



Analysis of the Impact of the Parent-Child Relationship on Adolescents' Negative Affect Based on SPSS: The Mediating Effect of the Peer Relationship

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Abstract. This study adopts questionnaire online to survey parent-child relationships, peer relationships and emotional states of 320 junior school students at Grade 7 and Grade 8 in Nantong city, Jiangsu province, 276 valid questionnaires. The Standardized Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale, Parent-Child Relationship Scale, Peer Relationships Scale for Children and Adolescents were used for the study. The collected data were analyzed and processed using SPSS 23.0. Major methods include descriptive statistics, t-test, analysis of variance, Pearson correlation analysis and Bootstrap confidence interval test. The results showed that The results showed that Parent-child relationships not only impact adolescents' negative affect directly, but also indirectly impact adolescents' negative affect through peer relationships, and peer relationships play a partial mediating role.

Keywords: component · SPSS · Bootstrap confidence interval test · parent-child relationship · peer relationship · negative affect · mediating effect

1 Introduction

Junior high school is the budding stage of adolescence, when one's world outlook, view of life and values are initially formed, self-awareness is enhanced, and the risk of depression is also rapidly increased (Cairnsetal, 2014; Zhang G Z et al., 2017).

Depression is a negative emotional state. Negative Affect (NA) is an important component of subjective well-being and an emotional dimension that reflects an individual's subjective experience of tension and unpleasant input, generally including loneliness, pessimism, depression, and anxiety [1], and adolescents in this period are susceptible to negative affect by various factors [2].

Some studies have shown that NA of junior high school students is significantly associated with certain deviant behaviors, and that the unpleasant experiences of junior high school students in their early adolescence are associated with problematic behaviors in schools; individuals with high NA are prone to conduct behavioral problems with poor

peer interaction as well as high aggressive tendency, and they are also associated with anxiety and depression (Wang D, 2011).

How do parents and peers, as important social relationships for junior high school students, impact junior high school students' NA? And what role do they play?

There used to be a view that the interaction between the parent-child relationship and the peer relationship is a compensatory model (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985), namely, a sound peer relationship can be protective or compensatory when adolescents experience a negative parent-child relationship. Another point of view is that the interaction between the parent-child relationship and the peer relationship can be explained by attachment theory, which emphasizes that a secure internal working model developed by a sound parent-child attachment can influence individuals' expectations of other future relationships, and that a secure parent-child attachment sets a foundation for forming a sound peer relationship, which in turn influences adolescents' emotional adjustment (Bowlby, 1973).

Researchers based on group socialization theory believe that, peer relationship occupies an important position and is a determining factor in adolescents' interpersonal networks [3]. Therefore, this study would focus on the impact of the parent-child relationship and the peer relationship on adolescents' NA, and on the mediating effect of the peer relationship for the parent-child relationship and adolescents' NA.

1.1 Relation Between Parent-Child Relationship and NA

Domestic studies have found that conflicts between adolescents and parents are currently prevalent in China, with over 80% of families with adolescents experiencing one or several problems in their parent-child relationships [4].

Previous studies have found that the quality of the parent-child relationship of junior high school students has a positive effect on their mental health development and can negatively predict depression (Kouros et al., 2014). A positive parent-child relationship (that is companionship, understanding, as well as effective communications from parents) can act as an external support, and provide support for positive living among adolescents and enhance their confidence, thus avoiding adolescents from being overly immersed in negative emotions caused by stress (Xiao X et al., 2017).

A Negative parent-child relationship, however, can exacerbate anxiety and depression for adolescents. According to related studies and references, adolescent depression is associated with the non-secure parent-child attachment (Carnelley, 1994). Parent-child attachment is also considered to be an important driver for adolescent depression (Rudolph, 2008). The higher the level of parent-child attachment, the less likely adolescents are to develop depressive mood (Zhang Y L, Zhang Y L, Yang Y, Zhang Y X, 2010; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2014). On the contrary, with lower level of parent-child attachment, adolescents are more likely to develop depression and anxiety, and may conduct other problematic behaviors (Deng L Y et al., 2013).

