Case and Literature Review on the Conflict between Adolescents and Parents

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This article will review some cases on the conflict between Indonesian adolescents and their parents. Review will be pointed out in the most nature of conflicts that are raised between adolescent and their parents in Indonesia, followed by the characteristics of the Indonesian teenagers and parenting styles. It will be closed by the review on the theory of adolescent development and parenting style.

Key Words: parenting style, adolescence development

INTRODUCTION

The very long-standing theory of G.S. Hall (1904) mentioned about the adolescent as a period of heightened stressful with a lot of turbulence inside. Hall also considerate on the 3 aspects supported the stressful moment, which are: (1) conflict with parents, (2) mood disruption; and (3) risk behaviour. By his study in late 1904 on the adolescent storm and stress period, Hall assumed that the storm and stress conditions are as the characteristics among the adolescents. However, according to the research on how storm and stress attack adolescents also showed that the degree of storm and stress condition is much more affected by cultural variation during the stage of adolescents. The cultural aspects are also depended on those three aspects above. When the conflict between parents and adolescents are less, the storm and stress condition will also decrease. And, when the mood disruptions and the risk behaviour of adolescents are less, the condition will also be less storm and stress.

This paper will be highlighting the conflict between parents and adolescents, because it will be very much affected by the cultural aspects. The issues will also drop a line to the issues of parenting style, which is definitely affected by the cultural aspect. All of the issues on how adolescents and their parents communicate to each other will be wrapping by the theory of adolescent behaviours and parenting style management in certain culture, especially in Indonesia.

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PARENTING STYLES

A common problem in parenting style is that a particular style of child rearing does not change once it is established when children are young. Meanwhile, in the reality the children development has come to the next level of stages (Bigner, 1989). Parents need to make adaptation in the child rearing strategies, methods and interaction when the children become adolescents. Parenting during this stage is very challenging. Parents should discover how to help adolescents to make their own decision, but at the same time should also guide them to minimize potential harm to both themselves and others. Parents need to understand adolescents feeling and point of view, without a good understanding, communication between parents and adolescent can be broken.

The classic study if style used in parenting adolescents was conducted by Glen Elder (1962). The study involves 7,400 adolescents from homes where there two parents. Elder classified parenting style on a continuum of control in form of 7 styles of parenting system. The 7 styles are; (1) autocratic, in which teen are allowed no freedom to express their opinions or make any decision affecting the conduct of their lives; (2) authoritarian, in which adolescents are allowed to express their opinion but parents continue to make decisions affecting their lives; (3) democratic, in which there is a sharing of power between parents and adolescents, but with parents having veto power over the decision made by the adolescents; (4) equalitarian, in which parents and adolescents having equal power and status and decision are made jointly; (5) permissive, in which adolescents make most of their own decisions, but parents have input into decision making process; (6) Laissez-faire, in which adolescents take complete responsibility for making decision about their lives, with parents only contributing information and opinion that teens may freely disregard; and (7) ignoring, in which parents take no interest in their adolescent’s behaviour.

Parents are usually quite reluctant to quickly release an adolescent from their control. Although they realize this must eventually be done, they prefer it to happen more slowly than most teens believe it should. The reluctance is because parents fear that they will no
longer needed by adolescent. Beside the change on family system is considered to destroy the cohesiveness that is built before.

The normal conflict between adolescent and parents may be exacerbated by two factors, which are; (1) cultural impoverishment, refers to parent’s fear that rapid social changes are making the patterns, rules, beliefs and values supported on their family system obsolete; (2) personality constrictions, refers to conflicts adults experience as their adolescents makes developmental progress towards greater individuation. Parents fear they are no longer needed by adolescent, and this may threaten their deeply ingrained sense of generativity.

Although family share the same environment, but family is composed of individual members whose perceptions on the family condition may differ from one to another. Such differences may contribute to family stress and have implication for the well being of adolescents (Paikoff, et.all. 1993). Common topics of conflict between parents and adolescents which used to rise during adolescent life span are shown in Table 1. Below.

