnected system, where the behaviour of each member has influence on entire family unit. All these models emphasize the critical role of family relationships in shaping children's emotional development, self-esteem, and ability to cope with challenges during the preteen years.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a conceptual research methodology. It is based on theoretical understanding, previous academic discussions and conceptual interpretation rather than primary data collection. The aim is to integrate ideas from developmental psychology and family studies to build a framework, explaining the relationship between parental support and preteen well-being. By addressing the gaps, the research contributes to a clearer understanding of how parental behaviours- both supportive and conflictual, interact to shape the mental health and emotional development of preteens.

3.1 Research Objective

To analyze the role of parental support, to examine the impact of parental conflict and to suggest strategies for improving preteen children's mental health.

3.2 Research Design

The research design for this study is conceptual and analytical. It relies on reviewing existing literature, theories, and academic discussions from developmental psychology and family studies. The study synthesizes previous research to develop a theoretical framework explaining how parental support and parental conflict influence the mental health and emotional well-being of preteens.

3.3 Sample Design

Since this study is a conceptual and theoretical paper rather than an empirical investigation, it does not involve primary data collection or sampling of participants. Instead, the "sampling" in this context refers to the selection of relevant literature, theories, and previous academic discussions that inform the conceptual framework. The study focuses on integrating insights from developmental psychology, family studies, and child mental health research to understand how parental support and conflict influence the well-being of preteens.

The sampling design is purposive and criterion-based. Sources are selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to understanding the variables of interest. This approach ensures rigor and relevance despite the absence of primary empirical data, making the conceptual analysis credible and meaningful.

3.4 Sample

3.4.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and credible research papers related to child or preteen mental health.
- Studies focusing on children aged 9-12 years or closely related developmental stages.
- Research discussing parental support, parental conflict, family environment, and child psychological well-being.
- Publications written in English and available through reliable academic databases.

3.4.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Studies not related to children or preteen developmental stages.
- Articles without clear academic or research credibility (blogs, opinion pieces, non-scholarly sources).
- Studies focusing only on adult mental health without relevance to children

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Analysis

The analysis of the results, based on reviewed literature and conceptual interpretation, indicates that parental behaviour plays a significant role in shaping the mental health of preteens.

By identifying recurring themes, the paper constructs conceptual models explaining how parental involvement can influence emotional outcomes among preteens and suggest strategies for parents to maintain a stable family environment during this critical developmental stage.

