

## **Parental monitoring and Self-disclosure of Adolescents**

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**Abstract:** *This is a review paper that intends to examine the relationship between parental monitoring and self disclosure of adolescents. Parenting is a purposeful action of parents towards their children which consists of a combination of behaviors, feelings and expectations that are unique to a particular parent and a particular child. Parental monitoring (tracking and surveillance) of children's behavior is considered an essential parenting skill. Studies show that well-monitored youths are less involved in delinquency and other norm breaking behaviors. New advancements in technology, mass media and internet have increased the challenges of effective parental monitoring. As a result importance of self disclosure increases manifold. Voluntary disclosure from child enables parents to know more about him/her and also helps in building an atmosphere of trust and honesty towards each other. The paper presents a description of the factors that facilitates or impedes the process of self-disclosure. Gender differences in self disclosure are also discussed in the paper.*

**Keywords -** *Emotional closeness, Parent-child relationship, Parental monitoring, Self-disclosure.*

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### **I. Introduction**

With globalization the concept of personal space is emerging and expanding very fast. Children demand personal space for themselves where they don't like any interference. Parents also try to provide them enough physical and psychological space so that they can grow and form their own identity but at the same time parents are also aware of the fact that adolescents have not reached that level of maturity so that they can manage things on their own. Their relative immaturity, heightened emotionality and eagerness to become independent may take them on a wrong path and lead to devastating results, such as- cyber crimes, drug addiction, juvenile delinquency and sexual harassment. So parental monitoring and supervision is must in this age. However, it is a challenging task for parents. They have to monitor their adolescent offspring without giving any indication to them that their wisdom and abilities being doubted. Even a slightest feel of being doubted or monitored by parents may shatter the self confidence and self-esteem of the child and may break the bond of trust between parents and child.

Parent child relationship is one of the longest lasting social ties human being establishes. Development and adjustment of a child/adolescent is greatly dependent upon the qualities of relationship they have with parents. Literature on family studies emphasized more on family processes (quality of parenting and relationships within the family) that contribute to determining children's well-being and outcomes rather than studying family structures (numbers, gender, sexuality and co-habitation status of parents).

Parenting is a dynamic process not a fixed state therefore it needs continuous assessment of the child's need, abilities and situational demands. These assessments and adjustments are not possible without an adequate and accurate knowledge of the child's whereabouts. Therefore parents try to know more and more about their child. There are mainly three ways to do this-

**1.1 Parental Source of Knowledge about Their Children-** Parents use many strategies to know about their children but there are basically three main sources which help them properly. Parental control is one of them. It is also known as autonomy granting, means in this, Parents could impose rules and restrictions on their children's activities and associations there by controlling the degree of freedom children have to do things without telling them. Another one is parental solicitation/ monitoring, in which parents could ask their children and their children's friends for the information. And the third one is child disclosure, in this child could tell them spontaneously without any prompting about where they are during their free time, how they do in school, whether they keep secrets from them, who they socialize with and what they do when they go out at night etc. All the three strategies have their own advantages and disadvantages. For example parental control seems to be an affective technique in some crucial situations but when it is adopted as a general strategy it may also limit the learning opportunities for children and result in low level of self-confidence and child's dependency on parents even for minor decisions of life. New advancements in technology, mass media and internet have increased the challenges of parental monitoring. Children get influences from many different directions and it is difficult to keep them away from such influences. As a result importance of self disclosure increases manifold voluntary disclosure from children's enable parents to know more about them and also helps in building an atmosphere of trust and honesty towards each other.

Initially people were thinking that for child's betterment parent should be strict and ruler kind, many researchers also emphasized on it, like- in a study, Snyder and Patterson (1987) suggested that parents must give children a set of rules about where they may go, with whom they may associate and when they must be home and then check-up and track compliance with those rules and take effective disciplinary action when the rules are violated. At the same time period one more study came which reported "poorly monitored adolescent tend to be antisocial delinquent or criminal". But in a study Hirschi (1969) suggested that the parent's Psychological presence in the child would keep the child from behaving badly, but that may not be achievable if the child's point of view and possible reactions are not psychologically present in the parents as they interact with their child. Stattin & Kurr also examined the relationship among child disclosure, monitoring, solicitation and control. & they found parent and adolescents agreed most on child disclosure, less on monitoring and parental solicitation & least on parental control. Recent studies reveal that parents' direct control over children's behaviour is not as important as the youngsters' own voluntary disclosure of information about their lives. Thus this study suggests that a bidirectional model of parent-child interactions is needed. Now days, parent promotes and encourages SELF DISCLOSURE from children, because Voluntary disclosure from child enables parents to know more about him/her and also helps in building an atmosphere of trust and honesty towards each other.

