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Adjustment of Parental Involvement Behaviors to Avoid Social withdrawal

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Abstract. The purpose of this research is to delve into the connection between teenager social withdrawal (TSW) and parental involvement behavior (PIB) in China. Both TSW and PIB have four dimensions each; this study was motivated as social withdrawal surfaces as a growing issue in a society that is fast-paced with educational and economic development. Our analysis was based on questionnaire data, using measurement scales derived from existing literature. The study unearthed a negative correlation between overall levels of TSW and PIB, implying that higher levels of PIB are indicative of lower TSW. Further scrutiny showed that three dimensions of PIB significantly predicted lower TSW while 'life care' did not play a role. Moreover, each dimension of PIB demonstrated negative correlations with one to two specific dimensions of TSW. This work can thus help parents gain an understanding on how their efforts towards parental involvement need adjustment so as to prevent higher levels of teenager social withdrawal.

Keywords: Teenager Social Withdrawal; Parental Involvement Behavior; Well-Being; Education Goals and Adjustment; Social Psychology; Mental wellness.

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this research is to explore the connection between social withdrawal and parental engagement within the Chinese context. Social withdrawal is typically demonstrated by consistently engaging in solitary behavior even in the presence of familiar peers; it is widely observed in China. The dominance of Confucianism and other traditional ideologies that prevail in East Asia place immense pressure on individuals through family-related expectations. These expectations could involve occupational duties, rigid requirements for etiquette, and high prospects academically — part of a myriad set of high pressures and hard-to-reach demands that sees a surge of introverted individuals (some extreme cases include social avoidance) within specific localities as they strive to cope.

The same occurrences can be seen globally with terms like "NEET" (not in employment, education or training) used in the UK, "Adultolescent" used in the US and "hikikomori" used in Japan. These terms refer to different youth populations showcasing extreme social withdrawal or great dependence scenarios, such as those who have given up work and stay at home for extended periods [1]. For teenagers, staying away from social interactions might result in difficulties keeping their overall health balanced, leading to depression or anxiety or even immune system deficiencies.

It is notable that there are ways in which social withdrawal can be lessened. In a study of randomized control, Terzian et al. showed that an active social network within patients showing signs of withdrawal helped in reducing the withdrawal levels — a clear indication of how withdrawal could be curbed [2]. As we explore the possibility of taming this monster called social withdrawal, other factors that could predict or even mitigate the extent may come into play.

Parental involvement is an important part of developmental psychology: it plays a critical role in molding one's psychological traits, which can include social withdrawal. Although this connection hasn't been widely studied, the purpose of this research is to unveil how social withdrawal relates to parental involvement. By doing so, we hope that parents can take scientific guidance on adjusting

their involvement behaviors, thus helping them achieve better educational outcomes without compromising the child's needs.

2. Literature Review

The previous studies in the field of social psychology and educational psychology have their focus on building a solid foundation of the topic of social withdrawal, providing clear definition, varies of descriptive data or qualitative data, and valid measurements for social withdraw [3]. Rubin and Coplan defined social withdrawal as a consistent display of solitary behavior when encountering familiar and/or unfamiliar peers [4]. They further categorized social withdrawal into three subtypes: shyness, unsociability, and social avoidance, each with distinct motivational factors and behavioral characteristics [4]. Numerous studies have investigated the prevalence, stability, and consequences of social withdrawal in children and adolescents across different cultures [5, 6]. However, as a relatively newborn topic, there is a lack of deep and specific search towards potentially related minor topics like the parental involvement behaviors (PIBs) [5]. The situation of the unexplored but vastly common domain, social withdrawal, provides great motivation for this study. Although this one single research will not be enough to complete the whole research gap of the academic domain, this research should provide new insights for new research pathways for future research.

In comparison, PIB, or parental input, or parenting style, are similar topics that have long been focused on, having diverse research topics and have development a relatively more completed system of work globally. Parental involvement refers to the extent to which parents are interested in, knowledgeable about, and actively participating in their children's lives [7]. It encompasses a wide range of parenting behaviors, such as emotional support, communication, supervision, and educational involvement [8]. Much of the research related to PIB and similar topics have mainly focused on development psychology aspects, such as child esteem and confidence [9]. For instance, Wu *et al.* developed a questionnaire to assess adolescents' perceptions of their parents' involvement behaviors and found that it consisted of four dimensions: emotional involvement, rule teaching, academic support, and life care [9]. They also found that parental involvement was positively associated with adolescents' self-esteem and negatively associated with their depression and problem behaviors [9].

