

# Parent and peer attachment and commitment to school: A correlational research involving high school Iranian students

Karim Sevari\* and Mehrdad Rezaei

Department of Educational Psychology, University of Nour Payam, Ahwaz, Iran.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study the relationship between parent attachment and peer attachment with commitment to school in a sample of 500 female and male students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at a public high school in Bavi County, Khozestan Province. The sampling includes 500 10<sup>th</sup> grade high school students (250 girls and 250 boys) studying in the academic year of 2016-2017 in Bavi County. Multistage random sampling was used to select the sample students. An inventory of parent and peer attachment and a school commitment questionnaire are used to evaluate the intended variables. The data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation analyses and multivariate regression. The results of this study shows that significance level at each of three hypotheses, which is equal to 0.001 for the intended variables, it is less than significance level of test (0.05); therefore, peer and parent attachments have multiple relationships with commitment to school. So, the research results shows that parent attachment and commitment to school, which have high scores, have a positive relationship among these youths.

**Keywords:** Parent attachment, peer attachment, commitment to school.

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\*Corresponding author. E-mail: K\_Sevari@pnu.ac.ir.

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## INTRODUCTION

The constructs of parent and peer attachment and school connectedness are best viewed within the theoretical frameworks of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). In general, attachment theory describes a fundamental normative process in early development defined in terms of behavioral and affective regulation. The most fundamental aspect of Bowlby's attachment theory is its focus on the biological basis of attachment behavior. In fact, Bowlby defends that attachment behavior has the predictable outcome of increasing the proximity of the child to the attachment figure. For Bowlby, the strong tie between the attachment figure and the child, is evident, particularly when disrupted, and does not result from an associational learning process, but rather from a biologically based desire for proximity that arose through the process of natural selection (Cassidy, 1999). Bowlby (1969) suggested also that behaviors of parents toward their children are inextricably linked to the type of

attachments that children develop.

A theory guides the research on school connectedness. Researchers investigating from a social learning perspective, i.e., social control theory (Hirschi, 1969), suggest that adolescents learn social, behavioral, and school-related skills through interactions with peers and adults within social institutions, e.g., a school (Murray and Greenberg, 2006). A second perspective suggests that psychological experiences of having a strong sense of connectedness to a social institution is a basic psychological need that, when met, promotes the sense of comfort, engagement, motivation, and trust.

Students' engagement in school, seen as the experience of important connection of the student to the school, in specific dimensions – cognitive, affective, behavioral and personal agency (Veiga, 2012, 2013), has been operationalized as the extent to which students are committed to school and motivated to learn (Simons-Morton and Chen, 2009) and comes into sight related to

peer relations. Estelle and Perdue (2013) studied the associations between peer support (and also parents and teachers support) on 5<sup>th</sup> grade children, and behavioral (work habits) and affective (school attachment) engagement in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This study indicated that peer support is significantly and positively related with affective engagement. You (2011) found an influence of peers during adolescence, through motivational elements such as *locus* of control and academic expectations; in fact, perceived support provides a sense of motivation and guides students toward academic success.

According to the motivational perspective, positive peer relations are promoters of school engagement as they meet up the necessities of belonging and attachment (Martin and Dowson, 2009; Juvonen, 2007; Wentzel, 1999; Ryan, 1993). Consequently, the positive feeling which are essential in adaptive functioning are observed both in school and public context (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Connell and Wellborn, 1991). The perceptions of peer support appear related to academic performance, school adjustment (Buhs and Ladd, 2001), academic motivation (Wentzel et al., 2004; Altermatt and Pomerantz, 2003) and pro-social behaviours (Wentzel et al., 2004). On the contrary, negative relations with peers come out associated with disengagement and anti-social behaviours (Ma et al., 2009; Buhs, 2005; Wentzel et al., 2004; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000).

Peer acceptance has been positively associated with motivational results, including satisfaction at school, achievement goals, the presence of socially appropriate behaviours (Wentzel, 1994; Wentzel and Asher, 1995). Peer rejection appears related to low interest in school (Wentzel and Asher, 1995) and school dropout (Hymel et al., 1996). Wentzel (1991, 1998) points the importance of peer acceptance for the interest in classes, academic goals accomplishment and behavioral engagement. You (2011) concluding that peer value and academic aspirations have a significant effect on students' engagement, via *locus* of control and academic expectation; these regulatory processes are developed due to perceived peer support and affect behaviour throughout the years of schooling. Furrer and Skinner (2003) examined the influence of sense of belonging on students' engagement and academic performance. Results showed that the tie established with the peers (as well as with parents and teachers) reported by the students was a significant predictor of engagement; the levels of engagement were mediators of the relation between sense of belonging and academic performance. Several authors (Shapka and Law, 2013; Ryan, 2000) found a correspondence between the adolescents' behavior and the one exhibited by their peers, which is supported by the social norms related theories. Martin and Dowson (2009) state that this influence on students' engagement is indirect, by way of internalized motivational beliefs, that is, through the interactions with their peers, academic related beliefs, values, goals and

expectations are interiorized, being consistent with those exhibited by their peers.

