

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST AND COMMUNICATION IN ADOLESCENTS TOWARDS PARENTS IN A POST-DIVORCE FAMILY ARRANGEMENT

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The paper was created within the project "Risk Behaviour in Adolescence, the Incidence and Influencing Factors" of the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and Slovak Academy of Sciences no. VEGA 1/0042/17.

Abstract: The study examines the relationship of trust and communication in adolescents and their parents in divorced families. Attention is focused on the comparison of these factors in families with sole and shared custody. The research sample consisted of (N = 76, sole custody N = 48, joint custody N = 28, AM = 11.5). In order to find out the openness in communication (Hargasová, Kollárik, 1986), emotional attachment to parents (Armsden, Greenberg, 1987). Administration and anamnestic data were obtained in counseling-psychological centers with the full consent of parents. In shared care there is a positive, truthful and open relationship towards both parents.

Key words: early adolescence, trust, communication, openness, guardianship

1 Introduction

The issue of the current family arrangement includes many interpretative possibilities in relation to current behavior of the population - the partnership and family cohabitation, and the formation of family relationships (Mičková, 2015a, 2015b; Ondrejko, Majerčíková, 2006). All aspects of present family life have undergone, for a long time, major changes which resulted in historical, economic and political change. One of the types of present families is an incomplete family lacking one parent, and children living with another parent. The reason for parental absence varies. Our study concentrates on an incomplete family due to divorce. In such families there is disruption and disharmony which can negatively interfere with the formation of a child's personality. There are studies that confirm problems in children after divorce, but there are also opposite studies that highlight the ability to manage problems. Research studies point to the relationship between the quality of the family environment and physical and mental health (Mirowsky, 1996; Shaw, Krause, 2004; Vaananen, et. al. 2005). However, all studies agree that the parent-child subsystem is based on mother-child and father-child bonding. This subsystem determines other subsystems (Matoušek, 2003). The atmosphere in divorced family is characterized by handling specific situations based on their degree of disruption. The most common disruption is an absence of mutual respect between parents and disturbed communications, which results in negative external behaviour (Pavlát, Šusta, 2008; Bernardelli, 2011; Mičková, 2015b,c). Problems are also found in different family formats, because they form part of everyday life, but the problems in a divorced family are specific. For example; in nurturing care, development of emotional ties with parents, and communication problems. One of the major factors of emotional existence is the parent-child interaction and the level of emotional attachment that keeps developing, and later creates trust between parent and child. Creating intimate relationships is an important aspect of openness in family communication. The breakdown of marriage brings different aspects into the family system (Krýslová, 2000; Armsden, Greenberg, 1987; Simon, 2002; Pavlát, 2012).

A significant difference in post-divorce family is usually the absence of one parent. Limited contact with one parent brings different approaches in communication development (Špaňhelová, 2009). According to Mičková (2016), family issues represent an enormous number of aspects that cannot be analyzed at the same time. Focusing on specific issues in the family makes it possible to search, discuss and find interrelationships in specific areas of a families system. Using this approach, as stated by König (and in that case), it is possible to analyze what a current family actually is. Part of every families system is a dimension that shapes the quality of life as well as the dimension of emotional thriving. The focus of the study is

the perception of trust in adolescents, and their communication with parents in a post-divorce family arrangement.

2 Characteristics of the Problems

The divorced family arrangement brings other types of conflict. Family members are emotionally attached to each other, and these emotions may be the cause of destructive relationships between parents, but also between parents and adolescents. Parents focus on their own rules, they ignore the demands of the other parent, which may be another reason for disruption in relationships and communication (Sturge-Apple, et. al. 2010).

