INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical period of development. According to Santrock (2004) adolescents are continuously changing mentally, physically, and psychologically. Hence, they are learning more about the real world and trying to strive for independence from parents and inclusion in social groups (Santrock and Yussen, 1984).

Findings from previous studies indicate that adolescent antisocial behavior and problems predict long-term consequences which include addiction, impaired family relationships and criminal activity well into adulthood (Brook et al., 1998; Duncan et al., 1997; Newcomb and Bentler, 1988). Various risk factors have been associated with the development and progression of adolescents’ antisocial behavior. Two commonly investigated risk factors for adolescent problem behavior are family functioning and self-concept.

According to McClun and Mervell (1998), self-concept does not exist in a vacuum as its development is influenced significantly by the immediate family context, although self-concept may also be influenced by factors outside the family, such as peers and school (Harter, 1999). Self-concept which is the way a person evaluates himself or herself influences one’s behavior and overall development. Findings from Henderson et al.’s (2006) study suggest that family functioning with self-concept work in conjunction with one another to predict the severity of adolescent externalizing problems such as drug involvement, aggressive behavior and also delinquent behavior.

ABSTRACT

The influence of family functioning on self-concept is crucial in adolescents’ development while negative family environment appears to be a risk factor in the development and maintenance of an adolescent’s behavior. This study aimed at determining the relationship between family functioning domains, adaptability, and cohesion with five domains of self-concept. The study employed survey research involving the administration of the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III) and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS). A total of 30 male adolescents who participated in a youth development program were involved in this study. Results from correlation and multiple regression analysis indicated positive relationships between domains of family functioning and five domains of self-concept. It was suggested that treatment for family therapy should focus on self-concept and family functioning in an integrative fashion rather than as separate loci. Positive family environment, effective parenting practices, and rebuilding adolescents’ self-concept should be incorporated in family-based intervention.

Keywords: Family functioning, self-concept, delinquent, adolescent
According to Henderson et al. (2006), various family risk factors have been related to the development of adolescent drug use and antisocial behavior. Some of these family-related risk factors include ineffective parenting practices, especially poor parental monitoring (Pettit et al., 1999), unorganized strategies of managing families (Swadi, 1999), and coercive and manipulative attempts to control the adolescents (Loeber and Stouthamer-Lober, 1998). Henderson et al. (2006) studied 224 clinically referred adolescents and found strong and direct effect between self-concept and externalizing problems. It was also found that family functioning partially mediated the relationship between self-concept and externalizing problems.

A study on 3,634 primary and 2,706 secondary school students found that family cohesion and social self-concept were significant moderators for children and adolescents. Better family support and peer relationships weakened the relation between depression and suicide ideation. The study also discovered the moderation effect of social self-concept was less obvious among adolescents (Au et al., 2009). Chiou et al. (2008) also found that the level of parenting stress was found to be significantly associated with children’s self-concept. An examination by Gibson and Jefferson (2006) of 78 adolescents who participated in Gear Up program found that both perceived parental involvement and growth fostering relationships contributed significantly to the variance in self-concept.

Levy (1997) studied 365 Australian adolescent boys and girls and found the correlation between delinquency and self-concept. He found that the more serious these adolescents’ delinquent behaviors, the more negative their self-concepts were. A longitudinal study by Mc Nelis et al. (2000) on factors related to self-concept on 106 asthmatic children aged 8 to 13 found that low self-concept were displayed by children experiencing less satisfaction with family relationship, a more negative attitude toward illness, hence used more negative coping behaviors. Reyes (2008) studied two resiliency factors: self-concept and perceived parental support, in conjunction with abuse factors that impacted psychological functioning on 61 sexually abused children. Among others, results found that a child’s self-concept was negative when exposed to lengthy abuse. Perceived parental support was found to be important.

According to Matherne and Thomas (2001), cohesion refers to the level of attachment and emotional bonding between family members which are categorized into four levels: disengaged, separated, connected and enmeshed. Characteristics of families that are disengaged are lack of closeness and/or loyalty, and are also characterized by high independence. At the other end of the scale of cohesion are families identified as enmeshed, that are characterized by high levels of closeness, loyalty and/or dependency.