Table 1. Topic of Conflict between Parents and Adolescents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Type of Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Parents and adolescent conflict over the adolescent performance, behaviour at school or school events and attitude toward school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values/morals</td>
<td>Disagreements here may depend on the teenager’s age and sex. Frequent areas of conflict are sexual values, political views, career objectives and educational goals, as well as appropriate friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family interaction</td>
<td>The style and nature of family relationships are often source of conflict. Of particular concern is the manner in which the adolescents treats other family members (e.g. with lack of respect, concern or sensitivity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>One of the sorest points of contention between adults and teenagers is the adolescent apparent lack of responsibility. The adolescents may have to be reminded constantly to perform tasks may forget about commitments until the last minute, may fail to keep up with the homework, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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This may well be the most difficult area of communication between parents and teenagers. Conflicts relate to dress style, hair length, general appearance, lack of manners, choice of friends, type of social activities, and the like.

*(Bigner, 1989, Family Influence in the Developmental Psychology)*

Thus, while parents continue to try to influence their adolescent’s behaviour, as in the past, meanwhile adolescence is the period of emerging individuation from family *(Igra and Irwin, 1996)*. As the result, in seeking independence and autonomy from their parents, adolescents undergo changes in roles and status that will redefine their place in society and may lead to confrontations and conflict with parents *(Holmbeck, 1995)*.

In 2003, research was conducted by Ofra Mayseless, et all to 18 years old teenagers, revealed that authoritative parenting practices were advantageous also in respect to adjustment of an authoritarian context, where as the authoritarian parenting was more unfavourable. It was supported by recent study that also showed the better outcome on authoritative parenting practice, in China, Korea and Hong Kong by some authors. It is believed to be related to the culture of each region. Authoritative parenting styles are connected to the use of power-assertive control, which might in line with the culture and family functioning of those regions. The finding suggested relating between parenting style and cultural or family function, to choose the better parenting style to be implemented.

**ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT (1): STORM AND STRESS**

Golinko *(1994)* mentioned that adolescence comes from the Latin verb “adolescere” which is mean by “to grow up” or “to grow to maturity”. This stage is characterized by the beginning of puberty and ending at the beginning of adulthood. This stage used to call as the bridge between childhood and adulthood. At this stage, a large number of changes are taken place. Hall, G.S. *(1904)* then calls it as a stage of storm and stress.

To support Hall *(1904)* assumption on stress during adolescence, Kiell *(1964)* also proposed that adolescent is a time of great turmoil and external disorder. Furthermore Keill *(1964)* mentioned that the turmoil moment is a universal phenomenon, and only can
be moderated through cultural determinants. Meanwhile, Barnett (1970) uphold that adolescents is in anxiety producing developmental process, where the important tasks are to leave the childhood innocent and to acquire a personal distance from social needs and aspiration of the family. These tasks seem to require a good adjustment to face the traumatic possibilities.

Eysencks (1969) on his research of extraversion and introversion strongly stated that adolescents suffer from **sturm and drang** which is express in the higher score of N (neuroticism), E (Extroversion) and P (Psychoticism) of his scale. All those three dimensions are indicating the tendency of neuroticism, psychoticism and extroversion. The score for adolescent among other group of age (adult and children) are the highest.

Anna Freud (1946), the daughter of the great psychologist, Sigmund Freud, had the same characteristics for adolescents as a period of psychic disequilibrium, emotional conflict and erratic behaviour. On the other hand, adolescents are also egocentric and self centred, where they belief so much that everything in this world focused on them. It cause increasing of Id demand over the ego and superego, and create the psychic disequilibrium. If the Id, Ego and Superego conflict is not resolve during the adolescence, will result an emotional disturbance. In her final words, Freud (1946) mentioned that the harmony among id, ego and superego is possible and will occur finally in most normal adolescents. To overcome the problems, superego needs to be developed during latency period, but not by inhibited the instinct too much. And finally, the ego needs to be sufficiently strong and wise to mediate the conflict between id and superego.