**1.2 Self Disclosure-** Self disclosure is an interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another. According to Jourard and Jaffee (1970), Self disclosure is the act of revealing personal information to others. Sidney Jourard argued that openness in at least one significant relationship was a prerequisite for a healthy personality. Self disclosure or wilful disclosures (Jourard 1971) aims –"to let another person know with no shadow of a doubt what you have done, what you feel, etc."

There are two types of disclosure- Personal self disclosure -Disclosure about oneself (I had a terrific day at work). It gives relationship partners "up to date" information about what each persons is thinking and feeling. And relational self disclosure -disclosure that focuses on one's relationship with another person or interactions with others (I can't imagine a better way to spend this holiday weekend than with you!). It also informs partners about the state of their relationship and how they are getting along. – Cf. Waring, 1987

**1.3 Characteristics of Self Disclosure-** There are several characteristics of self disclosure like- it relates to the development of intimacy in human relationships as well as plays an important role in constructing what kind of relationship individuals have with each another (Harvey & Omarzu 1997). A child's disclosure to his or her parents is related to the child's perceptions of overall quality of family communication. Studies shows, greater disclosure in relationship shows greater involvement (emotional), liking, feeling of intimacy and relationship satisfaction. Fitzpatrick, 1987 reported that self disclosure and openness as incompatible with asserting autonomy in their personal relationship. Self disclosure, depending on a reaction of relationship partners, also plays an important role in validating self worth and personal identity.

**1.4 Facets of self-disclosure-** In his studies Omarzu, 2000 describes three facets of self disclosure- one is Breadth (refers to the variety of topics a person willingly discloses to others. It can also refer to the various contexts people use to communicate-e.g. Internet, telephones). Other one is Duration (Duration is usually the amount of time people spend sharing personal information with others, however duration can often include the longevity of a relationship as well. Self-disclosure increases with the duration of a relationship). And last one is Intimacy (Intimacy in self-disclosure is the individual importance people place on the topics they discuss).

**1.5 Functions of Self Disclosure-** Derlega, et al. (1993) indicated five functions: emotion expression, self-clarification, social-validation, relationship development and social control. Later on Ando (1990) added **intimacy accommodation** to these five functions, and divides the total of six functions into two categories: - One is Personal function (emotion expression, self-clarification, and social-validation). And second is Interpersonal function (relationship development, social control, and intimacy accommodation)

**1.6 Positive-Negative Sides of Self Disclosure-** Self-disclosure is significant in human relationships in a sense that the reciprocity nature enhances social intimacy in terms of creating relatedness, liking, and respect among people. Self-disclosure is also beneficial in interpersonal relationship in a way that it creates close relationship and maintains an individual's psychological well-being (**Collins & Miller, 1994**). Although self-disclosure is a catalyst in bringing people closer together, it can inflict tension resulting to social isolation as well. One study on disclosure of HIV status to one's sexual partner, Parsons, VanOra Gomez (2004) found both positive and negative consequences. Negative consequences included rejection, stigma, loss of intimacy, and threats to personal well-being.

Collins and miller (1994) conducted a Meta analysis review documenting 3 distinct but overlapping mechanisms that account for the link between self disclosure and relationship closeness- People disclose more to some one whom they like. People like someone more who discloses to them. People like someone more to whom they have disclosed personal information.

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984), in a study found that 15 years old spending 25% and 17-18 years old spend 15% of waking time with family members. The teenagers became particularly angry when their self- boundary was repeatedly invaded by parental requests to perform task representative of parental values. Adolescent may disclose less to parents because the content may become less acceptable. These findings suggest that reduced self-disclosure in adolescent is a part of developmental process of separation and individuation in which the parents and the adolescent both plays a major role. Youniss & Smellar (1985) found that adolescent boys and girls talk to both mothers and fathers about schoolwork, future plans and social issues but they don't communicate much about issues like dating. Finkenauer et al 2002 also found that adolescent self disclosure was negatively associated and secrecy was positively associated with emotional autonomy as assessed on Steinberg and Silverberg's (1986) emotional autonomy measure.

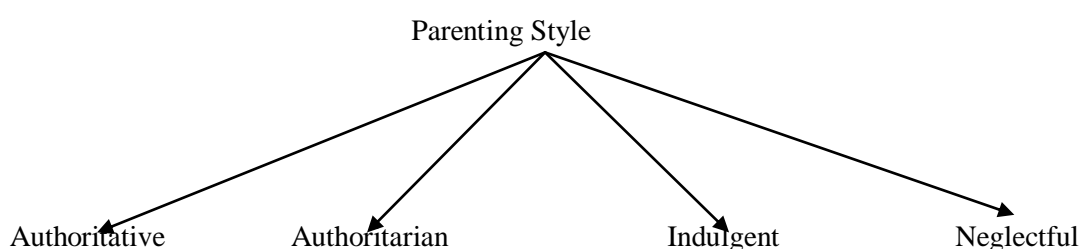
## **II. Factors affecting Self disclosure-**

**2.1 Parenting Style** - is a psychological construct representing standard strategies that parents use in their child rearing. Diana Baumrind describes four basic elements that could help, shape successful parenting

Responsive Vs. Unresponsive

Demanding Vs. Undemanding

On the basis of these 4 basic elements Baumrind describes 4 types of parenting style-



According to Darling and Steinberg (1993) parenting styles must be distinguished from parenting practices— behaviors defined by specific content and socialization goals (e.g. school achievement).

**2.2 Parental Acceptance** - Parental warmth is a degree to which parents are accepting and responsive of their children's behavior as opposed to being unresponsive and rejecting.

**2.3 Parental Control** - Parental control is a degree to which parents place limits on children's behavior and the extent to which these restrictions are enforced. Parental control has two types- Behavioral control and Psychological control. Behavioral control refers to parental behavior that attempts to control or manage children's behavior. Psychological control refers to control attempts that intrude into the psychological and emotional development of the child (thinking process, self expression, emotions and attachment to parents). According to Vieno, Alessio; Nation Maury et al (2009), parenting practices (e.g., parental monitoring and control) have direct effects on parental knowledge and antisocial behavior. Parenting style (e.g., parent-child closeness), on the other hand, is directly related to adolescent self-disclosure, which in turn is positively related to parental knowledge and negatively related to adolescents' antisocial behavior.

**2.4 Attachment pattern-** In a study Mikulincer, Mario; Nachshon, Orna classified 352 undergraduate Israeli students into secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment groups, and their differences in trait like measures of self-disclosure willingness and flexibility and in disclosure reciprocity and liking of hypothetical or real partners were assessed, result show that both secure and ambivalent people disclosed more information to, felt better interacting with, and were more attracted to a high discloser partner than a low discloser partner. In contrast, avoidant people's self-disclosure and liking were not affected by the partner's disclosure. Secure people showed more disclosure flexibility and topical reciprocity than ambivalent and avoidant people.

**2.5 Gender-** Research on self disclosure within families has focus almost exclusively on adolescent – parent communication. Generally mothers appear to receive more disclosure than fathers and daughter appears to disclose more than sons. (Norrell, 1984) .

Girls freely disclose more than do boys to their parents. Parents solicit more information from girls than from boys, according to children but not parents. Although girls report- being controlled more than boys, parents report controlling boys more than boys. Boys report better relationships with their parents than girls. Stattin and Kerr, 2000

Researchers on the basis of their own observation, suggested that girls as compared to boys voluntarily disclosed more information to parents. Females reported more emotional closeness and self-disclosure than males. Women are more likely than men to be the recipients of others disclosure (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Furthermore, men primarily disclose superficial information, whereas women disclose meaningful information (Payne, 2001). A person's willingness/ reluctance to disclose reflects the culture of society and individual life experiences. (Jourard, 1971).

**2.6 Personal Traits and Self Disclosure-** One central issue in studying self disclosure is the effect of individual differences. Sharing of information through self-disclosure is an adaptive strategy for humans to connect and relate oneself to society at large. Studies related to self disclosure and relationship development show, extraverted people should be more comfortable initiating self disclosure for the purpose of developing relationships. By contrast, as past studies suggest, introverted individuals tend to have greater concerns for personal privacy (Webster, 1998, Zweig & Webster, 2003). Past studies have also demonstrated a positive association between extraversion and self disclosure in face-to-face as well as online communication.

**2.7 Privacy and Self Disclosure-** Privacy is viewed as a process of boundary regulation, controlling how much (or how little) contact an individual maintains with others and adjustment of self-disclosure outputs and inputs is itself a boundary regulation. The extent of control one maintains over this exchange of information contributes to the amount of privacy one has in a social relationship. Reconceptualising self-disclosure as a form of boundary adjustment in the maintenance of privacy may provide a useful framework for integrating the self-disclosure literature.

**2.8 Self esteem-** Another major determinant of self disclosure is self-esteem (Sahlstein & Allen, 2002). Self-esteem is often measured by the number of positive or negative attributions people make about themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). Two major aspects of self-esteem are competence (is the degree to which people believe in their abilities) and worth (is the extent to which people consider themselves to be of value to others). High self-esteem individuals attribute positive events to skill whereas low self-esteem individuals attribute positive events to chance (Baumeister, 1993). Self-disclosure can be affected by an individual's self-esteem (Dolgin, Meyer, & Schwartz, 1991; Sahlstein & Allen, 2002). A person low in self-esteem is not likely to be as self-disclosing as someone high in self-esteem because of the amount of interpersonal risk involved in disclosure. When people disclose their intimate thoughts and feelings, they become vulnerable to embarrassment and risk damaging their self-esteem (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Because high self-esteem people believe in their ability to communicate well, they are less restricted than are low self-esteem people from sharing personal information (Vera & Betz, 1992).

### **III. Consequences of self disclosure-**

**3.1 Adolescents Family Life Satisfaction-** Adolescent family life satisfaction is defined as the extent to which adolescents perceive their families in a positive manner. Adolescent's life satisfaction is strongly correlated with their self-disclosure. Adolescent who are more satisfied with his/her families engage in greater emotional disclosure with their parents and are more compliant with parental expectations and report greater quality of life. Greater emotional disclosure is linked to greater compliance with parental expectations and better quality of life.

**3.2 Trust-** Trust in itself is formed on level of certainty dependence and degree of accurate knowledge about other people in the relationship. Our friends, family members and spouses are trustable because with a fair degree of certainty and confidence we 'know' them- that is to say, we are aware of their accurate personal details and information. The general rule is that lower the level of uncertainty the more intimate is the relation.

**3.3 Self disclosure and Interpersonal relationships-** The provision of intimate personal information is often linked to significant psychological or social consequences. Self disclosure has long been recognized as essential in establishing and maintaining relationships. Research found that as people exchange intimate information about themselves, they develop stronger interpersonal links in both the real world (Fehr, 2004) as well as in the cyberspace. Prior studies also found self disclosure as an important communication practice that facilitates personal growth (Jourard, 1971), relationship development (Fehr, 2004), group acceptance and social integration.

**3.4 Emotional autonomy-** self disclosure was negatively associated and secrecy was positively associated with emotional autonomy as assessed on Steinberg and Silverberg's (1986) emotional autonomy measure.

### **IV. Discussion & Conclusion-**

The lack of self-disclosure has a negative impact, mainly on the adolescent because of its possible repercussions. During adolescents, this factor can induce isolation, errors caused by a lack of knowledge, blocking of communication, etc. Self disclosure is a main factor in the initiation, maintenance and deterioration



of relationship. Studies show that close relationships can help a person maintain or enhance their level of self esteem by providing emotional and social support. Usually characterized by trust, intimacy and stability close relationships are often very personal and caring. After reviewing the literature regarding this topic, there are some suggestions for further studies in this field.

Although we get studies on adolescents disclosure, but self disclosure research is largely done in the context of social relationships such as spouse and friends. Studies addressing self disclosure of adolescents usually look for its association with behavioral disorders, so relationship between self-disclosure and parenting needs to be explored further. Mostly studies have been carried out in Euro-American context. So studies in Indian context are very few. Studies (Stattin and Kerr, 2000) report differences in the context to which adolescents disclose to their mothers and fathers. This aspect can further be explored. Besides this, the effect of personality on self-disclosure has not been fully explored. Since little attention has been given to the relationship of parental monitoring and self-disclosure among adolescents, this study aims to examine the relationship between various aspects of parenting behavior and adolescents' self-disclosure. An attempt would be made to compare the parental knowledge of mothers and fathers of the child's whereabouts and their way to exercise control over the child.

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