

INFLUENCES OF THE ADOLESCENT CRISIS IN THE PARENT-CHILD RELATION

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Abstract: Influences of the adolescent crisis in the parent-child relation. Developing models of relations in a family is part of the natural course of an adolescent's life. The conclusions of the present research reveal the fact that, although high school students in the twelfth grade already turn eighteen, one cannot say that they have overcome a certain family crisis as concerns the parent-child relations. This fact shows a delay in the adolescents' evolution to maturity as far as family values are concerned, even if towards the end of high school they have already turned eighteen, the legal mark of accepting marriage. In the case of students coming from dysfunctional families, the crisis is deeper. In our opinion, there should be a series of interventions at the level of educational policies, starting with curriculum reformation, so that the students' parents should be invited to get involved in a process which should form them for this profession. Among the subjects taught in schools, religion and literature prove the best potential of offering models which can contribute in a significant way to the students' emotional balance, in certain aspects pertaining to the valorisation of family, to building and maintaining harmonious relations between students and their parents, in a period when vulnerability in this respect is extremely high.

Keywords: family, adolescence, parents, values, education, religion

Preliminaries

One can write about family from multiple perspectives. From an educational point of view, the approaches get completely special connotations, especially if we refer to the way in which students in the final high school year regard and relate to this institution with a decisive role in the formation of each person [1]. The present research aims at testing the hypothesis [2] according to which developing a relation between students and parents is a process depending on overcoming the adolescent crisis and the valorisation of family by its members. Students coming from monoparental families need more security and safety in their own family than students living with both parents. Testing this hypothesis was achieved especially through the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the answers given by students to a questionnaire administered by the form masters.

The sample of subjects is formed of 268 students in the twelfth grade from nine high schools in the county of Alba, who attend daily classes, having eight different fields of study. We chose this grade for several reasons: most of the students in the twelfth grade have turned eighteen, they can evaluate situations, facts, attitudes and behaviours, and they have created an opinion about family, this being also supported by the formal curriculum of several school subjects [3].

The distribution according to genre is representative at a national level: 50, 74% girls and 49, 26% boys¹. As concerns their residence, the percentage is in favour of the students in the urban area (52, 98%), compared to the one for the students in the rural area (45, 89%), the difference up to one hundred being represented by non-answers. For this variable, the

¹ At a national level, the partial data reveal a percentage of 51,6% women and 48,7% men. <http://www.ziare.com/social/recensamant> (on February 22nd 2014)

margin of error compared to the percentages at a national level is around $\pm 5\%$. The age level covers three years (17-19), most of the students being 18 (73, 13%). From the total number of students, 38, 80% graduated the previous school year with an average mark of 9-10, 57, 83% with 7-8, 99, and 3, 37%, with 5-6, 99. Concerning certain aspects, the data will be subject to a transversal analysis, by comparing these to similar ones collected on a sample made of 295 students in the ninth grade, 239 students in the tenth grade and 303 students in the eleventh grade.

The precise aspects to which we refer in the present study regard the characterisation of relations in students' families and the identification of a dynamics in developing these. We also wish to analyse the way in which students coming from dysfunctional families experience the parents' divorce, in the aspects we followed. Besides, the analysis will also look into the degree of trust the students have in their parents as concerns sharing experiences, positive or negative feelings.

The characterisation of family from the perspective of interpersonal relations

Characterising one's own family is not an easy endeavour, not only because of the complexity of the problematics involved, but also on account of a gradual evolution of relations which establish between its members.

Some of the questionnaire's items asked students to choose from a list of fourteen statements - three which offer factual data (3,4,11), five statements with positive connotations (1,2,6,12,13), respectively negative connotations (5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14) – the ones that match completely the realities they experience in their families.

