

Gratitude and Perception of Parental Contribution among Emerging Adults

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Abstract

The major goal is to understand the interaction of parents and adults. It is extremely necessary to understand how, parents perceive, understand their children needs, problems, priorities and career decisions at this adulthood stage. The objective of my study is to analyze how children perceive their parents' financial, emotional, and other type of support, and how much it means to them. (Steinberg, 2001). It will also instil a sense of responsibility in children, making them aware of the sacrifices and efforts their parents make for them. (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). It plays a key role in teaching moral values, toughness, and self-worth, which shape behavior and coping strategies in adult life (Amato, 2010). Examining this association in terms of cultural norms, family dynamics, and social expectations can play a part in developing effective interventions for the promotion of healthy individual and family development (Chou et al., 2021).

Introductions

Emerging adulthood, aged between 18 and 25, is a development phase characterized by increasing independence, identity exploration, and shifting family relationships (Arnett, J.J. 2000). Instead of pursuing autonomy, the majority of emerging adults are still dependent on parents for emotional, financial, and practical support during this period (Fingerman, K.L., Cheng, S., et al., 2012). It is important to know the perception and expression of gratitude towards parental investment among emerging adults for ensuring healthy intergenerational relationships and well-being of the individuals (Brown, L., et al., 2021). Cultural context also plays a significant role in the expression of gratitude. In collectivist culture people are expressed gratitude as they have aspiration for group needs over individual needs, and are grateful to family and society (Yuki et al., 2007). For instance, research with Asian American young adults found that gratitude interventions, such as writing appreciation letter to parents, enhanced positive impact. The collectivist family values family unity and responsibilities (Cheng et al., 2019). This suggests that cultural values have a large impact on how gratitude is expressed and received within families, highlighting the importance of cultural and familial norms in gratitude expression (Ng et al., 2018). Relationships, (Lindell et al., 2021). Spiritual Development: Gratitude focuses on Islamic values of humility and taqwa (God-consciousness), which may solidify spiritual development among young adults (Rashid, 2017). Through the parent-child relationship, children acquire moral values, communication, control of emotions, and sense of belonging

(Steinberg, 2001). A positive parent-child relationship contributes to overall well-being and academic performance, influencing subsequent interpersonal relationships, mental health, and self-esteem (Baumrind, 1991). Emerging adulthood, which is typically in the range of ages 18-25, is a separate stage of development that is defined by exploration of identity, greater autonomy, and shifting relational dynamics (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2022). Parental support throughout this transition is still important and can influence psychological adjustment and academic achievement (Hussong et al., 2021). Parental support at this time is commonly both instrumental support, such as economic aid, and affective support, such as empathy and encouragement (Wang, 2017). Even when emerging adults become independent, they often still depend on parental knowledge and resources (Fingerman et al., 2021; Kwon & Park, 2021). In collectivistic cultures, parental sacrifices are deeply rooted, and thanks are sometimes expressed in indirect or collective manners (Graham, 2019). Wang (2017) emphasizes the significance of "mundane support," ordinary actions that go unappreciated but heavily impact the well-being of emerging adults. Gratitude is an important factor in emotional growth at this stage (Hussong et al., 2021). It is influenced by family processes, cultural expectations, and the parent-child relationship quality (Emmons & Mishra, 2022). Emerging adults who acknowledge the efforts of their parents tend to acquire emotional maturity and have better familial relationships (Park & Lee, 2021). Variations in the expression of gratitude can further be determined by family structure, gender, and socioeconomic status (Ahmed et al., 2024). Evidence indicates that those who feel more parental care express more gratitude, which is often mediated by time perspectives how they perceive their past, present, and future (Zhou & Wu, 2020). A research on 438 university students showed that parental care perceptions were correlated with greater gratitude, positive past orientations, and future orientation. Negative past orientations were, however, correlated with lower levels of gratitude. These results indicate that time perspectives partially mediate the association between parental care and gratitude during emerging adulthood (Zhou & Wu, 2020). In addition, the process through which gratitude grows in various cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds is unclear (Singh & Khan, 2023). In emerging adulthood, as gratitude is being conceptualized as the recognition and appreciation of advantages gained, it is a most significant emotional development (Hussong et al., 2021). Gratitude, not just an individual virtue but also a social one that strengthens associations with other people, is a key emotional development. The quality of interactions between parents and children significantly influences the development of gratitude during this period. As emerging adults gain independence, their ability to recognize and value their parents' contributions improves, which furthers their emotional growth (Wiley.com, 2023). Gratitude is a complex concept with emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components, which can be shaped by family dynamics and cultural contexts (Emmons & Mishra, 2022). Emerging adults often absorb or implicitly recognize their parents' support, even if they do not always express it verbally (Park & Lee, 2021). For example, in qualitative interviews, participants often conveyed feelings of respect and admiration through non-verbal cues, underscoring the importance of understanding the subtleties of gratitude (Brown & Hall, 2021). Family type, gender, and socioeconomic status all play their part in explaining the differences in how appreciation is enacted (Ahmed et al., 2024). Additionally, participants expressed higher degrees of thankfulness when their future time and past-positive perceptions were stronger. On the other hand, those with a larger past-negative time perspective expressed less thankfulness. In summary, both father and maternal care were slightly mediated by two time perspectives (i.e., past-positive and past-negative) in their association with gratitude in young adulthood. Also, the association between maternal care and thankfulness was partly mediated by future time perspective, and the association between maternal control and gratitude during late adolescence was partly mediated by past-negative time perspective. The findings illustrated the unique associations between individuals' thankfulness and maternal control, paternal care, and maternal care. They further indicated that three time frames past-positive, past-negative,

and future may be able to explain the relationship between parenting patterns and thankfulness during emerging adulthood.

Hypothesis

H1 : Young adults are able to sense value of their parents' support when they begin independent living.

H2 : When adults themselves undergo critical life experiences, they realize and value their parents' sacrifices more.

H3 :If parents and young adults communicate openly, it will enhance their relationship.

H4 : In families where feeling and expressing emotions is not a norm, appreciation can be extended in actions and not necessarily with words.

Research Design

The current research applied a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for acquiring rich, in-depth information about the views of emerging adults regarding parental contribution and gratitude.

Sampling Procedure

A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants among the 18–25 years old. The developmental phase was selected since emerging adults are able to have distinct perceptions regarding their relationship with their parents. The research sought to investigate the emotional bond, appreciation, and perceptions of parental support among the university students.

Research Questions

1. What's one thing you feel most thankful to your parents for?
2. Do you think your parents gave up anything like money or comfort for your studies or lifestyle?
3. Was there a moment when you felt your parents didn't understand you? How did you react?
4. How do you usually talk to your parents do you feel comfortable and open, or is it more formal and limited?
5. Can you tell when your parents are tired or stressed? What do you usually do in that situation?
6. Do you think people often forget or ignore what parents do for them? How do you personally show your parents that you're thankful?
7. Do you feel like you should give something back to your parents one day? If yes, how would you like to do that?

Procedure

The research procedure commenced with the topic selection, which centered on how emerging adults are connected with their parents. Once the study variables were defined, the literature on the topic was reviewed thoroughly. Open-ended questions were created, and data were gathered using interviews with university students. Data saturation was achieved through 13 interviews. The answers were transcribed, coded, and analyzed based on thematic analysis. Ethical standards were upheld strictly during the process. Results were presented to participants for member checking to obtain accuracy and clarity.

Table 1 Demographics Charecteristics of Participants

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Year of study	Parental status	Family structure	Place of Residents
P1	19	Male	1st Year	Living with both parents	Nuclear family	Urban
P2	19	Male	1st Year	Living with both parents	Nuclear family	Urban
P3	20	Male	2nd Year	Living with both parents	Nuclear family	Urban

P4	23	Male	3rd Year	Living with both parents	Extended family	Urban
P5	23	Male	3rd Year	Hostelized	Extended family	Urban
P6	20	Female	1st Year	Living with both parents	Nuclear family	Urban
P7	22	Female	3rd Year	Living with both parents	Nuclear family	Rural
P8	22	Female	4th Year	Hostelized	Extended family	Rural
P9	23	Female	4th Year	Hostelized	Extended family	Urban
P10	24	Female	4th Year	Living with In-Laws	Nuclear family	Rural

Table 2

Themes	Codes	No, Of participants (frequency)	Percentage(%)
Nurturance and support	Gave us Birth	4	40%
	Fullfil our needs	6	60%
	Supported	7	70%
	Health and Food	5	50%
	Spend money	6	60%
Support for future success	Sacrifice comfort	4	40%
	Face tough time	3	30%
	Work all conditions	4	40%
	Old-fashioned	5	50%
	Realized their views	4	40%
Misunderstanding &Compromises	Not love	3	30%
	Take Time to tell	5	50%
	Friendly & Openly	7	70%
Belonging ,Trust & Hesitation	Fear from father	3	30%
	Respect	4	40%
	Facial & gestures	8	80%
Perceive Stress & Empathy towards parents	Provide Comfort	6	60%
	Identify& solution	5	50%
	Fullfilling desire	4	40%
Payoff & Rewards	Maintain reputation	6	60%
	Gifts	8	80%
Total	—	10(100%)	100%

Table 3 Results Themes and codes of findings

Research questions	Themes	Coding
Q1,What one thing do you feel most thankful to your parents for?	Nurturance and Support	Gave us birth, good upbringing,fullfil our needs, provide the sense of right &wrong,Educate us,take care of health and food,supported us.

Q2. Do you think your parent gave money or comfort for your studies or lifestyle?	Support for future Success	Parents spend money, sacrifice their peace, comfort zone, needs & desire, work in all conditions, take difficult steps, paid fees, provide laptops & phones,
Q3. Was there a moment when you felt your parents did not understand you? How did you react?	Missunderstanding & compromises	Old-fashioned beliefs, Stuck with it, age gap, communication barriers, realizing their viewpoints with the passage of time, Do efforts to understand, avoid arguments, follow them
Q4. How do you usually talk to your parents? Its more open & limited.	Belonging, Trust and Hesitation	Openly & comfortably talk, Respect as well as friendship, more concern with mothers & fear from father.
Q5. Can you tell when your parents are tired/stressed? What do you usually do in that situation.	Perceive stress & Empathy towards parents in tense situation	By facial expressions, gestures, change in behavior, To reduce stress spend more time, provide comfort zone, find the source of tension & alternatives, outing to divert attention.
Q6. Do you think people often forget/Ignore what parents do for them?	Life responsibilities and Emotionally disconnect	Distance from parents due to (study, job, career) Unconscious forgetfulness not intentional, freedom, privilege, it's our right & their duty as well.
Q7. Do you feel like you should give something back to your parents one day? How would you like to do that?	Payoff & Reward of parental sacrifices	Fulfilling unachieved desires, take care of their health communicate with respectful way, prove yourself the source of pride, maintain reputation in society, give money & gifts.

Discussion

As previous studies have indicated, autonomy starts to set in during the phase of emerging adulthood that commonly occurs between the ages of 18 and 25 years (Arnett, 2022). It is at this stage that youth start becoming more independent in their decision-making and establishing a sense of mutuality in their relationships with others, even parents. In the same way, the present study concurs with this concept, uncovering that young adults slowly begin to identify the give and take principle in family relations.

Nurturance and Support

The results highlight how parents play a unique role in the lives of young adults, a finding supported by earlier research on parental influence and its effect on young adults' emotional and psychological growth (Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000). The subjects of this research stated strong appreciation for the sacrifices they said their parents made, frequently setting aside their own needs and wants for the good of their children and their children's education. According to one of the participants, their parents met every requirement, mirroring the self-determination theory that emphasizes parents' support for enabling autonomy and development (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Future Success Support

This theme supports the universally accepted idea that parental investment and involvement greatly affect children's academic success and future achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). All the participants collectively recognized that the economic and emotional sacrifices of their parents were crucial to their present educational and life successes. This theme obviously shows that participants concur their parents sacrificed their own comfort zones for the bright future of their children. Misunderstanding and Compromises This trend indicates bimodal responses with answers lying more or less equally in both directions. Most adults are opposed to the notion that it is possible to misunderstand parents; they think that their parents are highly cooperative, good-natured, and considerate of their side. They do not quarrel with their parents

Misunderstanding and Compromises

This theme captures the complicated nature of intergenerational communication. Previous research, e.g., Chao & Tseng (2002) indicates that misunderstandings between parents and young adults are prevalent because of variations in generational values and socialization. While some participants pointed out a lack of understanding, others mentioned peaceful relationships. The relationship is comfortable and friendly, and they tell them everything. But two girls participants said they prefer to speak with their mother, while they feel shy or terrified of speaking with their father, fearing his anger or scolding.

Trust, Love, and Hesitation

The findings confirm that love and trust form the core of parent-emerging adult relationship, but certain reservations, especially in communication with fathers, still exist. This also aligns with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), which emphasizes how attachment styles in the early years dictate patterns of communication for an entire lifetime. This theme shows that it is not very far from the truth when we say that we tend to realize our parents' stress through their facial expression, even though they do not directly reveal it to us. This is particularly perceivable during meantimes when all are seated at the table even if the environment appears normal, every single person is quietly preoccupied with their own concern. It is obviously apparent how anxious our parents are. Participants say that they can feel when their parents are stressed. Most often, they observed that mothers attempt to conceal their concerns.

Perceived Stress and Empathy

This theme shows that it is not very far from the truth when we say that we tend to realize our parents' stress through their facial expression, even though they do not directly reveal it to us. This is particularly perceivable during meantimes when all are seated at the table even if the environment appears normal, every single person is quietly preoccupied with their own concern. It is obviously apparent how anxious our parents are. Participants say that they can feel when their parents are stressed. Most often, they observed that mothers attempt to conceal their concerns.

Emotional Disconnect and Life Responsibilities

The conflict between appreciation and the growing demands of life is clearly evident from the literature. A study by Nelson & Padilla-Walker (2013) indicates that while navigating academic, work, and social commitments, it may become difficult for emerging adults to stay close to parents, though sentimental relationships tend to be preserved. The main problem, I believe, is that at this age, emerging adults get very busy with duties such as career development, education and employment. The few instances of disregard for parental sacrifices by the participants also tie in with literature revealing variability in the expression of gratitude in line with personal values, upbringing, and socio-cultural determinants (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Payoff/Reward of Parental Sacrifices

Respondents strongly supported the idea that filial piety, the ethical duty to provide for one's parents should be maintained, a conclusion supported by research on intergenerational reciprocity (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). They stress that just as parents encouraged and cared for them in their childhood, it is the duty of the children to be supportive to their parents in later years. One participant said that even though we can never repay our parents enough for everything they have done for us, we can at least make honest efforts. These are giving them, looking after them, spending quality time with them, and giving them respect and patience, particularly when they become old and in need of special care and consideration. A further general perception was that just as parents brought up their children with blind love, children should respond by taking care of them in their old age without complaint or hesitation. The need to "pay back" parents is especially prevalent in collectivist cultures such as Pakistan, where solidarity of the family is the norm (Hofstede, 2001). The thoughts of married women about preserving their parents' values also support the concept that appreciation goes beyond actual caregiving to symbolic and societal expressions of respect.

Limitations and Suggestions

This research was conducted with only emerging adults over 18 and under 25 years of age because of their accessibility to them and to minimize complications. Only a limited number of students participated, so results cannot reflect the opinions of all young people. Discussing parents' sacrifices may be emotive, so some individuals may have reserved their feelings. And everyone communicates feelings in different ways, making it more difficult to comprehend fully their thoughts. LAST data was collected from only those children who have parents and have to belong to nuclear and extended family. There are numerous other variables that could be examined for parental contribution among emerging adults. The current study opens up avenues for research on perception and appreciation of parental contribution among emerging adults. There ought to be honest and transparent conversation by both parties that can be comprehended by children. Perhaps future studies can be conducted with individuals from various regions and backgrounds so that the findings become more generalizable.

Conclusion

The current research provides evidence for the healthy relationship between parents and emerging adults. The current research, together with the research by other researchers, forms the foundation that can affect positively on parents and adult relationships. The current study reveals that adults possess a good and beautiful relationship with their parents. They believe their relationship is founded on love, trust and comprehension and it provides them the emotional support. Most of the students reported that they discuss freely with their parents about their problems and feeling as well as take into consideration and respect one another. When parents listen without becoming angry, it makes the children feel accepted. Overall, the discussion shows how the perceptions of parental contributions among emerging adults are influenced by emotional attachment, cultural values, life transitions, and empathic development. By basing participant's understanding on proven theories and empirical work, the study supports the premise that gratitude towards parents is not merely an individual feeling but a behavior also supported socially and culturally. Reinforcing such bonds with awareness and mutual actions can potentially promote both family and individual well-being.

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