Later on some researchers in psychology find out that although the storm and stress condition in the adolescence are normal, but it still need to be solve. Petersen, 1993 pointed out that all those problems will not disappear automatically, but should be solve persistently.

**ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT (2): SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY**

The most well known psychologist who mentioned about the psychological task of each level or stage of development is Erickson (1968). He stated that the chief psychosocial task of adolescent is the achievement of identity. Identity itself has many components such as sexual, social, physical, psychological, moral, ideological and vocational
characteristics, which will compound the whole self. The main task of adolescence according to Erickson (1968) is to confront the crisis of identity versus role confusion. To become a mature adult adolescence must seek for their special and unique characteristics. These special characteristics will meld the adolescence identity, so that it should be recognized and mastered. Nevertheless, the identity crisis is rarely fully resolved in adolescence period, and the issues carry on a long the adult life.

Some degree of identity confusion, according to Erickson (1968) is normal, but it will be disturbed if adolescence can not resolve his/her identity crisis until mid-twenties. In adolescence the need to find ways in using the skills that have been acquired. Subsequently, adolescences have to come up with at least three major issues: (1) choice of an occupation; (2) the adoption of values to believe in and live by; and (3) the development of satisfying sexual identity. Failing to resolve those three major issues, can lead to psychological hazard in the future life (Erickson, 1968).

In relation to what Erickson has mentioned, James E. Marcia (1980) also gives explanation for identity statuses. Marcia used identity statuses as a term for stages of ego development that depend on the presence or absence of crisis and commitment, during adolescence period. Crisis is a period of conscious decision making related to identity formation, while commitment is a personal investment in an occupation or system beliefs. Marcia also found the relationship between identity status and such characteristics as anxiety, self-esteem, moral reasoning and patterns of behaviour.

In conclusion, Marcia mentioned four identity statuses that might emerge during adolescence’s life: (1) identity achievement, which is characterized by commitment to make choice following a crisis. During this period, adolescences spent in exploring alternatives; (2) Foreclosure, which is occurred when a person who has spent some time considering alternatives (that is not being in the crisis) is committed to other people’s idea; (3) Moratorium, which is occurred when a person is currently considering alternatives (in crisis) and seems headed for commitment; and (4) Identity diffusion, which is characterized by the absence of commitment and lack of serious consideration of
alternatives. These four categories are not permanent; they may change as people continue to develop (Marcia, 1980).

If we look upon furthermore on what is the task of adolescence, bring up by Havighurst (1970) are mentioned as follows: (1) achieving new and more mature relations with age mates of both sexes; (2) achieving a masculine or feminine social role; (3) accepting one’s physique and using one’s body effectively; (4) achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults; (5) achieving assurance of economic independence; (6) selecting and preparing for an occupation; (7) preparing for marriage and family life; (8) developing the intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence; (9) desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour; and (10) acquiring a set of values and ethical system to guide behaviour. If all of those tasks will be overcome by the adolescent successfully, he or she will have a matured social competency.

According to Erickson (1964) establishment of a sense of personal identity is based on the understanding of one’s self or personality, which is composed of many related aspects. Adolescents will learn these aspects through experimentation and exploration in a variety of experiences. Role confusion as opposite of identity formation is a fragmented idea of the self that results from the inability to integrate the various aspects of the self into a unified personality. To illuminate the process of role confusion, Erickson affirmed that a clear idea of personal identity fails to materialize in certain situations, for example, when adolescent’s efforts to establish self identity are punished or discounted by parents.