If we analyse the results for the statements offering factual data, the latter lead to surprising observations. Thus, for the statement 11, *"I live with one of the parents because of their divorce/separation or because one of them is deceased"*, a positive answer was given by 26 students (9,7%) coming from dysfunctional families, and for the statement 3, *"As my parents are abroad, our relation is limited to phone calls"*, a number of 19 students (7,08%), who are entrusted to a guardian, member of the family or not. Moreover, 4 of these pupils are to be found in both situations. The statement *"Both me and my parents are religious people"* reveals a situation exceeding the national percentage concerning this aspect (39, 17%) [4], which expresses the effectiveness of religion. In the case of students coming from dysfunctional families this percentage is reduced (23, 07%).

The data obtained after analysing the answers for the statements with positive and negative connotations were synthetised in tables 1 and 2 in three categories: a. the number and percentage of the students in the whole sample, who chose each statement (the percentage was calculated by referring to the total number of students in the sample); b. the number and percentage of the students living with both parents, who chose each statement (the percentage was calculated by referring to the number of people – 242, which are in this situation); c. the number and percentage of the students whose parents are divorced, who chose each statement (the percentage was calculated by referring to the total of these people, 26).

Table 1. The choices for the positive statements referring to the characteristics of the family they come from.

Statements	Total N = 268		Students living with both parents N = 242		Students coming from dysfunctional families N = 26	
	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%
13. In the family I always feel safe.	202	75,37	188	77,68	14	53,84
2. In my family the relations are harmonious, without scenes of violence.	185	69,02	170	70,24	15	57,69
1. I am encouraged to express my own opinions.	175	65,29	159	65,70	16	61,53
6. I feel that with my family I could go to the end of the world / I could overcome any obstacle.	131	48,88	120	49,58	11	42,30
12. My parents are my best friends.	91	33,95	91	33,47	10	38,46

The data in table 1 allow us to make several observations. Only three of the five positive statements have percentages higher than 50%. These refer to the feeling of safety offered by the family they belong to (75, 37%), the harmonious relations between the family members (69, 02%) and the possibility to express their own opinions (65, 29%).

The next two statements reflect a strong family crisis, in aspects concerning trusting parents (48, 88%), respectively closeness to parents by developing friendship relations (33, 95%). If for the statements on the first two places we take into consideration the differences up to 100, we can say that more than a quarter of students do not see in their families an institution conferring them safety, harmony, that the atmosphere in which they grow is not one to offer them a model for their own family[5]. The situation is more dramatic in the case of students who come from broken families.

Differences higher than five percentages in the values of the data of the students who stay with both parents, compared to the answers given by the students who stay only with one of them because of the divorce/separation of the parents are to be found in the case of four of the five statements. The greatest difference (23, 84%) was calculated for the statement referring to the feeling of security in one's own family [6]. The difference is in favour of the students with divorced parents only in the case of the statement referring to the friendship relation between children and parents, however the percentage does not exceed 40%.

Table 2. The choices for the negative statements referring to the characteristics of the family students come from.

	Total	Students living with both	Students coming from

Statements	N = 268		parents N = 242		dysfunctional families N = 26	
	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%
9. There are tensions between me and my parents because of the generation gap.	85	31,71	76	31,40	9	34,61
8. My parents work a lot, that is why we do not spend much time together, but I know they love me.	79	29,47	73	30,16	6	23,07
5. I always feel treated as a child by my parents.	56	20,89	51	21,07	5	19,23
7. I often feel lonely in my own family.	31	11,56	23	9,50	8	30,76
10. I lack nothing from a material point of view, but I would like to be paid more attention by my parents.	30	11,19	28	11,57	2	7,69
14. I do not trust my parents completely, nor do they trust me.	18	6,71	16	6,61	2	7,69

The data in table 2 indicate the presence of some alarming aspects, a series of the percentage values being between 5% and 30%. The biggest percentage value (31, 71%) was calculated for the answers which highlight the presence of tensions and conflicts between students and their parents, on account of the difference of mentality between generations. A value very close to this one is the one which reflects the presence of discord and of violent scenes in the families of 30, 98% of the students. This was calculated with the help of an analysis from a reversed perspective of the statement: “In my family the relations are harmonious, without scenes of violence”, chosen by 69, 02% of the students. Out of the two percentage values we deduce that, for almost a third of the students, harmony in family is affected by conflicts and scenes of violence of different kinds.