Negative relations with peers appear associated with educational difficulties (Juvonen et al., 2003). According to some authors (Buhs and Ladd, 2001), disengagement may reflect a negative treatment by peers, such as victimization and exclusion. Several studies show that negative experiences with peers, such as rejection (Buhs, 2005), absence of friends (Wentzel et al., 2004), aggressions and bullying (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Juvonen et al., 2011; Ma et al., 2009) increase the probability of disaffection from school, as well as school dropout and juvenile delinquency (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). An association between connection with problematic friends and a decrease in engagement (along with family influence decrease) over time was found by Simons-Morton and Chen (2009). Li et al. (2011) indicated that peers' support positively predicts both types of engagement, while bullying behaviours show a negative predictor effect. The purpose of this study is to determine whether parent attachment and peer attachment are predictive of school connectedness in a school-based sample of adolescents in general and special education.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to conduct the study, after making questionnaires, the researcher attended the chosen school in the month of Esfand 2016 (which begins be around February 19, 2016). The statistical population of this research is all 10<sup>th</sup> grade female and male students of public high school in Bavi County studying in the academic year of 2016 to 2017. The data was obtained from 500 students who are chosen from 986 10-grade students of public high school in Bavi County studying in the academic year of 2016. The 10-grade students are chosen because, first, there is no new educational system in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and second, it is determined that 9-grade students have more commitment than 10-grade students, probably due to pressure of entrance examination. There was 20 female and male high schools in Bavi County, including 11 female schools and 9 male schools, 5 male high schools and 5 female high schools are chosen randomly. Next, 50 students are chosen from every school. Totally, 250 female students and 250 male students are chosen. This number of students is chosen because this research wants to follow the previous descriptive researches. After collecting the data, statistical method is used by SPSS software (in computer) in order to understand the results. Descriptive statistical method is used to determine statistical indexes such as mean, standard deviation; reliability method of Cronbach's alpha is used to determine the reliability of tests. Pearson's correlation coefficient and multivariate regression are used to examine the relationship between

variables.

Inventory of Parents' and Peers' Attachment (IPPA): This inventory, developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), includes 24 items aimed to measurement of perceptual attachment level of relationships with parents and peers in adolescents and adults. A self-report inventory with a 5-point Likert scale ranges from completely disagree=1 to completely agree=5. Using this scale, one can measure the degree of attachment of family members to each other and also attachment to peers. Perception of attachment to parents and peers, each have three dimensions: (1) "Communication" measures the individual's experiences about the quality of communication with other members of the family (parents) and peers. (2) "Trust" measures the level of trust that parents or peers have in an adolescent with respect and acceptance of his/her wishes and feelings: and, (3), "Alienation" measures the individual's experiences of negative feelings toward parents and peers. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) measured the reliability of these scale items, which yielded Cronbach's alpha of 0.601.

Commitment to the school questionnaire (Sevari, 2015): This instrument was developed and administered earlier by Sevari among 300 girl and boy students in district one of Ahvaz through exploratory factor analysis. This questionnaire consists of 31 questions and 4 cognitive, emotional, behavioral and informational subscales. In this questionnaire questions 1-7 relate to cognitive commitment, questions 8-17 emotional commitment, questions 18-25 relate to behavioral commitment, and questions 26-31 relate to informational commitment. The reliability of the Cronbach's alpha for components was achieved 0.92; 0.78 for the cognitive factor, 0.83 for the emotional factor, 0.78 for the behavioral factor and 0.76 for the informational factor. Validity of the components was verified and tested through confirmatory factor analysis. The scoring method is a four points scale from '1' for completely disagree to 4' for completely agree. The reliability of the scale of commitment to school by Cronbach's alpha method in this research is 0.741. The hypotheses of this research are as follows:

- There is simple relationship between parent attachment and commitment to school.
- There is simple relationship between peer attachment and commitment to school.
- There are multiple relationships between "parent and peer attachment" and "commitment to school".

## RESULTS

Descriptive findings of this research are shown in Table 1. Mean and standard deviation are respectively 21.99 and 3.51 for cognitive components, 27.63 and 4.14 for emotional components, 19.47 and 3.13 for behavioral

**Table 1.** Variable statistical indexes (minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation) of commitment to school and its components, parent attachment and peer attachment.

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Cognitive	21.99	3.51	7	28
Emotional	27.63	4.14	10	40
Behavioral	19.47	3.13	8	32
Informational	16.29	3.75	6	26
Commitment	85.41	9.78	34	121
Peers	34.76	6.18	12	60
Parents	25.73	5.33	14	60

components, 16.29 and 3.75 for informational components, 85.41 and 9.78 for general commitment, 34.76 and 6.18 for peer attachment, and 25.73 and 5.33 for parent attachment. Furthermore, the minimum and maximum of research variables are shown in mentioned table.

The findings that are related to the hypotheses of research are shown in Table 2.

**First hypothesis (H1):** There is a simple relationship between parent attachment and commitment to school.

Regarding Table 2, it is observed that correlation coefficient of sample is 0.19 for cognitive component and parent attachment, 0.14 for emotional component and parent attachment, 0.15 for behavioral component and parent attachment, 0.16 for informational component and parent attachment, 0.243 for commitment as whole and parent attachment and then significance level is equal to 0.001 for variable of commitment and its components. Therefore, we reject null hypothesis of test and we come to this conclusion that the test is significant and there is significantly linear relationship between parent attachment and commitment to school.