1.2 Relation Between Peer Relationship and NA

As one of the main social relationships for students' interpersonal interactions, peer relationship plays an irreplaceable role in their growth and development. As individuals

enter adolescence, they gradually alienate themselves from their parents and become more dependent on their peers (Brown, 2004; Collins & Laursen, 2009; Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). According to Yu Guoliang and Xin Ziqiang (2004), peer relationship refers to interpersonal relationship between children of the same or similar ages in shared activities, which are divided into friendship and peer group relationship.

A good peer relationship is positively related to levels of self-esteem (Berndt, Hawkins & Jiao, 1999, Berndt & Keefe, 1995) and negatively related to depression, anxiety and loneliness (Greca, 2005; La Greca & Lopez, 1998; Parker & Asher, 1993). Research from La Greca & Harrison (2005) suggests that a sound peer relationship helps reduce students' social anxiety effectively. It has also been shown that peer support not only positively predicts one's psychological well-being, but also alleviates his or her academic stress to a certain extent, reduces unpleasant experiences such as depression and loneliness, and increases self-confidence.

However, Ladd, Hartup, Bagwell, et al. found that children and adolescents without friends or with low-quality peer relationships are at risk for loneliness, stress, and concomitant developmental psychopathology (Berndt, 2002). Negative peer relationships may lead to additional mental problems, such as negligent acts (Dishion, Andrew & Crosby, 1995) and depression (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

1.3 The Mediating Effect of Peer Relationship

Family and schools are the two most prominent microsystems with a direct impact on the psychology and behaviors of junior high school students; patterns of parent-child interactions migrate to children's interactions with others, and a sound peer relationship has the potential to counteract the negative effect of a poor parent-child relationship on children's psychological health when the parent-child relationship fails to fend off difficulties experienced by children (Xiang M X et al., 2021).

High-quality parent-child communication helps reduce the risk of depression, and peer support and encouragement can further reduce this kind of risk (Zhao M, 2016; Wang Y L, 2017). Peer relationships can moderate a range of negative effects of emotional abuse on psychological resilience, and peer support may counteract harm caused by emotional abuse on psychological resilience (Chen C, 2016). Peer rejection can mediate the effect of parent-child conflicts on adolescent self-esteem, and the negative predictive effect of parent-child conflict on adolescent self-esteem diminishes with increasing peer rejection (Shan N, 2017).

(Tan Y L, 2021) showed that individuals' psychological health is influenced by the parent-child relationship and the peer relationship, and when the parent-child relationship is problematic, a sound peer relationship brings adolescents a greater sense of belonging, emotional support, and can mediate the relation between risk factors and adolescents' problem behaviors. Therefore, the peer relationship plays a mediating role in the parent-child relationship and NA.

2 Subjects and Methods

2.1 Subjects

Questionnaire method was adopted. The easy sampling method took junior high school students of a city in their first and second year as subjects. A total of 320 questionnaires were distributed, 276 of which were valid questionnaires and collected, with a valid rate of 86%. There were 143 boys and 133 girls and 131 Grade-7th students and 145 Grade-8th students. The average age of the subjects was ± 13 –15 years old.

2.2 Research Tools

2.2.1 Scale DASS-21

The simplified Chinese version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) was used in this research. The questionnaire was developed by Lovihond et al. and has 21 items measuring three NAal experiences, namely, depression, anxiety and stress. The depression factor includes 7 entries (3, 5, 10, 13, 16, 17, 21) and is associated with pathological dysthymia, self-abasement, and low level of positive emotions. The anxiety factor includes 7 entries (2, 4, 7, 9, 15, 19, 20) and is associated with somatic and subjective experiences of anxiety arousal. The stress factor includes 7 entries (1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18), and is associated with tension, apprehension, ambivalence and other NAs. A 4-point scale was used (0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = almost always). Higher scores indicate stronger NA. The reliability coefficients of the depression factor, anxiety factor and the stress factor in this study were 0.82, 0.82 and 0.79 respectively, and the internal consistency validity of the total scale was 0.89.

2.2.2 Parent-Child Relationship Scale

The Parent-Child Relationship Scale developed by Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbush (1991) was used to assess the father-child relationship and the mother-child relationship, with 9 items on a 5-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very”. The mean score is used to reflect the parent-child relationship, with higher scores indicating a stronger relationship between the individual and the parent. The Cronbach α coefficients for this scale in previous studies were 0.911 (with the father subscale) and 0.910 (with the mother subscale).