Another aspect has to do with the fact that almost a third of students do not have the possibility to create a very close relation to their parents because they spend little time together. The students whose parents are abroad also go in this category, the sum of the percentages being extremely alarming: 29, 47% + 7, 08% = 36, 55%. The psycho-physical development of each student behind these figures is strongly influenced by the absence of parents, not as much as physical presence, but especially as emotional support. For the students living with one of the parents the percentage is a little lower (23, 07%). A possible explanation for the greater attention paid in these cases to children is the consequence of the responsibility assumed for their education, including before the law.

Whether we refer to the students living with both parents or to the ones whose parents are divorced, approximately 20% of the students assert that they feel treated as children by their parents. The negative effects lie in a delay in the students’ evolution to

maturity, one of the reasons being that students do not assume responsibilities in the family, especially the ones living in the urban area.

The greatest differences in the percentage values related to the two categories of students whose answers were compared, regard the presence of the feeling of loneliness in one's own family. Almost a third of the students whose parents are divorced (30, 76%) support this statement, the percentage being 20 points higher compared to the students living with both parents.

The last two statements were chosen in small percentages by students. An analysis of their content imposes differences in approach. It is a positive fact that a low percentage of students desire more attention from their parents (11, 57%), with differences less than 5 points between the two categories of students which were analysed. Actually, this statement reflects the fact that the majority of students (almost 90%) feel the parents' love through the attention they are given. An opposite situation is the existence of students whose love and trust are greatly affected. Even if the percentage of students who chose the statement "I do not trust my parents completely, nor do they trust me" is below 10%, it does not mean that we can neglect this aspect.

The dynamics of interpersonal relations in a comparative transversal analysis

Five of the suggested statements can be analysed from the perspective of their dynamics in time. The questionnaire was administered, as we have mentioned, to a great number of subjects, so that the data obtained allow us to make comparative analyses regarding the evolution in time of some aspects such as: expressing their own opinions, trust in their own family, the feeling of friendship in the family, the tensions between generations, the excessive care of parents [7].

In table 3 we presented the percentages of the choices made by the students in the sample, according to the grade these belong to. For the analysis of the results we made the distribution curves of the percentages calculated for the positive statements (figure 1), respectively for the negative ones (figure 2).

Table 3. The choices for the statements which reveal the dynamics of interpersonal relations in the family during school years

Statements	IXth grade	Xth grade	XIth grade	XIIth grade
1. I am encouraged by my parents to express my own opinions.	67,79%	60,66%	62,37%	65,29%
6. I feel that with my family I could go to the end of the world / I could overcome any obstacle.	54,57%	45,60%	45,87%	48,88%
12. My parents are my best friends.	41,69%	39,74%	48,11%	33,95%
9. There are tensions between me and my parents because of the generation gap.	32,88%	29,28%	24,42%	31,71%
5. I always feel treated as a child by my parents.	25,76%	28,03%	25,74%	20,89%

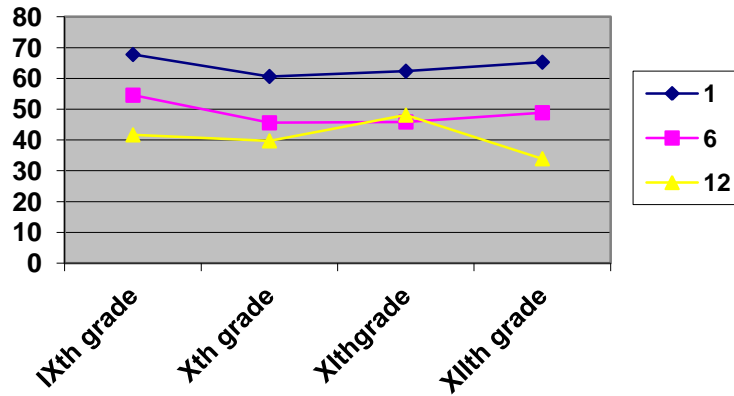


Figure 1. Distribution curves of the percentages in positive answers.