**Second hypothesis (H2):** There is a simple relationship between peer attachment and commitment to school.

Regarding Table 3, it is observed that correlation coefficient of sample is 0.103 for cognitive component and peer attachment, 0.138 for emotional component and peer attachment, 0.211 for behavioral component and peer attachment, 0.169 for informational component and peer attachment, 0.232 for commitment as whole and peer attachment and then significance level is equal to 0.001 for variable of commitment and its components; this value is less than significance level of test (0.05). Therefore, we reject null hypothesis of test and we come to this conclusion that the test is significant and there is significantly linear relationship between peer attachment and commitment to school.

In this research, variables of (cognitive, behavioral, emotional, informational) commitment as criterion

**Table 2.** Matrix of simple correlation coefficients between variables of parent attachment and commitment to school and its components (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, informational).

Variable	Variable	Correlation coefficient	Sig	N
Attachment to parents	Cognitive	0.19	0.001	500
	Emotional	0.14	0.001	
	Behavioral	0.15	0.001	
	Informational	0.16	0.001	
	Commitment	0.24	0.001	

**Table 3.** Matrix of simple correlation coefficient between attachment variables with commitment to school and its components (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, informational)

Variable	Variable criterion	Correlation coefficient	Sig	N
Attachment to peers	Cognitive	0.103	0.001	500
	Emotional	0.138	0.001	
	Behavioral	0.211	0.001	
	Informational	0.169	0.001	
	Commitment	0.232	0.001	

**Table 4.** Findings of regression correlation related to parent and peer attachment and commitment to school.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	69.468	2.884		24.088	0.000
	Parent	0.446	0.080	0.243	5.591	0.000
2	(Constant)	63.313	3.256		19.442	0.000
	Parent	0.350	0.083	0.191	4.243	0.000
	Peer	0.276	0.071	0.174	3.881	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: commitment to school.

variable and attachment variable (parent and peer) as predictive variable are analyzed through SPSS software. The results according to Table 4 are as follows: parent ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F(2.497) = 31.25$ ), and peer ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $F(2.497) = 23.6$ ); parent attachment has higher  $\beta$  ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $\beta = 19.1$ ) than peer attachment ( $P < 0.05$ ,  $\beta = 17.4$ ) in order to explain commitment to school.

## DISCUSSION

As we can see in Table 2, the results show that there is simple relationship between variables of parent attachment and commitment to school. Therefore, the first hypothesis of our research (namely, "there is simple relationship between parent attachment and commitment to school") is demonstrated. The results obtained from this test are in line with results of researches conducted by Dixon (2007), Ma (2003), Juvonen et al. (2003) and

Eccles et al. (1995). In order to explain this hypothesis, we can say that students, who live in family under guardianship of mother and father, are dependent on parents' behavior toward them for their personal traits such as social behavior and their compliance with rules and law. If father and mother behave very well with the children, satisfy their needs, and support and protect them, the children are attached to the parents a lot, this attachment to the parents cause the student to comply with rules governed in the school; as child has some commitments at home, he has such commitments to school and its rule. In order to maintain this commitment, there should be cooperation between parents and teachers.

As we can observe in Table 3, the results show that there is a simple relationship between peer attachment and commitment to school. Therefore, the second hypothesis of the research (namely, "there is relationship between peer attachment and commitment to school") is

also confirmed. The results of this research are in line with studies conducted by Dixon (2007), Ma (2003), Wentzel et al. (2004) and Blum and Libbey (2004). In order to explain this hypothesis, we can say, when children reach adolescence, they spend a lot of time with their friends and peers. Since peers have a lot of effect on students, such that they can bring their friends in different groups, so if peers, the students choose for themselves as friends, are brought up in large committed family, these students consequently become committed ones and follow the rules of society and school. If the peers are brought up in uncommitted large family, this trait can be transferred to others and this non-commitment causes them to disobey rules and law and to have no commitment to society. Therefore, peer attachment requires the family to apply right upbringing to children, meanwhile teacher of school should make effort for education and training of children.

As observed in Table 4, the results show that there are multiple relationships between "parent and peer attachment" and "commitment to school". Therefore, the third hypothesis (there are multiple relationships between parent and peer attachment and commitment to school) is approved. The results obtained from this research are in line with studies conducted by Ma (2003), Li et al. (2011), Bond et al. (2007), Mouton et al. (1996), Blum and Libbey (2004) and Eccles et al. (1995). In order to explain the hypothesis, we can say that in fact, attachment increases the commitment. On the other world, the one of things to increase commitment is attachment, in order to increase such commitment in the school; this attachment should be created in the students towards their parents and peers. In order to create such commitment, the parents should behave with the children very well, and support and protect their children, and then the children can be attached to their friends. This attachment increases commitment to the school and other communities. Furthermore, multivariable analysis of variances performed between attachment of female and male students with commitment to school and its (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, informational) components.

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