Such a family environment may cause a problem in the spontaneous expression of emotions (Wilmot, Hocker, 2004) and open communication (Bernardelli 2011, Micková, 2016). One of the reasons for communication interference is existing conflicts between parents. Aspects of family crisis constitute a set of stimulants involved in creating integrity. These dynamic stimulants are linked to the ability to communicate as well as an ability to trust (Erikson, 2002; Bowlby 2012 ai.). The dynamics of a family environment are also associated with the natural overcoming of family crisis, however a post-divorce family environment shows evidence that crisis situations in a family have not been resolved. The divorce settlement brings changes that affect emotional, economical and legal areas of the family (Matoušek, 1997). Solving post-divorce situations brings a personal burden to all family members. From a Psychological point of view, it can be seen as an ability to cope with change in a new family situation. One of the major changes involves the post-divorce parenting process. In relation to adolescence, it is important to master the parental role as well as the role of being a friend. This role includes the ability to accept the adolescent's needs and thus to create space for the other parent to continuously fulfill parental tasks which are in an adolescent's interest. It is important to accept and respect the needs of the adolescent as well as accept the second parent; this creates space for the formation of parental agreements, based on the ability of both parents to cooperate in the joint plan for rearing their children. More often, however, parents battle over childcare, and are trying to exclude the other parent from the child's upbringing. Such effort in parental behavior results in escalating disputes between them (Micková, 2014). The adjustment of parental rights and obligations is implemented through a court's decision. However, with the change in current male and female family roles, the view of post-divorce care also changes. The traditional sole custody model of care is no longer the only option in post-divorce existence. Sole care is based on beliefs that a child is based in one place which should ensure stability and certainty. Legal and physical education is entrusted to one parent while the other parent is only provided with visiting arrangements. The other parent has the right to visit a child, as well as an obligation to participate in his or her quality of life by fulfilling his or her maintenance costs. For a fulfilling relationship with both parents, it is desirable to create a parental agreement that eliminates conflicts between parents and creates space for the spontaneous interaction with both parents. Another form of childcare is shared custody in separate households.

The benefit of shared custody is that it creates more options than sole custody (Warshak, 1996). Nowadays, shared custody is preferred because the role of both mother and father can be greatly enhanced. The important condition of this form of childcare is the willingness and ability of both parents to communicate about everything related to a child's upbringing. Support for this model is found in the changing roles of both men and women, and not only on the social level. As stated by Potančok (2010), the status of men and women has changed significantly toward the end of the 20th century. This change is noticeable in the ever-changing role of a mother and father in a family environment. The father's family role has changed more than a mother's over the past decade. Although women are now

more career oriented than ever before, their role in childcare has not changed much. Fathers, however, are more involved in their children's upbringing than they were a few decades ago. A fathers' role as a child's mentor is growing, thus he contributes significantly to a child's psychological development (Potančok, 2010). Therefore, both parents help to develop an interactive relationship, trust and also communication. The importance of both parents, for example, can be found in (Novák, 2012). Regardless of allocated custody, a positive emotional attachment toward both parents is vitally important (Wilkinson, Walford, 2001; Walton, 2008; Vojtová, 2012). The absence of one parent brings different routes to build trust and communication (Špaňhelová, 2009). However, it suggests that conflicts usually continue in many divorced families, posing an increased risk for problems in developing interactive relationships, managing personality problems and emotional crisis resulting in problematic children. This is considered one of the most critical periods is adolescence (Carr - Greg, 2010, 2012). According to Macek (2003), this period is considered a period of transcendence from childhood to adulthood. It is characterized by significant changes in the biological and social spheres of life. In particular, the timing of this period varies from one author to another (see Langmeier, Krejčířová, 2006; Vágnerová, 2008). The study builds on the definition of adolescence by Macek (2003), which defines early adolescence (10-13 years), middle (14-16 years) and late adolescence (17-20 years). Early adolescence, which this study concentrates on, is characterized by the dominance of pubertal changes, searching for new relationships within their environment, and the formation of their own opinions. Significant change in social relationships is the decline of rivalry among boys and girls and an increased interest in the opposite sex. Behavior in early adolescence is characterized by negativism and rebelliousness. In terms of emotions in this period, according to Mičková (2015a,b) a typical increase in frustration is normal. Carr-Greg (2012) calls this concept as 'intensifying feelings'. According to Macek (2003), it is necessary to see this new identity of the adolescent alongside the family which he or she lives in. While the adolescent still lives with his parents, his identity is tied with the family and the problems often focus on direct and indirect conflicts with parents. Emotional experiences are becoming more intense, which is one of the determinants in forming an adolescent's identity. Identity searching is a dynamic process (Mazur, 1993; Fadjukoff, et. al. (2016). Relationships with parents can be defined as one of the most important factors in shaping the identity of an adolescent (Selecká, Václavíková, 2017). Regular conflicts between parents can interfere with adolescent emotions. This conflicting behavior may be one of the reasons for losing a normal emotional spectrum toward parents. According to Majerčík (2011), broken relationships between parents may be involved in forming negative behavioral patterns. This can result in the weakening of authenticity, and congruence in relations with parents.