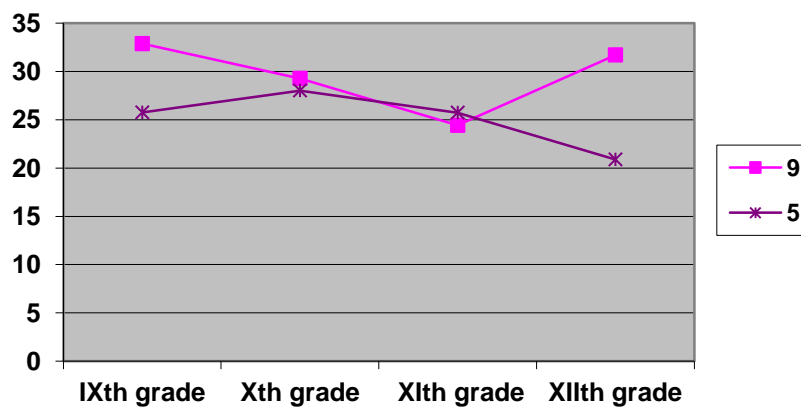


Figure 2. Distribution curves of the percentages in negative answers.

The data in table 3 and the position of the distribution curves for the positive choices (figura 1) reveal the following aspects: the curves indicating the dynamics of expressing one's own opinions (1), respectively the evolution in time of the trust in one's own family follow the same course, which highlights the adolescent crisis, more acute in the tenth grade (60, 66%; 45, 60%) and in the eleventh grade (62, 37%; 45, 87%). The values obtained in the twelfth grade for each of the two aspects analysed (65, 29%; 48, 88%) are greater than in the previous two grades, but do not exceed the ones in the ninth grade (67, 79%; 54, 57%). The differences in percentage points are 2, 5 for the first statement, respectively 5, 69 for the second out of the three we presented.

The shape of the curve presents the evolution in time of the friendship relation with parents involves a particular interpretation: overcoming the crisis in the tenth grade (39, 74%) is followed in the eleventh grade by a strong reconsideration of the relation with parents (48, 11%), who become the main confidants. In the twelfth grade this feeling diminishes (33, 95%), possibly because of the presence in students' life of friendship relations based on love. The beloved person becomes most frequently the person trusted to share feelings with.

Even if, apparently, the values which are similar for the statements with negative connotations calculated for the tenth and eleventh grade might lead to conclusions of

equivalence, the results must be analysed in their evolution. The minimum for the statement “There are tensions between me and my parents because of the generation gap”, observed at the eleventh grade (24, 42%), represents a positive fact at the level of analysing the results, which can be related to the result in the curve illustrating the positive connotation “My parents are my best friends”. The accentuation of the generation gap towards the twelfth grade (33, 95%) can also be attributed to the coming of the baccalaureate exam and to the divergence of opinion as concerns the students’ future. The shape of the curve for the statement “I always feel treated as a child by my parents” highlights another form of manifestation of the crisis of the child who wishes to become an adult as soon as possible, the greatest percentage being the one at in the tenth grade (28, 03%). The low value of the percentage in the twelfth grade (20,89%), almost 8 percentages lower compared to the maximum in the tenth grade and approximately 5 points compared to the values in the ninth and eleventh grade shows the tendency to a development in time of the relation between children and parents.

