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In a sample of 2918 adolescents aged 12 to 24 years, the relation between parental and friends' social support was studied, specifically with regard to emotional problems. In addition, age and sex differences were examined. Results indicated that parental and friends' support seem to be relatively independent support systems. Although the degree of perceived support changes in the expected direction (with parental support decreasing and friends' support increasing) during early adolescence, parental support remains the best indicator of emotional problems during adolescence. The effect of friends' support appeared to depend slightly on the level of perceived parental support, with the high parental support group showing a slightly positive effect of friends' support, and the low parental support group showing a negative effect of friends' support.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research in the Netherlands has shown that 13 to 27% of Dutch young people experience serious emotional problems (Diekstra *et al.*, 1991; Meeus, 1994b), including depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, social isolation and suicidal thoughts. Similar figures have been found in other western countries (e.g. Offer, Ostrov, Howard, & Atkinson, 1988; American Medical Association, 1990). Emotional problems increase during adolescence, and can become chronic for a considerable number of adolescents (Laufer and Laufer, 1984). In general, girls have more emotional problems to cope with than boys (Kandel and Davies, 1982; Kienhorst, 1988; Meeus, 1993a; White, 1989). Given the extent and the consequences these problems can have for further social adaptation, it is clearly of both social and scientific interest to investigate the determinants of emotional problems in adolescence. In this article, we look at the relations of adolescents with their parents and peers, and the influence these relations may have on the development of emotional problems. First, we will look at the relational changes in adolescence and the results of empirical research on the relation with psychological well-being. Subsequently, data from a Dutch study will be presented.

Relational changes in adolescence

During adolescence, the network of “significant others” is restructured (Meeus *et al.*, 1991). In childhood and in early adolescence, the central position in this network is occupied by parents. Although relations with their peers are also important for the social functioning of children, the relationship with their parents dominates during this period. In the course of adolescence, relations with peers assume increasing importance. Friends gradually come to occupy just as central a position in the relational network as the parents. This can be seen, for instance, in research on social support: over adolescence, the perceived support from parents either remained constant or decreased, whereas the support from peers was seen to increase (Cauce, Reid, Landesman, & Gonzales, 1990; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992; Meeus, 1989, 1993a).

At the same time, there is a change in the nature of the relations with parents and peers. The “childlike” bond with parents develops into a more equal relationship between adolescent and parents; in this process peer friendships form an important source of support (Sabatelli and Mazor, 1985). Research on group development in adolescence suggests that the importance of the peer group may decline again in late adolescence (Brown, Eicher, & Petrie, 1986; Dunphy, 1963). At this time, courtships probably begin to occupy an important place in the personal network.

Changes in the relationships with parents and peers in adolescence may be different for girls and boys. Research on social relations during adolescence has frequently revealed that girls generally report receiving more social support than boys (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). In addition, it has been suggested that girls tend to have fewer but more intensive contacts, whereas boys have a more extensive network but largely consisting of more superficial relationships (Bryant, 1994; Vondra and Garbarino, 1988). However, other studies have found no sex differences (Coates (1987) in Belle, 1989; Oliveri and Reiss, 1987; Shulman, 1993).

Relational changes and psychological well-being

How important are these shifts in the relational network for the psychological well-being of young people? Most investigations in this area have found that support from parents provides a better indicator of positive development than peer support (Barrera, Chassin, & Rogosch, 1993; Dekovif and Meeus, 1995; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Nada Raja, *et al.*, 1992). Good relationships with parents are found to be significant for positive self-esteem (Blyth and Traeger, 1988), social competence (Cauce, 1986) and general well-being (Greenberg, Siegel and Leitch, 1983). There are indications of the importance of supportive relationships with peers too, mainly same-sex friendships (see, e.g., Hirsch and DuBois, 1992).

But how are the relationships with parents and friends, and their respective importance for young people’s well-being, related to each other? In answering this question, 3 different points of view can be distinguished. Some claim that parents and peers represent opposing interests in the adolescent’s

struggle for autonomy. This view leads to the prediction that parental bonding should correlate negatively with peer bonding (Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986). This “conflict hypothesis” can be found in sociological youth studies of the so-called “parent-peer conflict” (Meeus, 1994a). In relation to emotional problems, this view may be translated into a *compensation model*: the emotional problems of young people who get little support from the parental home can be overcome by resourcing good friendships. According to the conflict hypothesis, this compensation is quite likely: those who experience little social support in the relationship with their parents will probably turn to their friends for such support and succeed in doing so.

In contrast to this view, it is suggested that relationships with parents and with peers correlate positively. According to Bowlby’s theory of attachment (Bowlby, 1973) for example, the quality of the attachment to parents determines other relations of attachment, including those with peers. The “better”, i.e., the “safer” a child’s attachment to its parents, the better it will be able to connect with others. Grotevant and Cooper (1985, 1986) formulated their connection hypothesis in accordance with this viewpoint, proposing that young people who enjoy a good bond with their parents are best able to develop as independent individuals. In a healthy, affectionate parent-child relationship parents are able to stimulate the autonomy of their maturing children. With regard to the psychological well-being of adolescents, a *reinforcement model* can be derived from this approach: young people who have a good, supportive relation with their parents are better able to build supportive relationships with friends, which would in turn be reflected in higher psychological well-being. In contrast, young people who experience a lack of social support in the relation with their parents are less well able to build supportive relationships with friends and thus will not be able to compensate in peer friendships for the lack of support in the relationship with the parents.

A third point of view can be found in the work of Berndt (1979), who states that family and peers form 2 wholly independent “social worlds”. Attachment to parents is independent of attachment to peers, and the relative significance of either depends on the importance for the self-evaluation of the adolescent. A comparable idea was put forward earlier in the so-called ‘situational hypothesis’ (Brittain, 1968) which proposed that parents and peers both had an influence on young people, but in different situations. Starting from

a relative independence between relations with parents and with peers, the support of parents and friends, according to such an *additive model*, should each provide its own separate contribution to the psychological well-being of adolescents.

It is difficult to reach an unequivocal judgement of these 3 different approaches on the basis of existing empirical research, since the different studies, based on different ways of operationalizing concepts, different measuring instruments, and differences between samples, are not always comparable. The conflict hypothesis lacks adequate support from empirical research (Meeus, 1994b). There is some support for the connection hypothesis (e.g., Armsden and Greenberg, 1987; Nada Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992), but there is also support for the idea that relationships with friends in adolescence form a relatively separate world that is not determined by the relationship with parents (Brittain, 1968; Cauce and Srebnik, 1990; Kandel, 1974; Kandel and Lesser, 1969; Meeus, 1989, 1994b; Reed, McBroom, Lindekugel, Roberts, & Tureck, 1986). Other research results do not fit within any of these three models. Nada Raja *et al.* (1992) compared young people with low and high scores for attachment to parents and friends with respect to the development of different kinds of problems. As regards problems of attention and behavior, only attachment to parents was found to have a (positive) influence. In the case of depression, however, results showed a remarkable interaction between attachment to parents and attachment to friends: young people with a poor score for parental attachment and a good attachment to friends scored highest for depressive feelings, considerably higher than youngsters who scored badly for attachment to both parents and friends. This interaction could be termed a “negative compensatory effect”, because it operates contrary to the expected.

Recently, comparable interaction effects were described by Mounts and Steinberg (1995), between the influence of (the style of upbringing by) parents and (the behavior of) friends on the behavior of adolescents. The positive influence of a friend who performed well at school was found to be stronger among adolescents with relatively more authoritative parents. At the same time, the negative effect of a friend who took drugs was stronger with youngsters whose parents had brought them up in a less authoritative style. Although these data related to variables other than support and well-being, they indicate a

similar interactive influence of the 2 kinds of relations with which we are concerned here.

In addition, there is the question whether the 3 models are equally valid for adolescents at different ages. In general, age differences are to be expected in the explanatory strength of each of the models due to the fact that in adolescence the quality of the different relationships (parents, peers) is fundamentally changing. It may, for example, well be the case that the relative independence of relations with peers and parents %and thus the additive model %is stronger in older adolescents because the distance between both social worlds increases as adolescents get older. Developing equality in the parental relationship on the one hand and growing competence in establishing mature friendships with peers on the other hand could also lead to the opposite prediction: the supportive nature of both kinds of relationships (e.g., with regard to psychological well-being) may correspond more closely in late adolescence and thus the reinforcement model may be better suited to explain the results in older adolescents. In contrast, it might be that older adolescents have learned to develop supportive relationships with friends due to social experiences outside the home and thus the compensation-model could prove to best fit the oldest adolescents. It is difficult to formulate sound hypotheses about the age specificity of the different models on the basis of empirical studies so far, as the cited studies cover different ranges of age. As a result, it is unclear whether the studied relationships change over the course of adolescence. Unraveling this issue is, therefore, one of the goals of this article.

Given the sex differences mentioned earlier, both in the area of emotional problems and that of social relations, it is plausible that the connection between social support and psychological well-being also differs between boys and girls. Holler and Hurrelmann (1990), for example, found that in relation to general health and well-being the significance of "social sources" is different for boys and girls. Girls reacted to family conflicts by way of psychosomatic complaints more strongly than boys, whereas among boys, social position within their peer group correlated with psychosomatic complaints more strongly. In addition, former studies found that girls are better able to develop supportive relationships with friends (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). As a result, the impact of peer relations might differ for

girls and boys. In the analyses presented in this article, attention will, therefore, also be given to the occurrence of sex differences.

The research question

This investigation will address the question of how relational changes in adolescence, e.g., changes in social support, are linked with emotional problems. On the basis of the literature cited, we can formulate the following concrete questions and hypotheses:

- 1. Does a shift in social support take place during adolescence?* It is anticipated that the support given by parents declines, and that the support of friends increases, as adolescents become older (H1).
- 2. How is the support of parents related to the support of friends?* In view of the different positions taken on this correlation we are unable to formulate any clear hypothesis. In addition, we will explore whether this relation changes as adolescents grow older.
- 3. How are parental and friends' support related to psychological well-being?* We anticipate that for both parental and friends' support, the greater the support, the higher the level of well-being (H3a). It is expected that the connection with parental support will be stronger than the connection with the support of friends (H3b). Further, we will examine the possible interaction between the effects of parental support and support of friends. In doing so, we want to assess the suitability of the aforementioned models (compensation model, reinforcement model, additive model) in explaining the interrelation between these 2 sources of social support.
- 4. Do the effects of parental and peer relationships change during adolescence?* It may be assumed that the effect of the relationship with parents on the adolescent's well-being will decline with increasing age (H4a), whereas the significance of peer friendships, on the contrary, will increase (H4b). We will also look at age differences in the correlation between parental support and friends' support in relation to well-being, to assess the validity of the 3 different models in explaining the effect of parental and peer support in the different age groups.

5. *Are there sex differences in the connection between the support of parents and friends on the one hand and well-being on the other?* It is anticipated that the connections will be stronger in girls, since emotional support seems to play a greater role in the social relations of girls (H5). Whether changes in their relations with parents and friends during adolescence are different for boys and girls is a question that will have to be explored; so far it is difficult to formulate any clear prediction.

METHOD

Sample

Data for this study come from wave 1 (1991) of a wider longitudinal project, the "Utrecht Study of Adolescent Development (USAD) 1991-1997" (Meeus and 't Hart, 1993). A national sample of Dutch adolescents aged 12 to 24 was drawn from an existing panel of 10,000 households. The respondents were interviewed in their homes. After the interview, they were given another questionnaire to fill out on their own and send back to the research organization. Our data come from this questionnaire, which was returned by 95% of those interviewed. The questions on parental and friends' support and emotional problems were fully completed by 2589 young people. The sample consisted of 1193 boys and 1396 girls. Four age categories were represented: early adolescence (between 12 and 14, $n = 549$), middle adolescence (between 15 and 17, $n = 798$), late adolescence (between 18 and 20, $n = 645$), and post adolescence (between 21 and 24, $n = 597$). Approximately 80% of the adolescents were living in the parental home, and 20% were living on their own. The educational level of the respondents was as follows: 17% low, 42% modal and 41% high. About 47% had a religious affiliation and 53% did not.

Measures

Parental and friends' support.

Perceived levels of social support received from parents and friends were measured by the role-relation method (Fisher, 1982; Meeus, 1989). The question asked was “when you are having problems in relations with someone else, or when you are feeling lonely, who helps you? Please note that this question refers to problems in relations with others, for example when you are quarreling, when someone does not like you or when you are feeling lonely.” The adolescents were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale the degree of support they received from a standard set of reference persons (father, mother, friends, best friend, acquaintances, etc.) when such problems arise. Since this study focuses on the relations with parents and friends, factor analysis with support from father, mother, best friend and other friends was performed, resulting in a clear two-factor structure which explained 83.3 % of the variance. Friends' support loaded on the first factor and explained 48.9 % of the variance; parental support formed the second factor, explaining 34.4% of the variance. The relevant factor loadings were all higher than .90. Hence, we constructed a measure for parental support (father and mother) and a measure for friends' support (best friend and other friends).

Emotional problems

This study considers 4 self-report measures of adolescent mental and physical health.

- a) A shortened version of the General Health Questionnaire (HGQ) (Goldberg, 1978; Kienhorst, Wilde, van den Bout, & Diekstra, 1990; Meeus, 1993a) measures the degree to which psychological stress and depression have recently been experienced. It consists of 2 subscales: psychological stress (6 items) and depression (4 items). The respondents were asked to indicate on a 4-point scale [1=not at all to 4=much more than usual] the extent to which each symptom had been experienced during the past 4 weeks (e.g., feeling tense and nervous; feeling unhappy and dejected). Both scales have a high internal

consistency (alphas were .86 and .83 for Psychological stress and Depression respectively). The mean score was derived for each subscale.

- b) The Cantril ladder (Cantril, 1965) measures the feeling of general well-being and happiness. The respondents were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale how they generally feel. [1=very badly to 10=very well].
- c) The Mini-VOEG (Joosten and Drop, 1987) assesses the general physical health and complaints in bodily functioning. It consists of 13 items which can be answered by "yes" or "no." The internal consistency was .76.
- d) The tendency to have suicidal thoughts was assessed by one 4-point item: "Have you in the last 12 months thought about committing suicide and putting an end to your life?" [1=never to 4=very often](Diekstra *et al.*, 1991).

These indicators of adolescent emotional problems were highly interrelated (correlation coefficients ranging from .29 to .73). In order to determine whether it is possible to obtain 1 score for the construct Emotional Problems, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis, using the 5 scale scores as variables. Analysis resulted in 1 single-factor solution, with 54.1% of explained variance. All variables loaded more than .60 on this factor. Thus, each adolescent was assigned a factor score, derived by using the short regression method, for the construct Emotional Problems.

Procedure

The families were recruited by a professional survey research institute from an existing panel of 9000 households, representative of the Dutch population. The data were gathered by means of both interviews as well as questionnaires. The analyses performed for this study were based on data from written questionnaires only.

RESULTS

Shifts in social support in adolescence

The extent of perceived parental support is no different for boys and girls ($O=67.2$ and 66.1 respectively), whereas the extent of support from friends does differ: girls experience more support from their friends ($O=66.7$) than boys ($O=56.7$), ($T(2587)=-11.6, p < .001$). To assess possible shifts in parental and peer support during adolescence, ANOVAs were performed using perceived parental support and support of friends as dependent variables. Independent variables were age and sex. Age effects were found with respect to both parental support ($F(3) = 17.29, p < .001$) and peer support ($F(3) = 18.33, p < .001$). A sex difference was only found with respect to peer support ($F(1) = 129.52, p < .001$) but not for parental support ($F(1) = .90, ns$). With respect to both parental and peer support, significant age \times gender interaction-effects were found ($F(3) = 3.25, p = .02$ for parental support, and $F(3) = 6.96, p < .001$ for peer support). Analyses for boys and girls separately reveal that the relationship between age and both types of social support is linear in boys, whereas for girls this linearity is absent for peer support and much smaller (although significant at $p < .05$) for parental support (see table 1.1).

Figure 1.1 shows the age differences in both parental and peer perceived support for boys and girls separately. In boys, parental support declines with increasing age, whereas support from friends increases, with the eventual result that both forms of support are seen to be of roughly the same magnitude. These shifts, however, take place between the ages of 12 and 17, after which there is little further change. Hypothesis 1 is thus partly confirmed. In girls, however, there is a comparable shift between the ages of 12-14, but after the age of 14 no clearly visible patterns of age-related differences are found in parental support. For peer support on the other hand, a significant curvilinear effect is found, indicating a rise in peer support in early adolescence, a decline in peer support in middle adolescence (between ages 16 and 18), followed by a rather stable level of peer support at older ages (a quadratic model of peer-support on age fitted best with $F(1393) = 15.04, p < .001$). In addition,

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there is a greater difference between the 2 kinds of support among boys than among girls

Table 1.1. Test of Linearity of Age-Effects (Regression) on Parental and Friends' Support for Boys and Girls

	b	F	sig F	N
Parental Support				
Boys:	-.17	33.57	.000	1193
Girls:	-.05	3.31	.069	1396
Total Sample:	-.10	26.95	.000	2589
Friends' Support				
Boys:	.19	37.84	.000	1193
Girls:	.01	.31	.580	1396
Total Sample:	.09	22.17	.000	2589

($d = 10.56$ and $-.57$ respectively ; $t(2587) = 9.64$; $p < .001$). Moreover, in girls, peer support exceeds parental support in the 15-17 age group ($t(423) = 4.49$; $p < .001$), while in boys, the support of parents remains greater than peer support through the two youngest age groups (12-14-year-olds: $t(261) = -13.8$; $p < .001$; 15-17-year-olds: $t(373) = -7.08$; $p < .001$). For both boys and girls, no difference is found between parental and peer support from age 18 onwards.

The correlation between the support of parents and friends

Parental and friends' support are found to correlate positively, though the correlation is small: $r = .16$ ($p < .001$). Whether this correlation changes during adolescence, was tested by means of regression analysis using friends' support as the dependent variable and parental support, age and the parental support \times age-interaction as the independent variables. The interaction effect appears to be not significant ($b > .026$, $p = .179$), indicating that the correlation between both kinds of support does not change with age.

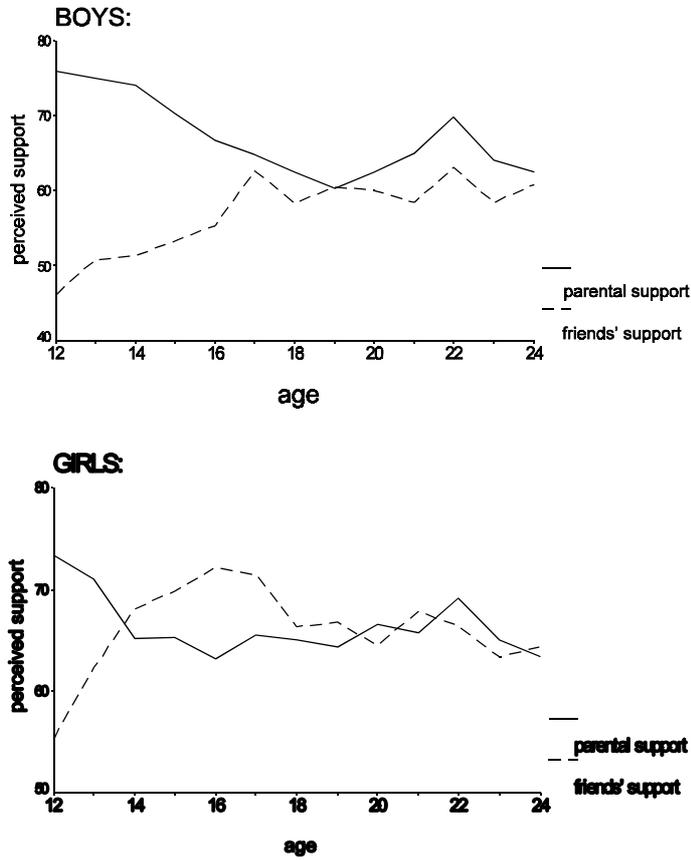


Fig. 1.1. Sex-specific support patterns from age 12 to 24

Support from the relationships with parents and friends and psychological well-being

First, simple correlations between parental and peer support with psychological well-being were calculated. Results clearly reveal a general impact of parental support (Pearson correlation between parental support and emotional problems is $-.25, p < .001$), whereas the effect of peer-support in general is absent (Pearson correlation between peer support and emotional problems is $.03, ns$).

Multiple regression analysis was performed to look at the connection between the support of parents and friends and emotional problems, or psychological well-being. Emotional problems were the dependent variable, support of parents and friends, age and sex were the independent variables. The scores for support and age were standardized in advance. This was necessary in order to be able to use de Friedrich's procedure for an adequate interpretation of the interaction effects in the regression comparison (see Aiken and West, 1991, p. 44-48). For the same reason, the non standardized regression coefficients (B 's) are reproduced in table 1.2 instead of the standardized coefficients (β 's).

Emotional problems do, in fact, show a relation with the variables taken here, though these explain only 10.7% of the variance in emotional problems. The effects of sex and age are in the expected direction: girls on average report more emotional problems than boys, and emotional problems increase during adolescence. Parental support also correlates with emotional problems in the expected sense: the greater the support, the fewer the problems. Again, support from friends appears to have no connection with emotional problems.

Parental support, however, turns out to interact with all the other variables, indicating a general moderating effect. Two factors guide the interpretation and evaluation of interaction effects: the amount of the variance explained, and the magnitude of the regression coefficient (here B). Whenever relevant, the regression coefficient (b) of each subsample can then be compared. In this case, the interaction effects contribute little to the explanation of the variance, but the regression coefficients give cause to look more closely at the interactions. The interaction effect between parental support and the support of friends, for example, has a B value of $-.06$, which compared with the B values of the separate main effects ($-.16$ and $.03$ respectively), suggests a possible significant contribution. To visualize the underlying pattern that leads to this interaction effect, we proceeded as follows. For parental support, a low (1 standard deviation below the average), an average, and a high (1 standard deviation above the average) value were established. Then the relation of peer support to emotional problems was plotted under different values of parents' support, as shown in fig. 1.2. Parental support is negatively related with

Table 1.2. Multiple Regression analysis of Emotional Problems on Parental Support, Friends' Support, Age, and Sex

Variable	<i>B</i> in last step	<i>R</i> ² cumulative per step
1. Background:		.037 ^a
Sex	.30 ^a	
Age	.06 ^b	
2. Support:		.093 ^a
Parental Support	-.16 ^a	
3. Support:		.094 ^a
Friends' Support	.03	
4. Two-way interactions (added one by one):		
Parental support × friends' support	-.06 ^b	.097 ^a
Parental support × sex	-.16 ^a	.103 ^a
Parental support × age	.07 ^a	.107 ^a
Friends' support × sex	-.01	(no significant increase in <i>R</i> ²)
Friends' support × age	-.01	
5. Three-way interactions (added one by one):		
par.supp × fr.supp × sex	.04	
par.supp × fr.supp × age	.01	

NOTE: Higher-order interactions were non-significant, and therefore are not given in this table.

^a*p* < .001

^b*p* < .01

emotional problems for all groups, but this effect is twice as strong among adolescents who enjoy strong support from friends compared with those who get little support from friends. This could be interpreted as a reinforcement effect. Given the small magnitude of this effect, however, we should be careful with this interpretation.

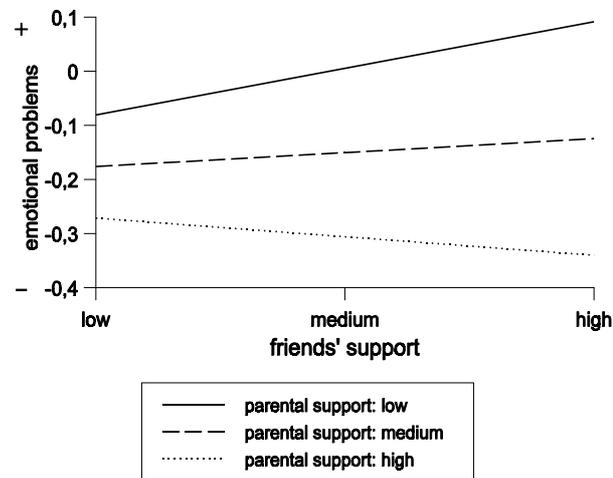


Fig. 1.2. Interacting effects of parental support and friends' support on Emotional Problems

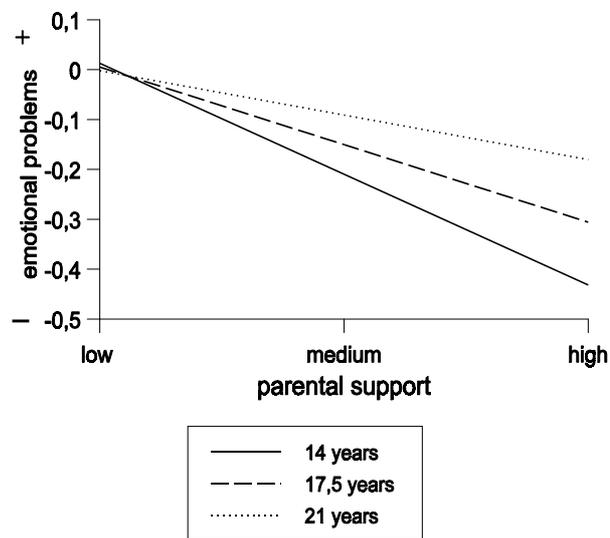


Fig. 1.3. Interacting effects of parental support and age on Emotional Problems

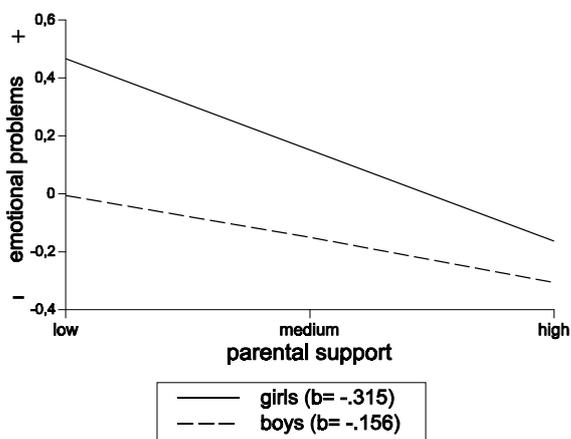


Fig. 1.4. Interacting effects of parental support and sex on Emotional Problems

The connection between parental support and emotional problems interacts with age in the way we had anticipated (H4a), as shown in fig. 1.3. As far as emotional problems are concerned, the effect of parental support decreases with increasing age. A low level of parental support goes with a high level of emotional problems in all age groups, whereas a high level of parental support tends to lower the level of emotional problems particularly in the younger groups. However, hypothesis 4b, the predicted increase in the significance of friends for well-being was not confirmed, however. The relation between the support of friends and emotional problems does not change with age, nor did we find a 3-way interaction between age and the effects of parental and friends' support.

Hypothesis 5 was partly confirmed. The relation between parental support and emotional problems is stronger for girls than for boys (see fig. 1.4). This interaction effect was not found for the support of friends. Higher-order interactions were not significant in this analysis, leading to the conclusion that neither the relative significance of support from parents and friends for well-being, nor the changes in this significance, differ between boys and girls.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this investigation was to look at the way the support of parents and friends are related to emotional problems among adolescents and to define possible age and sex differences in this relation.

As expected, a shift in social support during adolescence was found: perceived parental support declined and perceived friends' support increased, to a point where both degrees of support are roughly the same. The most important changes occurred on average before the age of 16. This process lasted longer with boys, or occurred later, than with girls.

The support of parents and friends correlated positively, but quite modestly, confirming the findings of Armsden and Greenberg (1987) and Nada Raja *et al.* (1992). This suggests that these 2 types of relations should be considered as 2 relatively independent support systems.

Parental support is most strongly related to emotional problems in adolescents, although interactions with parental support were found indicating that its effect is not the same under all conditions. The importance of parental support weakens during adolescence and is, moreover, stronger for girls than for boys. Support from friends at first sight appears to be unrelated to well-being, corresponding with earlier research findings (Barrera *et al.*, 1993; Blyth and Traeger, 1988; Dekovif and Meeus, 1995; Greenberg, *et al.*, 1983). However, in combination with the degree of perceived parental support, friends' support is found to play a minor role: when adolescents get little support from their parents, those who enjoy greater support from friends are found to report most problems.

What, then, is the significance of these findings to the different theories of perspectives on the relation between parental and friends' support? None of the 3 models we distinguished is clearly corroborated. The low correlation between parental and peer support is compatible with the domain hypothesis of Berndt (1979), which sees the social worlds of family and peers as relatively isolated from each other. Yet this idea is contradicted by the fact that the relation between friends' support and emotional problems is not unrelated to the effect of parental support. The 2 relations thus do appear to affect each other, but not in a positive, mutually reinforcing sense, as the connection hypothesis

predicts (when high parental support goes with a lower level of emotional problems in their children, peer support will go with a lower level of emotional problems as well), nor in a compensating sense, as the conflict hypothesis would predict (when parental support is low, peer support will compensate this effect and will go with lower levels of emotional problems instead). The compensation or conflict model can thus be rejected. Our results correspond with the results of Nada Raja *et al.* (1992). These authors suggest that, far from providing security, strong attachments to peers could be a fertile ground for the growth of depression when these relationships come under strain. According to the attachment theory, this could be explained by pointing out that the basis for good relationships with peers is provided by a secure attachment to parents. Whenever this basis is lacking, friendship may also be experienced as less secure. Causal directions, however, cannot unequivocally be established in our cross-sectional study. In adolescents reporting low levels of parental support, the tendency to report high levels of peer support is strongest in those with the highest level of emotional problems. Such a relationship could also be interpreted as a tendency to “turn to friends” in times of distress when parents are not available - and thus could be interpreted as being in line with the conflict hypothesis. The fact that peer support is not able to “compensate” indicates the importance of lack of parental support. Longitudinal analyses of these relationships will allow for more causal inferences on this issue.

The fact that we encountered no significant age differences in this pattern corroborates with this idea. Apparently, the relationship with parents forms a most important basis for psychological development; a basis which remains of importance throughout adolescence and young adulthood, both for the development of relationships with peers and for psychological well-being.

Finally, some comments on the analyses are in place. First, social support is found to predict only a minor part of adolescents’ emotional problems. Support as measured here (perceived quality of social support) only gives an indication for 1 aspect of the quality of relationships. Additionally, support itself consists of a great many other specific aspects, such as functional characteristics and different forms of how support is given and obtained (see, e.g., Barrera, 1986; Cauce, 1986; Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990), that are not distinguished here. The fact that perceived support seems to have different meanings for different subsamples is puzzling and forms another indication of

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the need to expand the research on the psychological mechanisms behind support.

Furthermore, we are dealing with a “normal” sample in this research, rather than a clinical population, with a limited range of emotional problems. A consequence of this is that the more extreme forms of emotional problems were lacking in our population. A comparison with a clinical sample would enable us to draw further distinctions between healthy and pathological patterns in the relational development of adolescents.