The authors of many research articles agree that in order for a person to function fully, they need to satisfy not only materialistic, but also specific competences (Démuthová, Balcerčíková, 2012), but also emotional needs (Prekopová, 2001; Shaw, Krause, 2004; Niedenthal, Krauth - Gruger, Ric, 2006). The authors further affirm that mutual touching, hugging, and physical contact is a confidence-building factor.

Parental support develops trust which then enhances the communication. The trust can be seen from several points of view. As an attribute (Křivohlavý, 1993), personality (Ryff, Keyes, 1995) psychic state and emotional bond (Erikson, 2002). The study examines confidence in the context of emotional attachment to parents. Relationship of trust and family ties can be found on multiple levels. At the hormonal level, oxytocin is considered to be a predictor of a secure emotional bond, has a connection to trust, and it is considered to be a significant factor in confidence – building (Raby, et. al. 2013). At the emotional level, the important factor is how adolescents perceive a relationship between their parents, openness in communication or space for expressing feelings and opinions, and their acceptance of it. According to Matoušek (2003), trust is an

important factor of expressivity (feelings expression). However, expression of feelings to parents is more complicated in post-divorce arrangements. One of the important criteria of post-divorce child-parent communication is an adolescent's perception of the relationship between parents. Imbalance and vulnerability are typical for early adolescents and may be reflected in open communication with parents. Parental relationships are also affected by the effort to get a child into childcare, and are usually reflected in damaging communication between them. Another form of parental behavior is concealment of emotions in front of their children (Satirová, 2006; Matějček, Dytrych, 2002, Severson, et.al. 1993). Such behavior potentially carries a negative change in an adolescent's behavior toward parents. One of the changes may be inconsistency due to disruption of these relationships. Incongruence is considered by Satir (2006) to be a frequent consequence of distressing relationships in divorced families. It can be said that the image of non-congenital behavior is an obstacle in the adolescent and parental communication, which can result in limited communication between adolescents and their parents, and an unwillingness to express their emotions and feelings. According to Hoppeau, Krabel (2001) in disturbed relationships, the conversation is problematic and at the same time it causes a communicational barrier. The authors believe that the most common barriers are the inability to concentrate, agility, malignancy, irritability, and lack of interest. Bakalář (2006) states that parental conflicts and attempts to bring the child on their side can lead to an uncompromising dismissal of the other parent. These conflicts can contribute to a parents' ability to reach an agreement. Trélaün (2005) in this context, points out the importance of the defeat situation, the essence of which is the acceptance of the current situation. Another useful form in trying to assert the role of a parent is the ability to form a settlement. This way of communication helps parents to partially or fully fulfill their own goals, but most importantly the needs of their child. The quality of relationships with the parent who has custody of a child is reflected in their psychological wellbeing, or psychological discomfort. Research on post-divorce childcare brings different findings. Uhláriková (2010) found that the highest life satisfaction is in adolescents living only with their mothers. Uhláriková (2010) found more dissatisfaction in adolescents who only live with one parent, found in his research, that greater support from family members leads to satisfaction. Sejšová (2008) found no difference in satisfaction among teenagers from full and incomplete families. Another research (King, 2002) confirms that the quality of the parent-child relationship is reflected in trust and positively influences interpersonal trust. Parents are often contradicting in their speeches; the adolescent seeks to avoid suffering or guilt and by doing so he or she usually hides their wishes and needs. Adolescents can also perceive their parents' lack of trust between each other, exaggerated emotional responses, and experience anger while experiencing positive emotions with a second parent, and so on. For these reasons, adolescents can interpret those parental emotional signals as problematic. Post-divorce family arrangements and perceptions of parental relationships can create a barrier in spontaneous expressions, expressing feelings, and restricted communication with parents (Kmeťová, 2006). Finding out that parents are not 'perfect' can lead adolescents to be more critical and reject and question parental views, which may then be reflected in communication with parents (Keating, 1990; Repková, 1996).

3 Goal

The aim was to find out the relationship between the level of trust and openness in communication between two parents (especially the mother and father). The aim was to compare the relationship of trust and communication in a post-divorce environment. Another goal was to find out the link between trust and open communication during the early adolescence period, in relation to friends.

4 The research sample

The survey sample consisted of 76 adolescents. (Sole Care N =

48, Shared Care N = 28, AM = 11, 5 Years). Sole care involved only the mother, and shared care involved joint care of both parents (agreed joint care). The duration of the sampling period of post-divorce living was 2 years.

5 Methods

Trust was tested by a questionnaire for measuring the style of emotional attachment to parents and peers; IPPA - Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden, Greenberg, 1987a,b). IPPA is an extended version of an older tool to measure emotional attachment, which is called the Inventory of Adolescent Attachment (Greenberg, Siegal, Leitch, 1983). The revised version of IPPA (Armsden, Greenberg 1987) also detects the perception of trust. Another questionnaire used in the research was a standardized questionnaire of the Family Environment Scale (Hargášová, Kollárik, 1992), a sub-scale of the relationship's dimension for finding the degree of openness. Both questionnaires are used in areas of family counseling and therapy.

6 Results and their interpretation

Table 1 Spearman's Correlation of adolescent's trust towards parents in relation to communication to parents after divorce (father's absence in the family environment after divorce)

Father's absence in the family environment after divorce (N=48)			
Trust toward mother		KM	KO
	r	,730**	-,427*
	Sign.	0,000	0,019
Trust toward father		KM	KO
	r	-,565**	,980**
	Sign.	0,001	0,000

Legend: KM (communication with mother), KO (communication with father)

* Significant for 0.01 level of statistical significance

** significant for 0,05 level of statistical significance

The variables included in the test do not have a normal distribution across the set, so the relationships between the variables are verified by Spearman's Correlation. Relationships of trust were inspected between both parents (especially mother and father); open communication with parents (especially mother and father) was detected in adolescents who live with only their mother after the divorce. The results are presented in Table 1. As we can see, statistically significant relationships are between mother-trust and mother communication, and the negative relationship is between mother-trust and father communication. At the same time, the results show that high trust for fathers is associated with low openness towards a mother which positively relates to openness to father. The results interpret that high trust towards one parent is associated with low openness, low emotional expression of feelings, and low level of communication with the other parent.

Table 2 Spearman's Correlation of adolescent's trust towards parents in connection with communication with parents after divorce (presence of both parents in family environment after divorce)

Presence of both parents in family environment after divorce (N=28)			
Trust towards mother		KM	KO
	r	,954**	-,246
	Sign.	0,000	0,226
Trust towards father		KM	KO
	r	0,075	,935**
	Sign.	0,717	0,000

Legend: KM (communication with mother), KO (communication with father)

** significant for 0,05 level of statistical significance

In the table 2, we can see the relationship between parental trust and family communication where both parents look after adolescents after divorce. Higher levels of trust with a mother are associated with a low degree of openness to a father. A higher level of trust with father is associated with a higher level of openness to the father. We interpret that father's presence in the family and in close relationship is associated with an open expression of feelings.

Table 3 Spearman's Correlation of adolescent's trust towards parents in connection with communication with peers (father's absence in a family environment after divorce)

Father's absence in a family environment after divorce (N=48)		
Trust toward mother		KF
	r	0,051
	Sign.	0,728
Trust towards father		KK
	r	0,143
	Sign.	0,452

Legend: KF (communication with friends)

Table 4 Spearman's Correlation of adolescent's trust towards parents in connection with communication with peers after divorce (presence of both parents in family environment after divorce)

Presence of both parents in family environment after divorce (N = 28)		
Trust toward mother		KK
	r	0,068
	Sign.	0,742
Trust towards father		KK
	r	0,303
	Sign.	0,117

Legend: KF (communication with friends)

In tables 3 and 4 we can see that the adolescent's trust towards parents, regardless of post divorce care is not related to how the adolescents entrust and communicate with their friends. Consequently, the interest was focused on the relationship between trust and friends in relation with communication with mother, father, and friends. In table 5, we can see that the higher the trust toward the friends, the higher the level of emotional expression toward mother. From table 6 it's clear that trust in friends in joint custody, is not related to level of communication with father or mother. A significant relationship was found between trusting friends and their openness in communicating with friends.

Table 5 Spearman's Correlation of adolescent's trust towards friends, in connection with communication with mother, father and friends (father's absence in a family environment after divorce)

Father's absence in a family environment after divorce (N=48)				
Trust toward friends		KM	KO	KF
	r	,386**	0,007	,675**
	Sign.	0,007	0,970	0,000

Legend: KM (communication with mother), KO (communication with father), KF (communication with friends), ** significant on 0.05 level of statistical significance

Table 6 Spearman's Correlation of adolescent's trust towards friends, in connection with communication with mother, father and friends (presence of both parents in family environment after divorce)

Presence of both parents in family environment after divorce (N=28)				
Trust toward friends		KM	KO	KKF
	r	0,224	0,078	,619**
	Sign.	0,271	0,692	0,000

Legend: KM (communication with mother), KO (communication with father), KKF (communication with friends), ** significant on 0.05 level of statistical significance

7 Discussion

Family divided by divorce can cause adolescents to behave differently with both parents. In sole custody (mother) and co-care, it is difficult for adolescents to develop a congruent relationship with both parents at the same time. Findings indicate that trust in one parent reduces openness in communicating with the other parent, while under the exclusive care of mother. The research sample was composed of adolescents who had a positive emotional bond with both parents, and having a moderate and higher degree of trust in both parents. Nevertheless, the degree of open communication is considered individually to each parent. Fixation to one parent is associated with incongruence with the other parent. We think that adolescents, based on their personal experiences with parents, have a wide range of options to avoid conflicts with parents at the communication level. We believe that parental behavior may be one of the reasons for expressing positive emotions, which

relates to a parent with whom they are not in personal contact. This behavior is most likely to be established while in exclusive care of the mother. It can be assumed that in this kind of care parents are unable to reach a common parental agreement, which teenagers perceive as one of the sources of conflict between the parents. It can be assumed that the adolescent is under psychological pressure, which can be revealed by limited and selective communication with parents on both subsystems mother-adolescent, father-adolescent. Similar results in terms of communication were found by Horská and Lacinová (2015). They found that communication in divorced family is weaker than in complete families; however harmony and respect for parents does not change. Living with the mother does restricts the physical presence of the father, and therefore it can be assumed that the limited communication applies especially towards the father. Mothers' expectations, their verbal and non-verbal expressions to eliminate contact with fathers may lead adolescents to conceal emotions from the other parent. Understanding this new situation teaches adolescents to accept mother's requirements, and to adapt to new situations. It may be assumed that this is one of the reasons why the emotional relationship between the adolescent and the father can be weakened. Another can be the negative perception of their parents' relationship. Warshak (1996) states that fixation to the parent is equally linked to the effort to satisfy this parent's requirements. Another reason for limited communication with fathers may be caused in discussions with adolescents where the mother reduces the father's value as a partner. Mother's negative memories on previous cohabitation with father and their presentation in discussions may be the result of forming a mother-adolescent coalition. This disturbance in communication with father as a consequence of a new formation of a coalition with mother is confirmed by many authors (eg. Greenberg, et. al., 1983; Horth, et. al. 2000; Démuthová, Balcerčíková, 2012; Popelková, Malčáková, 2013, and others). The absence of a father in a new setting is a restriction of physical proximity, which is very important for the further development of trusted communication. Limiting communication face to face and through eye contact creates a barrier to share feelings, and spontaneous expressions of emotions. The absence of a father in everyday life contributes to elimination of joint activities to a great extent. It may be thought that the absence of a father in the family, and the need to differentiate between mother and father, may lead to a great deal of restraint in expressing their views, attitudes, and emotions. Ross, Wynne (2010) states that unfriendliness between parents can be an obstacle for the formation of harmony. The question therefore arises as to whether the isolation of a non-resident parent is one of the reasons for not having an interest in participating further in a child's upbringing. Conclusions from previous research findings indicate that the optimal form of contact after divorce is the free continuation of the family relationship. According to Warshak (1996), the understanding of both parents that their parenting responsibilities continue can help maintain a relationship with both parents after a divorce. The agreement on participation in such responsibilities, timing and form of guardianship is only applicable if accepted by both parents. Support for shared childcare is found in Matějček (2000). According to the author, two separate living environments are acceptable, but only if they do not create significant conflicts. These findings support our results with regard to joint and alternate care. We found that in such environments, the adolescent communicates openly with a father. It can be assumed that such parental agreement works if parents are able to constructively communicate. Sturge-Apple et. al. (2010) report that the ability to reach an agreement can contribute to maintaining family harmony. The other findings show post-divorce families and the relationship of trust and communication between adolescents and their friends. The social environment created by friends is an opportunity for them to express themselves spontaneously and openly. Our findings point out the importance of friendly relationships, where adolescents can share their feelings and emotions. In this context, Doktorová (2013) states that for the period of early adolescence, it is important to develop social competences. It can be said that friends act as a factor in self-expression of self-expression and open communication, and thus creates adolescent

space for congruence. Friends in early adolescence begin to take an important place in their life and are an important factor in their social environment. The need of self-expression, openness and congruence within peer groups brings also risks, mainly if adolescent does not have harmonic and stable family environment (Rojková, 2016). The results also highlight an adolescent's communication problems, but we interpret these cautiously due to the low number of respondents in the research sample. The selection of respondents was carried out in a pedagogical-psychological counseling center, where the psychologist consulted the family in a post-divorce setting. It can be said that parents have some willingness to solve the problem. This aspect has helped us to get a sample where children do trust their parents. Another situation is in families where there are serious disrupting problems of the dyadic relationship (mother - adolescent, father - adolescent) and the triadic relationship (mother - father - adolescent). In the future, it would be interesting to see research pertaining to families where trust is disturbed by both, or some of, the parents. However, the question in this case remains to what extent parents would be willing to participate, and would give their consent to complete the appropriate questionnaires. The focus on a narrow development period, namely the period of early adolescence, also represents limitation and therefore the results cannot be generalized for this reason. However, they help us to create a picture of a specific development period, such as early adolescence. The focus on two-years after the divorce period was to determine the perception of communication at a time of intense change, related to the divorce. Within this timeframe, many changes could be already applied in this new family structure, which could have affected the results. Another limitation is the focus on mother's sole care. Interestingly, it would be worthwhile to examine the trust in communication in families with sole care of fathers. However, this type of sub-family arrangement is unique. The uneven distribution of the sample did not allow us to identify gender differences, which could be considered as a further limitation of the research. We realize that other variables have not been included in this research, these include situational or personality variables.

8 Conclusion

Based on these results, it can be said that joint custody minimizes estrangement with the father, and it creates a certain communication strain on a relationship with both parents. The post-divorce family arrangements complicate the possibility of open communication with both parents at the same time, but do not interfere with the congruence of an adolescent's relationship with their friends.

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Primary Paper Section: A

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