HOW PARENTING STYLES CAN DEAL WITH ADOLESCENT NEEDS

In the present day, adolescents have a special life style that perseveres independently from adults. It seems that this life style is a strategy to individuate from family and all adults. In the other hands, adults who are worried about these differences, try to convince adolescent that the value they are adopted is not acceptable. These differences are frequently manifested as power struggles, and called by Generation Gap.
Conflict between parents and adolescents use to happen because of the parental attempts to exert controls that teens view as unfair. Most adolescents concern on how much freedom over their own conduct and activities they have (Chand, Crider & Willets, 1975). Meanwhile, Feldman & Quatman, 1988, mentioned that parents and adolescents clash about the age at which teens should be allowed to do certain things.

**SOME CASES ON CONFLICT BETWEEN PARENTS AND ADOLESCENT IN INDONESIA**

Indonesia as one of the ASIAN country has a very specific and unique customs in acting upon everyday life, including on how to raise a children. Parents are the highest rank on authority in the family. Children have to be complied with the parent’s policies, without any further arguments. Children have to learn to manage their behaviour upon adult, submitting their ego and even more children are cultured to be not assertive. Sometime children have to say yes, whenever they want to say, and vice versa. This tradition does not give any problems when children are young enough, but will become a very big problem when ever they are grown up to be teenagers.

As we are acquainted with the characteristics of adolescence stage of development, which are full of changes in every aspects such as cognitive, affective and emotion, moods, orientation, and especially the physical changes. In the early period of adolescence is characterized by the onset of puberty. Holmbeck et.al (1995) and Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn (1991) mentioned it as the acute and rapid biological changes involved and affecting the adolescents feeling as well as the relationship with parents. Some young people have trouble in handling so many changes at once, and may need some help in overcoming dangers along the way. More over adolescence is time for seeking identity, which makes the teenagers need to be acknowledging for their power and authority. This situation, generate a great hazards to their physical and mental well being.

During this period, there is a confounding moment. In one side, adolescents wish to show their own self existence and capability, because it is the time for them to seek for identity. But in the other hands, a great deal of changes, as well as their condition for not fully has the capacity in handling the problems need to be accompanied by adult. In consequences,
adolescents used to pretend for not requiring the help of adults. Parents or other adult figures, who directly lend a hand, will be refused by them.

In the circumstances of Indonesian, especially Javanese cultures and traditions, adolescents need to be more conceded to the parents and sometimes have to hold back their need to expand themselves. Of course, this situation can stimulate conflict between parents and adolescents. Even though most of the adolescents conceal their feelings, but can be blown up some when. To make the illustration clearer, I would like to raise 2 different cases on how Indonesian teenagers facing their problems in relation with their parents.

**Case 1: Being Mistrust by Parents**

Rere, a 15 years old girl who is very active use to spend her time in school for extra curriculum activities. She was appointed to be the Chair Women of the Student Union Association since last year. Beside her activities, Rere also spend her spare time to extend her knowledge and paradigms, by exploring the book and internet in the library. Her activities of course soak up her time. She uses to reach house in the evening, and indulge her self with her favourite activity, reading novel in her bedroom.

Rere parents feel that her daughter was so much lost her existence. They feel that Rere does not have enough time to get along with the family, and barely to communicate intensively. They thought that Rere, now becoming an out of control daughter. They used to interrogate Rere with particular questions that were filled up with suspicions. Rere parents, especially be suspicious of the internet surfing activities, since they read a lot of articles and news on the cyber sex issues.

Every time parents interrogate on those matters, Rere felt to be distrust. So for of her life she tries to keep her self from doing misbehaviour. She feels very unfair and discriminatory. She disputed all her parents’ prejudices, by withdrawing from family communications. Further more, Rere parents believed that something was very wrong with their beloved daughters. Since then the conflict between parents and daughter becoming more tense.
Case 2: Upholding the “Best Child” Crown

Amir is the bright children. He always gets the best grade in his school. He is cherished to be the courteous boy. His parents adored him so much. They always considered Amir to be the best example amongst other children. Amir aware of his condition, even more he takes pleasure in to be the “best child” of his parents. He is really proud of this achievement that he holds so long.