Adaptability defined by Matherne and Thomas (2001) is the ability of the family to change in power structure, roles and relationships in order to adjust to various situational stressors. It is also categorized into four levels: rigid, structured, flexible, and chaotic. Families with low levels of adaptability are considered rigid and these are characterized by authoritarian leadership, infrequent role modification, strict negotiation and lack of change. Whilst family with high level of adaptability are considered chaotic and these chaotic family types manifest a lack of leadership, dramatic role shifts, erratic negotiation and are characterized by excessive change (Matherne and Thomas, 2001).

This study was designed to determine the relationship between family functioning and self-concept. It also determined the relationship of family functioning domains and five domains of self-concept. This study also examined the predictive relationship between two dimensions of family functioning and the five domains of self-concept. The two dimensions of family functioning were adaptability and cohesion, while the five domains of self-concept were physical self, moral ethical self, personal self, family self, and social self.
METHODS

The method of sampling was purposive. The participants in this study consisted of 30 male youths aged between 16-25 years old, who had committed several offences, enrolled in a youth development program and gave consent to participate in this study. The data on the subjects is normal and homogenous based on Levene’s test of normality and homogeneity.

To assess family functioning, respondents completed the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III), which is composed of 20 negatively and positively stated questions based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). FACES III developed by Olson et al. (1979) assessed real family condition and ideal/imaginary condition. The reliability of the subscales of the FACES III Malay version has been fairly well established with alpha of 0.80. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS) developed by Fitts and Warren (2003) was employed to assess self-concept which contained 100 items scored on a 5-point scale from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 5 (very true). The reliability of TSCS was satisfactory with alpha 0.80.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results in Table 1 showed that there were significant and positive correlations between adaptability with physical self, moral ethical self, personal self, family self, and social self (five dimensions of self-concept). This meant that the higher the scores of adaptability, the higher the self-concepts of the adolescents. There were also significant and positive correlations between cohesion and the five dimensions of self-concept. The results indicated that the higher the cohesion, the higher the self-concepts experienced by the adolescents.

Predictive relationship was also examined between adaptability and cohesion towards physical self. Multiple regression analysis found physical self was significantly predicted by family functioning. Results of multiple regression also showed that adaptability predicted significantly physical self with 10% variance, \( R^2 = 0.10, F (2, 281) = 14.89, p < 0.001 \). Adaptability was a significant predictor with Beta= 0.27, \( t=4.32, p < 0.001 \). However, cohesion did not predict significantly physical self-concept. The results are shown in Table 2. The linear equation that can be formulated is:

\[ Y=44.99+0.393(\text{Adaptability}) \]

Predictive relationships were also investigated between adaptability and cohesion towards moral ethical self. The regression model also showed that cohesion predicted significantly moral ethical self with 9% variance, \( R^2 = 0.09, F (2, 294) = 14.72, p < 0.001 \). Cohesion was a significant predictor with Beta = 0.27, \( t=4.20, p<0.001 \) as shown in Table 2. The linear equation that can be formulated is:

\[ Y=43.54+0.27(\text{Cohesion}) \]

Personal self was also significantly predicted by both family adaptability and cohesion. Results of multiple regression showed that adaptability and cohesion predicted significantly personal self with 14% variance, \( R=0.14, F (2,280) = 22.89, p<0.001 \). Adaptability and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Correlation between family functioning and self-concept</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>0.305*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>0.196*</td>
</tr>
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*p < 0.01
cohesion were significant predictors with Beta=0.21, \( t=3.37, p<0.001 \) and Beta=0.21, \( t=3.37, p<0.001 \) respectively. The linear equation that can be formulated is:

\[
Y = 38.89 + 0.34(\text{adaptability}) + 0.27(\text{cohesion})
\]

Table 2 also reported multiple regression analysis between adaptability and cohesion with family self. Results showed both adaptability and cohesion predicted significantly family self-concept with 39% variance, \( R^2 = 0.39, F (2, 288) = 90.61, p < 0.001 \). Cohesion was a significant predictor with Beta=0.26, \( t=4.20, p<0.001 \). Similarly, adaptability also significantly predicted family self with Beta=0.34, \( t=3.37, p<0.001 \) as shown in Table 2. The linear equation that can be formulated is:

\[
Y = 22.98 + 0.59(\text{adaptability}) + 0.63(\text{cohesion})
\]

Finally, this study also investigated the predictive relationship between adaptability and cohesion towards social self. The regression model also showed that only adaptability predicted social self with 13% variance, \( R^2 = 0.13, F (2, 281) = 20.55, p<0.001 \). Adaptability was a significant predictor with Beta=0.31, \( t=4.84, p<0.001 \). The linear equation that can be formulated is:

\[
Y = 43.18 + 0.40(\text{adaptability})
\]
relationship was true for both family functioning’s domains (adaptability and cohesion) with all five of self-concept’s domains (physical, moral, personal family, social, and ethical). The data, thus, support previous studies that have shown a relationship between self-concept and family functioning (e.g., Mc Nelis et al., 2000; McClun and Mervell, 1998).

Further, results have shown that adaptability was predictor of physical self, personal self, family self and social self whilst cohesion was predictor of ethical self, personal self, and family self.

Of the four domains of self-concept (family, physical, personal, and social), adaptability was the strongest predictor of family self. Similarly, family self was also predicted the best by cohesion. It seems that among the domains of self concept, family self can be best predicted by both adaptability and cohesion. What can be derived from this is that family functioning is the predictor of self-concept particularly family self. This is somewhat not surprising as elements of family functioning should contribute the most to the same aspect of other variables, in this case, family self concept. For that reason, it can be suggested that whether the adolescent develops strong family self concept, will depend mostly on the strength of his or her family functioning. What is more interesting here is that between the two family functioning domains, cohesion was the stronger predictor of family self. Closeness of family members in the adolescent’s family seems to be the more crucial domain than adaptability in the developing of family self concept.

Previous research consistently has stressed that family functioning is a crucial factor in determining and predicting self-concept among adolescents. Family environment and functioning are significant predictors for an adolescent’s self-concept. If one’s family functioning is balanced and healthy, adolescent will continue to develop a positive outlook of oneself, that is a positive self-concept. The findings of this study also supported research by Nasir et al. (2011) that there was a positive correlation between family functioning and self-concept. According to Nasir et al. (2011), family functioning would either directly or indirectly contribute to positive self-concept. When family is not functioning well, it will affect the emotional and physical growth, hence hampering the feeling of insecurity and positive development of self-concept.

Adolescents’ behavior may also be associated with delinquency. Research has also indicated that the family environment is an important variable in the development of delinquency (Cashwell and Vacc, 1996; Clark and Shields, 1997). Rosenbaum (1989) found that adolescents who have a strong relationship with their family were less likely to display delinquent behavior. Featherstone et al. (1993) also reported that youth from intact two-parent families were less likely to report school problems than were children from single-parent families. Cashwell and Vacc (1996) found that a cohesive family environment reduced the chances of delinquent behavior. Similarly, a study by Shields and Clarks (1995) found that low levels of adaptability in the family resulted in higher levels of delinquency. In addition, results of a study by Brown et al. (2009) indicated a direct and interactive influence of family dynamics and child characteristics on the development of children’s self-concept.

The findings from this study should be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, the sample comprised of a small sample of male adolescents involved in a youth development program; therefore, the results may not be generalized to other samples. Second, the family measures used were collected from the adolescents’ perspectives. It would be conceivable that parents perceive family environment differently from the adolescents’ perspective; hence different results may have been obtained.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies suggesting that family functioning and self-concept are two variables that have influences on each other. Family functioning is a predictor of self-concept among...
adolescents. It seems likely that an adolescent who has a low self-concept may also see his or her family in a negative light. It seems unlikely that an adolescent who has a low self-concept would view his or her family functioning as high. Hence, treatment for family therapy should focus on self-concept and family functioning in an integrative fashion rather than as separate loci. Positive family environment, effective parenting practices, and rebuilding adolescents’ self-concept should be incorporated in family-based intervention.

REFERENCES