Parents, confidants of their children

Man’s need for communion with his fellow beings is ontological. Opening to parents is natural and in a biblical perspective this relationship transcends the earthly reality [8].

The parents’ role in the life of their children goes beyond satisfying primary needs. Sharing feelings and experiences, regardless of their nature, represents a condition for developing relations between the members of a family.

In our research we planned to find the place parents occupy among the people with whom students prefer to share their feelings. The results obtained can be seen in table 4.

Table 4. Students’ preference for the persons they share their feelings with.

Answers (%) Person	When experiencing great joy / an achievement, who is the first person you share it with? (P)	When experiencing grief/ unfulfillment, who is the first person you share it with? (N)	Difference % % P - % N
• parents	165 61,56%	103 38,43%	23,13%
• best friend (boy/girl)	71 26,49%	106 39,55%	- 13,06%
• nobody	9 3,35%	29 10,82%	- 7,47%
• brothers/other members of the family	9 3,35%	14 5,22%	- 1,87%
• another person	11 4,1%	14 5,22%	-1,12%
• a teacher/ form master	0	1 0,03%	- 0,03%

The data in table 4 show a separation as a percentage value in two categories of confidant-persons: parents and friends.

It is easier to transmit joys/achievements to parents (61, 56%) than griefs/unfulfillments; in the latter case the percentages are very close between parents (38, 43%) and friends (39, 55%).

The explanation for the difference of 23, 13 percentage points in favour of the parents when transmitting positive states and for the low value of the percentage of students who communicate their negative states to parents is to be found in aspects such as: the feeling of trust in family members has diminished, there are tensions because of the generation gap, family has been debased through mass-media.

Students' answers also reveal another aspect: there are a great number of students who do not share their feelings with anyone, especially the negative ones (10, 82%). This can be considered an effect of the hypercognitised education, in which informative activities prevail, whereas forming interpersonal communication skills occupy a secondary place.

Conclusions

The data of the research emphasize the fact that students in the final high school year adjust the way they relate to family members in general and especially to parents.

The results which present the characteristics of the family students come from – either positive or negative – mark out the fact that overcoming the adolescent crisis is not an easy process, the effects being felt longer, so that turning eighteen cannot be considered automatically a moment of reference for the beginning of a new stage of psycho-physical development.

From the point of view of interhuman relations we can assert that students in the final high school year have not overcome the stage of adolescent crisis, they are in a process of (re)configuration of the relations with parents and other family members, which deepens the family crisis.

The existence of some forms of violence in the family is generated by the divergent opinions between generations, as well as by the parents' tendency to treat their children inappropriately compared to their age or to have the final or the only word in making certain decisions or expressing certain opinions. This is a possible cause of the fact that most of the students are reluctant in considering parents their best friends, especially when it comes to sharing experiences and feelings.

The analysis of family characteristics, made from the perspective of the choices made by students coming from broken families reveals a more dramatic fall of the relations between family members than in the case of students living with both parents. The causes are that the feeling of security in the family is extremely weakened, there are situations which destroy the harmony in the family and support the presence of some forms of violence and people fail to trust family members and their capacity to support them overcome obstacles. People's freedom to express their own opinions is limited, the tensions caused by the generation gap aggravate and the feeling of loneliness in one's own family is more acute.

The research data discover a dynamics in time of the parent-child relation, which is strongly marked by the adolescent crisis. One observes that towards the end of the high school studies the percentage values rise as concerns aspects on valorising family and the

relations between its members; however, they do not exceed the values at the level of the ninth grade.

The fact that, from the perspective of the relational field, students leave high school with a lower level compared to the beginning of this cycle involves educational interventions especially in the tenth grade, when the adolescent crisis is strongly present through several aspects. A first solution would be suggesting educational interventions regarding this problematic in the religion and literature classes by offering acceptable models for the students of this age. There also appears the need for some discussions with the students' parents in order to identify solutions to the difficult cases of child-parent relations.

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