2.2.3 Peer Relationships Scale

The Peer Relationships Scale for Children and Adolescents, developed by Professor Guo Boliang, was adopted to measure the self-perception of children and adolescents in the process of getting along with others. The questionnaire has 22 items, and each item is rated from 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (often), and 4 (almost always), with items 11, 12, 15, 17, 19, 20, and 21 being scored negatively and the rest being scored positively. The higher the scores on the questionnaire indicate the worse the peer relationships. The internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.71.

2.3 Research Procedures

The research was administered, taking a class as a unit, with the support of relevant school leaders and informed consent of the junior high students themselves. SPSS was used to analyze and process the data.

3 Results

3.1 Analysis of the Status of Each Variable

Descriptive statistics was used to examine the current status of the parent-child relationship, NA and peer relationships of junior high school students. The results showed that the scores of father-child relationship and mother-child relationship were 3.69 and 4.15 respectively, and scores of NA and peer relationship were 1.41 and 1.63 respectively. See Table 1 for details.

3.2 Analysis of the Difference of Each Variable Based on Demographic Variables

Independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to examine the differences in junior high school students' parent-child relationship, NA and peer relationships on demographic variables. The results showed that there were significant differences in peer relationships based on gender ($p < 0.05$); there were significant differences in parent-child relationships, NA and peer relationships based on class ($p < 0.05$); there were significant differences in parent-child relationships and peer relationships based on mother's education background ($p < 0.05$); there were significant differences in parent-child relationships, NA and peer relationships based on father's education background ($p < 0.05$); there were significant differences in mother-child relationship based on father's occupation ($p < 0.05$); there were no significant differences in parent-child relationships, NA and peer relationships based on mother's occupation ($p > 0.05$), as detailed in Table 2.

3.3 Correlation Analysis of Each Variable

The Pearson correlation analysis method was applied to investigate the correlation between the parent-child relationship, NA and the peer relationship of junior high school

Table 1. Scores of Each Variable

Variables	N	min	max	M	SD
Father-Child Relationship	276	2	5	3.69	0.77
Mother-Child Relationship	276	2	5	4.15	0.68
NA	276	1	3	1.41	0.43
Peer Relationship	276	1	3	1.63	0.41

Table 2. Difference Analysis of Variables Based on Demographic Variables

Variable		N	Father-Child Relationship	Mother-Child Relationship	NA	Peer Relationship
			M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD
Gender	Male	143	3.74 ± 0.77	4.09 ± 0.72	1.45 ± 0.45	1.69 ± 0.41
	Female	133	3.65 ± 0.77	4.22 ± 0.63	1.38 ± 0.40	1.57 ± 0.42
	t		1.003	-1.617	1.453	2.508*
	p		0.317	0.107	0.147	0.013
Class	Grade 7	131	3.80 ± 0.76	4.24 ± 0.68	1.35 ± 0.42	1.56 ± 0.39
	Grade 8	145	3.60 ± 0.77	4.08 ± 0.67	1.47 ± 0.43	1.69 ± 0.43
	t		2.096*	2.027*	-2.450*	-2.637**
	p		0.037	0.044	0.015	0.009
Mother's Education Background	Bachelor or above	37	4.20 ± 0.60	4.49 ± 0.48	1.30 ± 0.38	1.45 ± 0.38
	Junior College	34	3.64 ± 0.84	4.05 ± 0.79	1.43 ± 0.51	1.62 ± 0.43
	High School or Technical School	128	3.69 ± 0.73	4.21 ± 0.57	1.41 ± 0.42	1.62 ± 0.39
	Junior high school and below	77	3.48 ± 0.79	3.94 ± 0.79	1.47 ± 0.44	1.74 ± 0.43
	F		7.719***	6.490***	1.345	4.302**
	p		0.000	0.000	0.260	0.006
Father's Education Background	Bachelor or above	51	3.96 ± 0.81	4.39 ± 0.57	1.29 ± 0.36	1.50 ± 0.43
	Junior College	32	3.61 ± 0.71	3.88 ± 0.78	1.53 ± 0.53	1.68 ± 0.42
	High School or Technical School	132	3.72 ± 0.73	4.25 ± 0.59	1.40 ± 0.41	1.62 ± 0.39
	Junior high school and below	61	3.46 ± 0.80	3.89 ± 0.78	1.49 ± 0.45	1.73 ± 0.43
	F		4.242**	8.142***	2.841*	3.067*
	p		0.006	0.000	0.038	0.028