4.1.1 Conceptual Flow Chart: Preteen Mental Health in a Supportive Environment

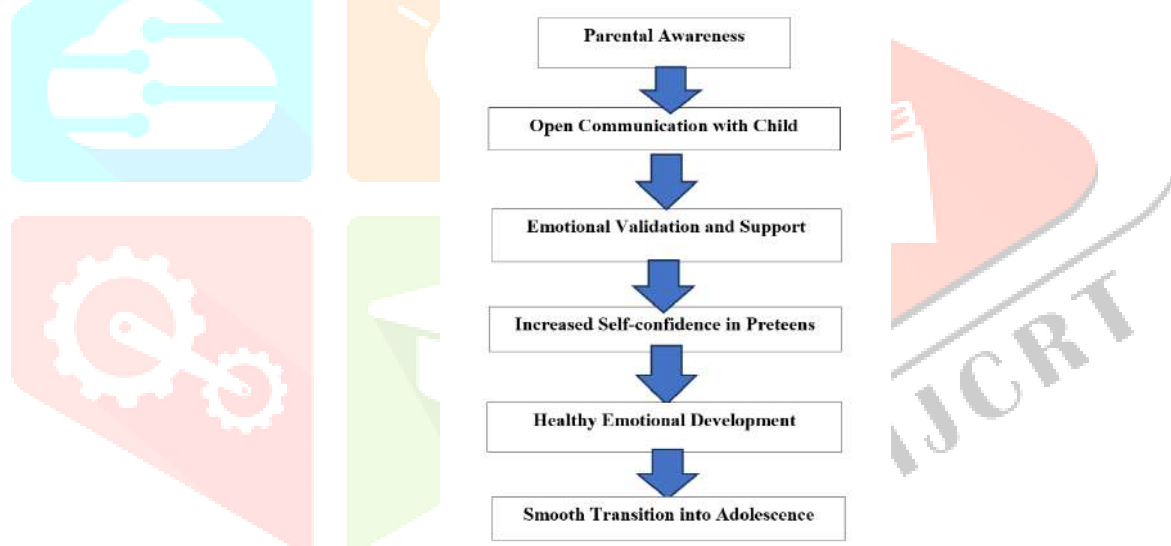


figure 1: conceptual model of preteen emotional development

4.1.2 Conceptual Flow Chart: Preteen Mental Health in a Conflict Environment

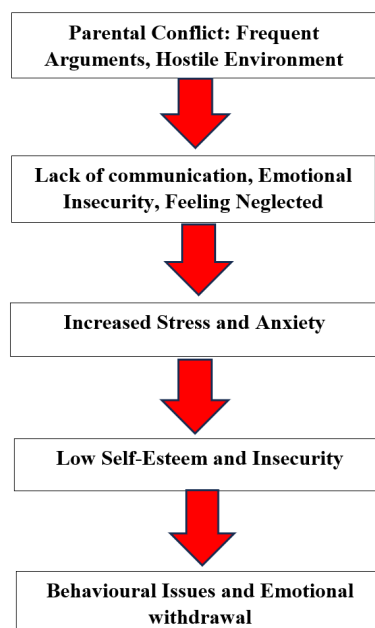


figure 2: conceptual model of preteen emotional distress

4.1.3 Conceptual Flow Chart: Suggestive Strategies for Parents to Maintain a Stable Family Environment

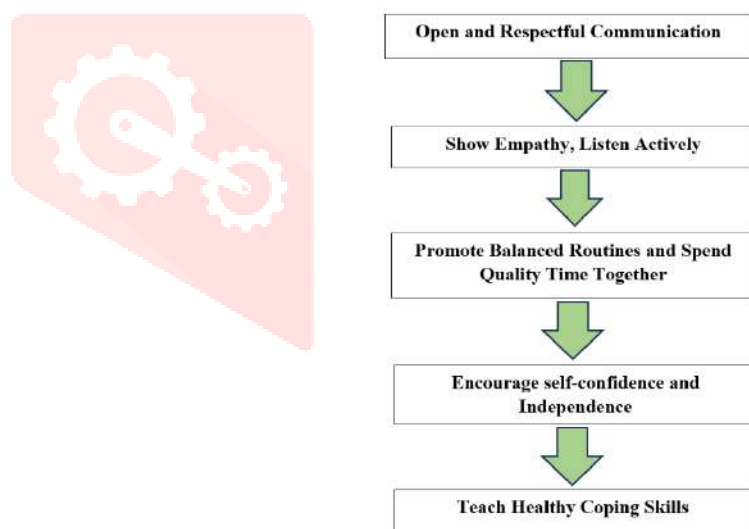


figure 3: conceptual model of suggestive strategies for parents to maintain a stable family environment

4.2 Discussion

The conceptual framework and visual diagrams presented in this paper highlight the critical role of multiple support systems in preteen development.

- The flow chart (figure 1), illustrates a sequential pathway starting from parental awareness, moving through open communication and emotional validation, and culminating in enhanced self-esteem, emotional resilience, and a smooth transition into adolescence.
- The flow chart (figure 2), shows that frequent parental conflict creates a hostile and unstable home environment for preteens. Lack of communication and emotional support makes children feel insecure and neglected. This emotional instability increases stress and anxiety, which gradually affects self-

esteem. As a result, preteens may develop behavioural issues, emotional withdrawal, or difficulty managing their feelings and relationships.

- The flow chart (figure 3), highlights strategies that parents can adopt, to maintain a stable and supportive family environment. Open and respectful communication, empathy, and active listening help children feel valued and understood. Balanced routines and quality family time strengthen relationships. Encouraging independence and teaching healthy coping skills, support emotional growth, helping preteens develop confidence and psychological well-being.

V. Conclusion

This study explored the mental health of children in the preteen years (9-12), and examined how parental support or conflict affects their emotional and psychological well-being. The main objective of this conceptual study was to understand the role of parental behaviour in shaping preteen mental health, identify the negative effects of parental conflict, and suggest strategies for parents to create supportive home environments. Since the study was conceptual, it relied on reviewing the existing literature, theories, and academic discussions from developmental psychology, child psychology, and family studies.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that parental support and a stable home environment are essential for the emotional and psychological development of preteens. Families that foster open communication, empathy, and quality interaction provide children with tools to cope effectively with stress, build resilience, and develop a positive self-image. Conversely, parental conflict, neglect, and a hostile family atmosphere increase risks of anxiety, emotional insecurity, and behavioural challenges. Ultimately, the study highlights the importance of creating awareness among parents, educators, and caregivers regarding the impact of family interactions on preteen mental health. By implementing supportive practices and reducing conflict at home, families can ensure that children can grow up emotionally balanced, confident, and psychologically resilient, paving the way for healthy adolescence and adulthood.

VI. Limitations and Further Scope of the Study

This conceptual study on preteen mental health and the influence of parental support or conflict provides a theoretical understanding but has certain limitations. As conceptual paper, it does not involve primary data collection. Therefore, the findings are interpretative rather than empirically validated, limiting the ability to quantify the relationships between parental behaviour and preteen mental health outcomes.

Another limitation is the scope of existing research. Much of the literature focuses on broader adolescence or early childhood, with fewer studies specifically addressing preteens aged 9-12. Additionally, most research is based on Western populations, which restricts the understanding of cultural and socio-economic variations in family dynamics and child mental health. The study also does not account for longitudinal effects of multiple factors, such as peer relationships, school environment, or biological changes which influence preteen emotional development.

In spite of these limitations, the study provides a foundation for future research. Researcher can test the conceptual framework by collecting data from diverse preteen populations. Future studies can also explore strategies for improving mental health, such as parenting programs, family counseling, or school-based support. Investigating cultural, social, and economic differences, as well as long-term effects, can help develop more practical and generalizable solutions to support preteens' emotional and psychological well-being.

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