Still, the research of PIB lacked the connection with the newly developed topic of TSW, but only several indicative topics, such as: usage of social media, self-efficacy and procrastination [10]. For example, Ding *et al.* found that parental involvement was negatively associated with adolescents' problematic social media use, and this relationship was mediated by adolescents' self-esteem and effortful control [11]. Li *et al.* conducted a systematic review of qualitative and quantitative studies on youth social withdrawal behavior (hikikomori) and identified several family-related factors that may contribute to this phenomenon, such as parental overprotection, lack of communication, and family dysfunction [1]. However, they also noted that the evidence base for these factors was limited and more research was needed to clarify their roles in the development and maintenance of social withdrawal [1].

In summary, while there is a growing body of research on social withdrawal and parental involvement behaviors as separate topics, there is a lack of studies examining their interrelationships, especially in the context of adolescence. The current study aims to address this gap by investigating the associations between different dimensions of parental involvement and social withdrawal in a sample of Chinese adolescents. By doing so, it hopes to shed light on the potential protective or risk factors in the family environment that may influence the development of social withdrawal tendencies during this critical period of life.

3. Method

3.1. Hypothesis

In this study, the PIB ’s four dimensions are: emotional involvement behavior (EIB), rule teaching (RT), academic support (AS), and life care (LC). The TSW’s four dimensions are: withdrawal from community and wider world (WCW), withdrawal from family and close friends (WFF), emotional withdrawal (EW) and physical withdrawal (PW).

The research hypothesis of the study is overall PIB level and all PIB dimension of EIB would be negatively correlated with overall TSW level. Moreover, we hypothesize that all PIB dimensions would be negatively associated with all four TSW dimensions.

3.2. Participants

33 participants (20 males and 13 females) voluntarily answered the questionnaire through WeChat. There is diversity among the locations of participants. 2 of the participants are in America (with nationality of Chinese), and 31 of the participants are from different provinces in China (27 from Guangdong, 2 from Hunan, 2 from Beijing, 1 from Shandong, and 1 from Chongqing). The age of all participants is distributed within 10 to 18 years old with a mean age of 14.81. All of the participants answered the questionnaire through scanning QR code or click a questionnaire link that are posted and shared on WeChat.

3.3. Measurements

3.3.1. Measuring PIB.

Parental involvement behavior (PIB) is measured using a questionnaire on adolescent evaluation of parental involvement developed by Wu *et al.* [9]. The original questionnaire consists of 22 questions that ask subjects to evaluate the frequency of provided situations (e.g., playing together at home). It is divided into two versions: one for teenagers evaluating their father's PIB and another for evaluating their mother's PIB. The only difference between the two versions is the subject of each question, which refers to either the mother or the father. Additionally, the original questionnaire is categorized into four aspects, corresponding to the four dimensions mentioned in the introduction: emotional involvement behavior (EIB), rule teaching (RT), academic support (AS), and life care (LC). Questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, and 16 are categorized as EIB; questions 3, 17, and 22 as RT; questions 1, 11, 14, and 21 as AS; and questions 13, 18, 19, and 20 as LC. The original questionnaire was retested with the same participants after 15 days, yielding a reliability higher than 0.7.

During the questionnaire design, a few alterations were made to adapt the questionnaire to our study. The first alteration is the sequence of the questions. To facilitate data analysis, the questions measuring the same aspect (EIB, RT, AS, or LC) were arranged to be adjacent to each other. After this alteration, questions 1-11 measure EIB, questions 12-14 measure RT, questions 15-18 measure AS, and questions 19-22 measure LC.

The second change to the original questionnaire is the removal of the separate versions for fathers and mothers. As our study variables do not consider specific maternal or paternal involvement behavior but rather general parental involvement behavior, the subjects within each question (originally "father" or "mother") were changed to "my parents." Consequently, the questionnaire used in this study has only one version for measuring general PIB with four dimensions and does not contain separate versions for fathers and mothers.

All questions have the same maximum score of five points. The final PIB score is calculated by summing the participants' ratings of the 22 items, with 1 representing very low frequency, 2 representing relatively low frequency, 3 representing median frequency, 4 representing relatively high frequency, and 5 representing very high frequency.

3.3.2. Measuring TSW.

A Social Withdrawal Scale is used in this study to measure teenager social withdrawal (TSW) [12]. The original scale was designed to measure the degree of social withdrawal in motor neurone disease patients. It consists of 24 questions, each describing a specific situation and asking subjects to indicate their agreement using a 5-point Likert scale. The 24 questions are divided into four continuous parts, each measuring a different dimension of social withdrawal: questions 1-6 measure Withdrawal from Community and Wider World (WCW), questions 7-12 measure Withdrawal from Family and Friends (WFF), questions 13-18 measure Emotional Withdrawal (EW), and questions 19-24 measure Physical Withdrawal (PW). After conducting a reliability analysis, Rigby et al. removed question 12, which is not included in our study questionnaire.

Several changes have been made to the original scale to ensure our questionnaire satisfies our research goals.

First, the scale was translated from English to Chinese to ensure all participants could understand the questions and provide reliable data.

Second, questions 1, 4, 19, 20, and 24 were removed, as they measure social withdrawal specific to patients with motor neurone disease and describe situations less familiar to the majority of our study participants (e.g., the necessary usage of a wheelchair).

Third, questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, and 13 were modified to fit the situation of our participants. These questions were originally designed to evaluate subjects' level of social withdrawal after being diagnosed with motor neurone disease. Since our study does not focus on a specific time point in the participants' lives, we removed components describing specific times (e.g., "My social life...affected by my condition" or "... prior to MND").

Fourth, the wording in questions 2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, and 23 was altered from negative to positive attitudes. For example, question 2 was changed from "My participation and involvement with local organizations/societies/clubs are few" to "I participate and involve with local organizations/societies/clubs a lot." This change aims to maintain consistent wording attitudes (positive) across all questions.

After these alterations, the questionnaire includes 18 questions for measuring TSW, divided into four parts: 5 questions in the first part measuring WCW, 5 questions in the second part measuring WFF, 6 questions in the third part measuring EW, and 3 questions in the fourth part measuring PW.

Each question has a maximum score of 5 points. The TSW score is calculated by subtracting the participants' ratings of the 18 items from 90 (the total possible score for the 18 items, with 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive and Discussion for the Data

Table 1 below would perform the means, standard deviations and correlations between target variables and their four dimensions by using correlation test and t test. There are a few dimensions are significantly correlated: EIB is negatively correlated with WFF($r=-0.673$, $p<0.01$) and general level of TSW($r=-0.492$,$p<0.01$); RT is negatively correlated with WCW($r=-0.536$, $p<0.05$), WFF($r=-0.524$, $p<0.01$) and general TSW($r=-0.369$, $p<0.01$); AS is negatively correlated with WCW($r=-0.406$, $p<0.01$) and general TSW($r=-0.361$, $p<0.01$), and LC is negatively correlated with WFF($r=-0.504$, $p<0.01$).

The results reveal the fact not all dimensions of PIB effectively predict all dimensions of TSW. Thus, dimensions of PIB can only be used to predict specific TSW dimensions, but not all TSW dimensions or overall TSW level.

Table1. Means, standard deviations between target variables and their four dimensions.

All			Correlations									
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. EIB	42.727	10.390	-				-0.342*	-0.673***	-0.327*	-0.184*	-0.492**	
2. RT	12.818	2.663		-			-0.536**	-0.524**	-0.177*	0.097*	-0.369**	
3. AS	13.364	4.533			-		-0.406**	-0.527**	-0.233*	0.095*	-0.361**	
4. LC	16.181	3.753				-	-0.295*	-0.504***	0.093*	0.150*	-0.164*	
5. WCW	7.454	3.914					-					-0.264*
6. WFF	4.787	3.772						-				-0.701***
7. EW	9.031	5.423							-			-0.253*
8. PW	3.485	2.959								-	0.037*	
9. General TSW	24.758	12.309									-	-0.461**
10. General PIB	84.091	18.223										-

The conducted correlational tests shows that the overall PIB and its dimensions EIB, RT, AS are negatively correlated with overall TSW level, among them, EIB have the highest effect on indicating lower level of general TSW.

Moreover, the PIB subtypes RT and AS shows significant negative correlation with TSW dimension WCW, indicating their effective role indicator of TSW dimensions WCW. Also, the result shows that the TSW dimension WFF can be reflected by all four dimensions of PIB, indicating its sensitivity towards PIB.

However, dimension LC (life care) of PIB is not significantly correlated with overall TSW level, which does not fit with our original research hypothesis, suggesting the inability of LC to predict overall TSW level.

4.2. Implication

The predictor role of PIB, though does not contain causal relationship, similar many results of other studies in this field, indicates that the level of TSW could be lowered. And parents in China might be reminded that the phenomenon of social withdrawal, commonly refer as “extremely introverted”, along with its undesirable consequences (e.g., low sociability, highly dependent to parents, lack of empathy), are avoidable events by paying proper educational efforts. According to the results, potentially feasible educational efforts might contain:

1. increase the time spent on building positive emotion linkage with teenager, e.g., do things the teenager interested in with them, do exercise with them around home and express positive emotions towards teenagers actively through vivid body language that China parents do not use to have.

2. spend some time on teaching or discussing with teenagers about the rules or patterns of the social world, provide them psychological preparation of various of situations in social life, thus make them more confident and courageous toward making social contact.

3. Maintain proper level of academic support and life care involvement behavior for teenagers, along with the presence of high emotion linkage and rule understanding, teenagers might have more feelings of being seen as important and build more confidence while facing unknown social situations. 4. Also control the level of PIB, though have passed the overall correlation significance, the fitted curve of the collected data shows a potential trend of increasing TSW in the interval of high PIB. This might be explained by the excess amount of PIB would take up too much energy of teenagers and make them form negative emotions toward PIB, thus reverse the effect of PIB.

Meanwhile, we have to consider alternative explanations for the hypothesis, the results may be caused by reaction of unknown mediator factors in the current study. The suggested factor of emotion would not possibly be the only explainable variable in the field. And the validity of the results might also be doubted, since there exist obvious defections of sampling source and method.

4.3. Limitation: sampling method, restricted research direction and research method

The study currently has obvious limitations, those limitations might explain the unexpected results of the data that are not included in the hypothesis, while these limitations could remind the future researchers in the field of avoiding.

First, the study lacked proper sampling method. We lacked the channel to distribute our questionnaire to diverse regions in and out of the Republic of China, most of the samples (participants) are from Guangdong, a relatively distinct region in China, where economic activities are active and is a favorable region of the government’s policies, which the participants are very likely to be in a relatively wealthy family and greatly differs with the ones living in median or lower than median families. As the result, the participants might receive higher quality PIBs that is hard to gain comparing to the median and lower economic condition families. Therefore, a sampling method that could gain regional source with high diversity is needed if the researchers want to expand their results to any larger populations.

Second, there lacked diversity among the sample population. Due to the sampling method of distributing survey through WeChat, which is commonly seen as a private communication channel, to distribute the questionnaire, the participants would unavoidably be people with similar economic situation, educational background and social experience. The low diversity among participants would increase the difficulty of extend the result to wider population even more. In future studies, scholars and researchers should try to avoid collecting data from subjects who potentially might have similar conditions, who are usually closely related to the researchers and scholars.

4.4. Indication of future studies

Whether the research direction or the research method of this single study is extremely limited and needed supplement from the future studies to build a solider foundation of the field of social psychology and educational psychology.

First, the current study hasn't revealed a clear mediation factor, as well as causal relationship, which remains great blank for future studies to fill in. Potential mediators such as emotions brought by the PIBs, self-defense mechanisms during low level of PIB, or unknown psychological factors positively affecting TSW in the situation of high PIB could be studied to gain better understanding towards the field. And more diverse research methods could be used to establish more relationships between various of factors, more than the predictor role established in the current study.

Second, there are still massive amounts of potential predictors in the field with the topic of social withdrawal. Such as family structure, the language habits within the family, or specific genetic information leading to the expression of TSW. Which would certainly greatly enrich the knowledge in the field if being studied.

Third, the measurement designing for the TSW is also a topic that is relatively new-born. Existing measurements for TSW is rare and lacked cultural and situational diversity, future studies could focus on creating more valid and universal measurements (scales, questionnaires, experiments) for the field.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this research gives good knowledge about relationship between parental involvement behavior and teenager social withdrawal. It is specifically based in China. The findings indicate that the higher levels of PIB, including emotional involvement behavior (EIB), rule teaching (RT) and academic support (AS) lead to lower levels of TSW. On different notes, specific PIB dimensions have different effects on TSW aspects. Although the study has some limitations like lack of diversity in sample population or restricted sampling method: it still can help parents to prevent or reduce social withdrawal tendencies from their children by adjusting their involvement behaviors. It is recommended that future investigations do not merely replicate these results but instead strive to use broader populations, investigate other factors, and create measurement instruments that would be appropriate from the cultural point of view. The aim is to enrich our knowledge on the intricate connection between parental participation and withdrawal into society in China and in other places as well.

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