Nevertheless, in the middle of his adolescence moment, he was really in love with his classmate. He can hold his feeling any longer. He needs to express it in front of her. And luckily, his love was responded positively by his lovely classmate. The two teenagers then involved in the affection relationship.

Meanwhile, Amir’s parents used to convey that love during teenager is hazardous. According to Amir’s parents, love during teenager will ruin his achievement. But, Amir could not stand to hold his love. He can not deny the feeling that was blossoming inside his heart. As a reason, he used to lie to his parents to cover up his conditions. Moreover, the more he should latch his heart from his love, the more desire he felt.

As a result, he really lost his fortitude to learn in school. This condition becoming even worst, when he kept lying to his parents on his school grade that is actually decreased from time to time. Amir suffered from his love and guilty feeling in the same time, and he failed to maintain his achievement, even though he still has his “best child” crown.

Discussion on the cases

Both cases are existed in Indonesia adolescent life, nowadays. The first case used to occur because there are lack of communication between parents and teenagers. Both parents and teenagers used their own judgments to deal with the situation. Sometime, when teenagers do tell parents the truth, parents are likely to learn and use information about other teenagers, than accepting what is happen in our child. Parents in Indonesia, rarely change their parenting style and practice, as the child reach another milestone of the development span. They way parents handle teenagers will be much the same with the way they handle young children, meanwhile, adolescence is the period to emerge self identity.
The parent’s model of communication, both constructive and destructive, becomes the model for the adolescents. Even if they are hiding away in the bedrooms with headphones, but still they pick up the general emotional atmosphere in the house. Teenagers can feel very suspicious when they are interrogated all the time. At these models, teenagers can not catch how to be respectful. The bases of communication with the adolescent should be consisted of “trust”. There will always be some aspect of the adolescent lives that parents know nothing about it. Parents can not control every single step of the teenagers. Moreover, teenagers also have a good way to keep secret from parents when they want and feel need to do. The only thing parents can do is by spreading out the trust in communication to adolescents.

Nevertheless, since in Indonesia, parenting styles are more authoritative and paternalistic, in this condition, parents really hold the authority of the family. Adolescents have to obey, with out any objection, to the rules the parents made. If, for some reason (sometime even the good reasons), teenagers can not comply with the regulation, they will counted to do misbehaviour. Teenagers rarely have a chance to explained their condition and opinion. Mostly the parenting style is so directive.

If we try to see Rere’s case, she will feel distrust. Her effort to keep herself away from bad influence, and involve in the very constructive activities are not worth for the parents. She really feel downs and useless. Particularly, when parents suddenly come with negative label for her that they got from other references instead of her own.

Meanwhile in the second case of Amir, is the more popular case in Indonesia. Parents use to grant that the teenagers will do at least the same standard behaviour as they are. Respecting teenager’s right to be his or her own person is very essential. Exploring who the teenagers are and defining that their differences from parents even though still staying connected are the key formulation in treating teenager. If parents give more chance for teenagers to develop quite naturally, teenagers will honoured their lives even better.

Indonesia parents, like any other parents in the world want to protect their teenager so much from pain, suffering and bad influences. But in fact, parents can not do that time to time. And more over, if parents constantly protect teenagers from doing mistakes, parents
will teach them not to trust their own decision, and seems to sabotage teenager’s ability to learn from their own experiences. Parents have to remember that as the child enters adolescence, the personal qualities and traits become more firmly established.

In the case of Amir, he did not have a space to tell the truth about what he is doing, because he is so afraid of losing the label of “good child”. While in nature, teenagers are secretive and sometime even have the desire to challenge themselves to do something different. In this occasion, we have to provide the teenager with the space to feel free to tell us the truth about what happening in their world, without any judgments and negative labels. This condition will lead the teenagers to be more respect to their own selves, and at the end will show the way to achieve positive self concept.

We do believe that by mastering positive self concept, teenagers will prevent themselves from negative influences. Teenagers with positive self concept will take account their own objectives in deciding to do something. This type of teenager will not be easily influence by other or external factors.

References:


