

Core Family Factors Affecting Children's Development and Socialization: Parental Time Spent with Children

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on childhood, the time spent by parents with their children (PTSC), the level of interaction with other children (CPIL), and the relationship between later academic achievements and the mental health of young adults who recall childhood. Interaction with other children is very important for their social development, and parents' participation is the key factor in this interaction in the family. The results show that parents' time and commitment will affect children's ability to establish good relationships with friends. When parents are active, provide emotional support and help create opportunities to meet other children, it helps to establish good relationships with friends. However, other things, such as cultural norms, social and interpersonal differences, can change the influence of parents on the interaction between children and friends. This paper shows that compared with the interaction with friends and children's academic performance, how parental support actually works and what it will bring in the long run remains to be studied. These studies can help to formulate evidence-based interventions and formulate policies and education plans. The purpose is to help children establish good relations with their peers and achieve all-round social development.

Keywords: Left-Behind Children, Parental Time, Mental Health, Retrospective Study.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced modern society, the existence of parents is very important for the good development of children. The relationship between parents' time spent with children (PTSC) and children's level of interaction with peers (CPIL) is still a hot topic in developmental psychology. Post-traumatic stress disorder refers to the time and way that parents and children do things together, such as playing, talking, caring and studying^[1]. CPIL refers to how and to what extent children get along with their friends, which directly affects their social skills, emotional intelligence and overall well-being^[2].

The existing literature shows that parents' participation plays many roles in children's social development. A good relationship with friends helps to cultivate communication skills, empathy and prosocial behavior. On the contrary, difficulties with friends will lead to social isolation, low self-esteem and other psychological and social problems. In addition, CPIL has a two-way relationship with academic performance and mental health: getting along well with friends can improve the commitment to study and academic success, and academic success can also enhance social skills. On the contrary, problems with friends will slow down academic progress and increase psychological troubles. Prosocial behavior is an important part of CPIL, which contributes to social emotional health and academic success, while bad experiences with friends, such as bullying and rejection, can damage mental health.

The focus of this study is a retrospective report. These young people, aged between 20 and 25, grew up in a family with only one child in China. They remember their childhood and adolescence: parental support, interaction with peers, academic performance and mental health. The data collection includes 40 quantitative records to measure retrospective PTSC, CPIL and academic performance, supplemented by 7 open responses to evaluate stress and mental health. Due to the research conditions, this survey mainly focuses on academic performance, and mental health data comes from open questionnaires. In view of China's unique cultural background-such as the stigma surrounding psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, and the increase of family conflicts related to epidemics-this study integrates literature review, theoretical analysis and empirical evidence to explore the complex relationship between PTSC, CIPL, academic performance and mental health.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on the core relationship between the time parents spend with their children in childhood (PTSC) and the level of children's interaction with peers in childhood (CPIL). It also studies the role of CIP in children's mental health, academic performance and social behavior. Theory of Three Represents' sexual phenomena-children's left hiding, parental control and helicopter parenting-are integrated, which makes the relevant theoretical and empirical results systematically reviewed.

PTSC refers to the time spent by parents in educating children, such as daily care, games, study support, communication, travel and behavior supervision^[1]. The main determinants include parents' working hours, children's gender, family structure (for example, families with only one child) and educational beliefs^[3]. It is important to note that the developmental outcome depends not so much on the duration of nursing, but on the quality of nursing and its applicability to development. Children of different ages need different forms of support, and high-quality nursing follows a clear development gradient.

CPIL shows the quality and frequency of children's interaction with friends in and out of school. This is an important sign to see if they adapt well socially and emotionally. Good CPIL helps children gain more self-confidence, better social skills and better grades in school. It also helps them to cooperate, understand others and resolve conflicts. A bad IPL can make them more lonely, anxious and sad, or lead them to have anti-social behaviors and problems, such as crimes or suicidal thoughts^[4]. Under the cultural background of China, prosocial skills are very important for children's good integration and adaptation^[5].

PTSC mainly affects CPIL in two ways: indirect socialization and direct structure^[6]. Indirect effect is combined with attachment theory and social learning: the warm and supportive relationship between parents and children makes children stronger in society. Direct influence means that parents and friends organize and supervise activities together, but usually the influence is less than indirect influence. Family atmosphere and how to resolve conflicts at home also meet friends. Generally speaking, high quality PTSC is related to higher CPIL. Parents should adjust their children's participation according to their age, reduce the invasive control of adolescence, and support their autonomy^[7].

Insufficient PTSC or poor quality seriously damaged CPIL. Parents of families with only one child often lack comparative experience, which makes short-term or unstable nursing less effective. Left-handed is a typical case: long-term lack of continuous nursing will increase psychological vulnerability, weaken peer skills, reduce academic performance and increase the risk of victimization.

Excessive extension of PTSC without quality support will also damage CPIL. Ineffective nursing will reduce the overall development quality, and excessive confinement in adolescence will lead to parent-child conflict. Overprotective styles, such as strict parental control and parenting helicopters, limit autonomy, encourage anxiety, lack of goals and underdeveloped social skills. Moderate and careful nursing can produce better developmental results. Empirical evidence still shows that the quality of interaction is more important than mere physical existence^[8].

In short, post-traumatic stress disorder mainly affects CPIL through its quality rather than duration; Poor quality nursing, regardless of its length, will weaken peer interaction skills and indirectly damage mental health, academic performance and social adaptability. This review laid a theoretical foundation for the future empirical design, and clarified the family education intervention measures suitable for the cultural and mental health support of children in China.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Under the guidance of the two PTSC models described in the literature review, this study puts forward a main hypothesis: the relationship between childhood PTSC and childhood CPIL is inverted U-shaped. This means that slightly increasing the interaction time can improve CPIL, but if it is too long, it will reduce CPIL. At the same time, CPIL is considered to be positively related to mental health, academic performance and social behavior: the higher CPIL, the lower psychological risk and the better long-term development.

The research design adopts an exploratory direction, rather than seeking a clear causal conclusion. The relationship between dependent variables is influenced by culture, education level, gender, age and other background factors. The purpose is to clarify the development trend and advocate providing a better family environment for children. These data were collected through two online questionnaires from June 21st to June 30th, 2024. The respondents were China adult only children aged between 20 and 25, who provided retrospective reports on their family experiences during childhood

and adolescence, but did not report the history of mental illness. The word “children” refers to the participants’ childhood and adolescence development stages, not their current age. All measurements are based on retrospective self-assessment. Paying attention to the only child eliminates the confounding variables related to brothers and sisters, and improves the representativeness of contemporary social studies in China.

This is a retrospective study, using participants’ memories of the time their parents spent with them, their interactions with friends and their academic achievements during primary and secondary schools. This study mainly adopts quantitative analysis. Questionnaire 1 contains closed questions to measure the duration of PTSC, the frequency and satisfaction of CPIL and academic performance. Using SPSS estimation curve to test the reverse U-shaped hypothesis and show the relationship between variables. Quantitative methods are helpful for objective analysis of numbers, but may not show hidden mechanisms, which is why questionnaire 2 includes open-ended questions, qualitative opinions on participants’ subjective experiences and discussion and analysis to explain quantitative results. In order to reduce moral hazard, lack of flexibility and sampling restrictions, this study does not use face-to-face interviews. Anonymity is maintained by giving random numbers instead of using names, and data is stored safely. Participants can refuse to answer or stop at any time without payment or audio or video recording. The “bypass tracking” program reduces difficult memories, and minors do not participate to avoid moral problems.

By integrating quantitative methods and other qualitative methods, this study explored the internal relationship between parent-child interaction time and peer participation. It provides enlightenment for the study of children’s mental health, academic achievement and social development, and promotes the practice and knowledge of educational psychology.

4. RESULTS

This study uses the retrospective report of the working hours of the parents of the only child in China during childhood and adolescence to estimate the time interval between parents and children (PTSC) and to examine the relationship between PTSC and children’s peer interaction level (CPIL) and academic performance. Because the sample is small enough, we use curve fitting and scatterplot visualization to show the trend of variables.

After deleting the answers from 14 non-only children, there are still 26 valid cases, with a sex ratio of 1:1. Cases with forgotten or unstable parents’ work schedules were excluded from the analysis. No quantitative results reached the traditional statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the relationship between variables is explained by the trend of curve fitting scattering diagram.

The analysis of the father’s working hours (FWT) and the level of peer interaction shows that there is no significant linear correlation during primary school or high school, but the overall trend is negative: the father’s longer working hours (so less companionship) corresponds to a lower peer interaction score (as shown in Figure 1). This confirms the unique contribution of parents to social exploration and the formation of children’s personality.

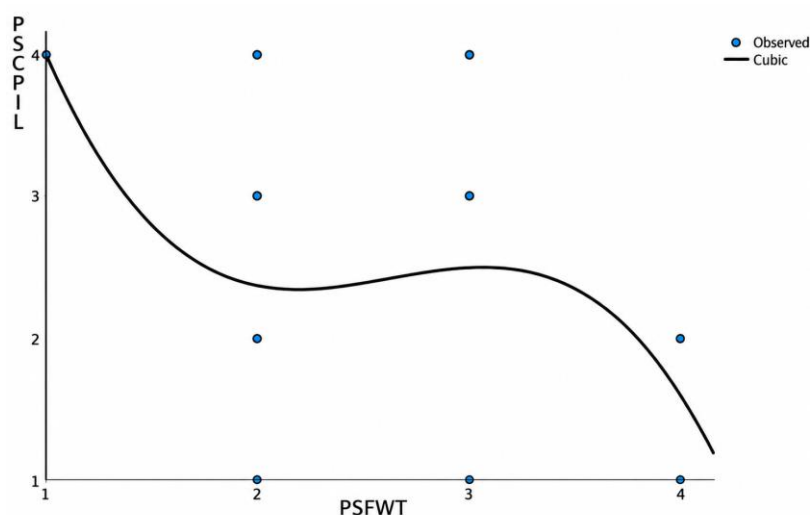


Figure 1. The trend of Primary School’s FWT and Primary School’s CPIL.

Look at figure 2. Mother's working hours (MWT) shows a clear U-shaped inverse relationship with CPIL, primary schools and universities. If the mother works too little or too long (and therefore spends too much or not enough time with her children), it will have a negative impact on the interaction with friends. Moderate working hours are most conducive to social development. Parents' working hours (PWT) also shows a U-pattern contrary to CPIL: if parents spend too little or too much time at work, peer interaction skills will be damaged, which is consistent with the main hypothesis of this study.

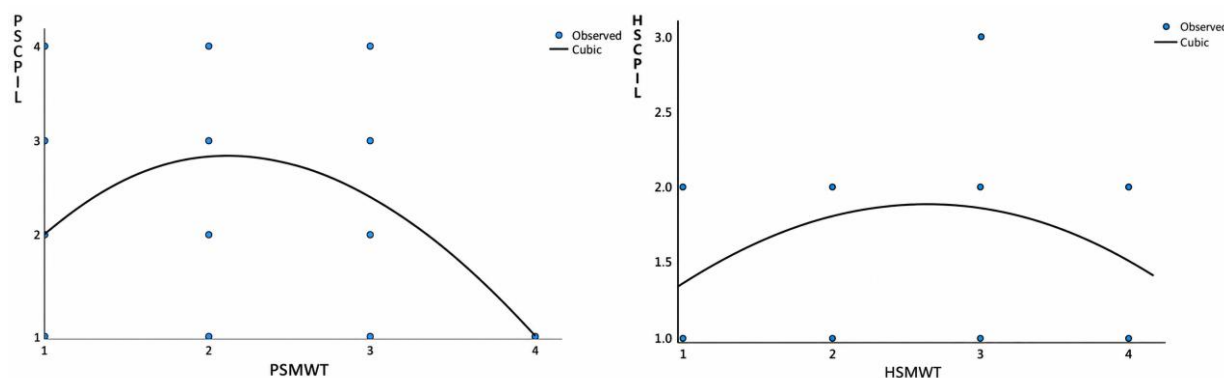


Figure 2. The trend of MWT and CPIL in primary school and high school.

Regarding the interaction with peers and academic performance, the frequency of interaction between peers shows a slight negative correlation with primary school performance, while in high school, we observed an inverted U-shaped pattern. No statistically significant correlation was found, and three main explanations were put forward:

- (1) Academic performance is influenced by the quality of peer interaction rather than the frequency. In this sample, high interaction frequency usually coincides with low satisfaction.
- (2) Academic achievements are multidimensional (including classroom participation and the relationship with teachers), but they are only measured by achievements, which introduces prejudice.
- (3) Academic pressure changes with age: the pressure in primary school is less, and the pressure in high school and high school is greater. How everyone bears the pressure will change the result.

This study has limitations, such as small sample size, limited control over confounding variables, and the fact that it is based on the frequency of interaction rather than its quality. Nevertheless, it confirms that parents' support, interaction between friends and academic performance are related, all of which are shaped by duration, quality and academic pressure.

The research results provide insights for parenting research, social skills development and academic progress of teenagers in China. They suggest moderate and high-quality parental support, taking into account the specific academic pressure at each stage of the school.

5. CONCLUSION

This study reviews the relationship between parents' time and children's (PTSC) in childhood and adolescence-estimated by parents' working hours-among the only children in China who are now young adults, and its relationship with children's peer interaction level (CPIL), academic performance and mental health. All results come from personal memory and show developmental links instead of real-time measurements. The main conclusions are as follows.

The results confirmed the inverse U-shaped relationship between childhood PTSC and childhood CPIL. Too short or too long parenting time will damage the interaction with peers: lack of companionship will limit parent-child communication and hinder the normal development of the relationship, while too much time will lead to invalid participation and increase parent-child conflicts. Only gentle and careful companies can promote the good development of society. Mother's time follows this curve, while father's time shows a negative linear trend, which emphasizes the special role of father in social exploration.

Academic performance has several dimensions, which cannot be completely measured by individual achievements. In addition, the quality of interaction, rather than the frequency, can predict academic performance. In our sample, frequent interaction with peers often reflects low satisfaction, while low-quality communication increases pain and disrupts learning.

In addition, insufficient parental support will reduce the quality of peer interaction and increase mental health risks. Academic pressure also seriously affects academic performance, which is difficult to measure and makes the relationship between variables more complicated.

Despite limitations, such as small sample size and frequency of interaction, this study clarifies the interaction among PTSC, CPIL, academic performance and mental health. It is suggested that appropriate parental support, high-quality interaction, and parents' style adapted to development should be emphasized, and academic pressure should be considered according to the school level to support the comprehensive social, academic and psychological development of teenagers.

6. LIMITATIONS SUPPLEMENT

This study uses a retrospective method and is based on people's memories of childhood and adolescence, but these memories may be affected by memory problems or forgotten over time. All information is measured by these retrospective reports, rather than long-term real-time observation, which limits our ability to establish causality.

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