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Variable		N	Father-Child Relationship	Mother-Child Relationship	NA	Peer Relationship
			M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD
Father's Occupation	Professionals (teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses and so on)	21	3.82 ± 0.74	4.07 ± 0.74	1.41 ± 0.54	1.63 ± 0.54
	Service Personnel (service attendants, drivers, sales clerks and so on)	10	3.61 ± 0.80	4.14 ± 0.76	1.66 ± 0.50	1.73 ± 0.45
	Workers (factory workers, construction workers, sanitation workers and so on)	107	3.56 ± 0.70	4.01 ± 0.73	1.45 ± 0.43	1.69 ± 0.41
	public institutions, civil servants, government staff	44	3.68 ± 0.90	4.20 ± 0.59	1.40 ± 0.44	1.59 ± 0.41
	Others	94	3.83 ± 0.77	4.32 ± 0.61	1.36 ± 0.39	1.56 ± 0.38
	F		1.682	2.810*	1.372	1.509
	p		0.154	0.026	0.244	0.200
	Mother's Occupation	Professionals (teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses and so on)	22	3.74 ± 0.83	4.17 ± 0.65	1.34 ± 0.41

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Variable		N	Father-Child Relationship	Mother-Child Relationship	NA	Peer Relationship
			M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD	M ± SD
	Service Personnel (service attendants, drivers, sales clerks and so on)	18	3.70 ± 0.80	4.15 ± 0.74	1.47 ± 0.50	1.67 ± 0.40
	Workers (factory workers, construction workers, sanitation workers and so on)	95	3.64 ± 0.76	4.15 ± 0.68	1.47 ± 0.42	1.71 ± 0.42
	public institutions, civil servants, government staff	42	3.69 ± 0.74	4.16 ± 0.58	1.39 ± 0.42	1.54 ± 0.36
	Housewife	35	3.76 ± 0.85	4.33 ± 0.71	1.40 ± 0.45	1.57 ± 0.47
	Others	64	3.73 ± 0.76	4.06 ± 0.73	1.36 ± 0.43	1.63 ± 0.42
	F		0.198	0.716	0.789	1.479
	p		0.963	0.612	0.558	0.197

Note: *** represents $p < 0.001$, ** represents $p < 0.01$, and * represents $p < 0.05$. Same below.

students. The results showed that significant negative correlation existed between the parent-child relationship and NA ($r < 0, p < 0.01$); significant negative correlation existed between the parent-child relationship and the peer relationship ($r < 0, p < 0.01$); significant positive correlation existed between NA and the peer relationship. See Table 3 for details.

Note: According to the peer relationships scoring criteria, higher peer relationships scores represent worse peer relationships. Therefore, with higher parent-child relationship scores, the peer relationship is better and the corresponding peer relationships scores are lower, indicating a negative correlation; with higher NA scores, the peer relationship is worse and its scores are higher, indicating a positive correlation. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis of Each Variable

variable	Father-Child Relationship	Mother-Child Relationship	NA	Peer Relationship
Father-Child Relationship	1			
Mother-Child Relationship	0.625**	1		
NA	-0.349**	-0.339**	1	
Peer Relationship	-0.238**	-0.333**	0.527**	1

Table 4. Mediating Effect of the Peer Relationship

Path	Effect	S.E	LLCI	ULCI
Father-Child Relationship → NA (c)	-0.19	0.03	-0.26	-0.13
Father-Child Relationship → NA (C')	-0.13	0.03	-0.19	-0.08
Father-Child Relationship → Peer Relationship → NA (a × b)	-0.06	0.02	-0.10	-0.03

Note: interval (LLCI, ULCI) excludes 0, indicating a significant path. Same below.

3.4 Mediating Effect Test

3.4.1 The Mediating Effect of Peer Relationship on Father-Child Relationship and NA

With the father-child relationship as the independent variable, the peer relationship as the mediating variable, and NA as the dependent variable, the mediating model diagram shown in Fig. 1 was established, and the Bootstrap confidence interval test was used to test the mediating effect of the peer relationship. The obtained results showed that, in the path of Father-Child Relationship → NA, the Bootstrap confidence interval was (-0.26, -0.13), excluding 0, which indicates that the total effect c is significant; after introducing the mediating variable of the peer relationship, the Bootstrap confidence interval was (-0.19, -0.08) in the path of Father-Child Relationship → NA, excluding 0, which indicates that the direct effect c' is significant; in the path of Father-Child Relationship → Peer Relationship → NA, the Bootstrap confidence interval was (-0.10, -0.03), excluding 0, which indicates that the indirect effect a × b is significant. In summary, the mediating effect of peer relationship accounted for 31.6% (Table 4).

3.4.2 The Mediating Effect of Peer Relationship on Mother-Child Relationship and NA

With mother-child relationship as the independent variable, peer relationship as the mediating variable, and NA as the dependent variable, the mediating model diagram shown in Fig. 2 was established, and the Bootstrap confidence interval test was used to test the mediating effect of peer relationship. The obtained results showed that, in

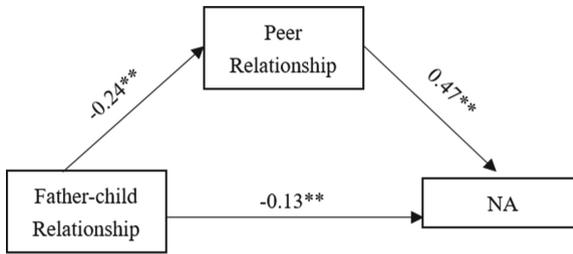


Fig. 1. Mediating Model Diagram of Peer Relationship

Table 5. Mediating Effect of Peer Relationship

Path	Effect	S.E	LLCI	ULCI
Mother-Child Relationship → NA (c)	-0.22	0.04	-0.29	-0.14
Mother-Child Relationship → NA (c')	-0.12	0.03	-0.18	-0.05
Mother-Child Relationship → Peer Relationship → NA (a × b)	-0.10	0.02	-0.14	-0.06

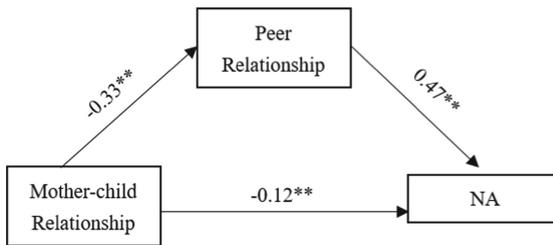


Fig. 2. Mediating Model Diagram of Peer Relationship

the path of Mother-Child Relationship → NA, the Bootstrap confidence interval was (-0.29, -0.14), excluding 0, which indicates that the total effect c is significant; after introducing the mediating variable of peer relationship, the Bootstrap confidence interval was (-0.18, -0.05) in the path of Mother-Child Relationship → NA, excluding 0, which indicates that the direct effect c' is significant; in the path of Mother-Child Relationship → Peer Relationship → NA, the Bootstrap confidence interval was (-0.14, -0.06), excluding 0, which indicates that the indirect effect a × b is significant. In summary, the mediating effect of peer relationship accounted for 45.5% (Table 5).

4 Discussions

The research focuses on the impact of the parent-child relationship and the peer relationship on adolescents' NA, especially the mediating effect of the peer relationship on the relation between the parent-child relationship and adolescents' NA.

4.1 Correlation Analysis of Parent-Child Relationship and NA

Consistent with previous studies, the quality of the parent-child relationship of junior high school students has a positive effect on the development of their psychological health. The higher intimacy of the parent-child relationship, comes the lower NA, which is consistent with the findings of (Kourosetal., 2014) and Wu Nianyang [4]. Significant relation exists between the parent-child relationship status and psychological health of adolescents (Yang T Z, Huang L, Wu Z Y, 2003). High-quality parent-child relationship is an important factor in promoting healthy development of adolescents (Stafford et al., 2016), and adolescents with the poor-quality parent-child relationship are prone to develop adjustment difficulties (Weymouth et al., 2016).

The higher the level of the parent-child attachment, the lower is the likelihood that adolescents will develop depression (Zhang Y L, Zhang Y L, Yang Y, Zhang Y X, 2010; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2014). On the contrary, with lower level of parent-child attachment, adolescents are more likely to develop depression and anxiety, and may conduct other problematic behaviors (Deng, L Y et al., 2013).

A positive parent-child relationship makes children feel loved and respected, develop positive, optimistic perceptions and expectations of themselves, others, and their surroundings, willing to interact with people other than their parents, and form relatively positive peer and teacher-student relationships. Children with a poor parent-child relationship, on the other hand, tend to have negative perceptions and experiences of themselves, others, and their surroundings, which affect their interactions with peers and teachers, and their peer and teacher-student relationships tend to be negative.

Therefore, improving the quality of the parent-child relationship can reduce the risk of NA such as depression, anxiety, and stress, and improve the psychological health of students in their early adolescence.

4.2 Correlation Analysis of the Peer Relationship and NA

The results of the research show that a positive correlation exists between the peer relationship and NA, that is, the better the peer relationship, the lower are the peer relationships scores and the lower is the NA; the higher the peer relationships scores, the worse is the peer relationship and the higher is the NA. This is highly consistent with the study by (La Greca & Harrison, 2005), that sound a peer relationship is effective in reducing students' social anxiety; a negative peer relationship may lead to more psychological problems, such as negligent behavior (Dishion, Andrew & Crosby, 1995) and depressive mood.

The higher the peer relationships scores, the lower is the NA. This is consistent with the findings of Li Yousui (2007) and Sun Xiaojun (2007). In addition, some studies have shown (Zhang Z, 2016) that adolescents with strong NA have relatively poor peer relationships. The reason for this is that adolescents with strong NA tend to interact with adolescents who also have strong NA (Mercer Derosier, 2010), and these adolescents may interrupt their peer relationships because of different levels of intensity of their NA, and they actually have very few interactable partners in terms of peer relationship selection. At the same time, Mercer's study found that adolescents who possessed NAs such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness perceived these NAs as appendages of undesirable factors in peer interactions.

4.3 Mediating Effect of the Peer Relationship on the Parent-Child Relationship and NA

This research analyzed the mediating effect of the peer relationship and found that the peer relationship mediates the relation between the parent-child relationship and NA.

Brown's research suggests that for adolescents, the parent-child relationship has an impact on their peer relationship interactions. The parent-child relationship is the first social relationship of an individual, exerting a profound impact on the individual's future social competence. In families with sound functions, great communication and flexibility in problem solving are crucial for family members when unexpected events appear or urgent problems need to be solved. This has a positive effect on both problem-solving capabilities and interpersonal skills, so adolescents are able to have good peer relationships in school. Conversely, adolescents' capabilities to cope with problems are compromised, and their interpersonal skills and self-perception are limited, making them difficult to maintain sound peer relationships.

Peer relationship partially mediates the relation between the parent-child relationship and NA, i.e., the parent-child relationship not only directly influence NA, but also exerts indirect impact on NA through its effect on peer relationships. Ecological systems theory proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner can provide an explanation. According to this theory, the influencing factors of the environment on the individuals are a set of interlocking structures with individuals as the point of origin. That has a direct impact on individuals is the microsystem proposed in the theory, which includes families and schools that adolescents are directly exposed to. What exert an indirect impact on individuals are factors outside the mesosystem, and the peer relationship is one of them. It means that both the adolescent parent-child relationship and the peer relationship can have an impact on NA, where there is a direct impact of the parent-child relationship and a mediating impact of the peer relationship [6, 7].

5 Conclusion

In early adolescence, the parent-child relationship is gradually replaced by the peer relationship, in other words, the peer relationship has a greater impact on adolescents. A good peer relationship, however, is based on the foundation of the peer relationship formed by an early secure parent-child attachment. The better the parent-child relationship, the lower is the NA and the better is the peer relationship; when a negative parent-child relationship exacerbate adolescents' NA, a sound peer relationship plays a mediating effect in reducing the impact of NA.

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