

**BAR-ILAN UNIVERISTY**

**Contribution of Attachment Style and Family Climate to Peer  
Relations, Aggression, and Acculturation of Second-generation  
Immigrants from Ethiopia**

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## **Abstract**

Adolescence is a developmental stage in which transition from childhood to adulthood occurs. It involves fundamental physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes. This period may be sensitive, vulnerable and dangerous for some adolescents who find it difficult to control their behavior and emotions (Dahl, 2004).

The current research regards adolescents who are second generation to immigrants. Adolescence for these teenagers is a risk factor in which they are confronted with important identity issues. Thus, questions about personal identity and the relationship to the culture of origin and to the receiving culture rise. This research will focus on descendants of immigrants from Ethiopia. The immigration from Ethiopia to Israel is unique for being originated within ideology and strong religious sentiment to Israel. Research emphasizes two main characteristics of these adolescents: the culture of origin against yearning to belong to the Israeli culture.

Often, teenagers and young people from Ethiopia (immigrants and children of immigrants) prefer to find a way to combine between the old and the new (Adelstein, 2003; Shabtai, 2001). Nonetheless, this combination is not easy: these adolescents find it difficult to define their identity in Israel for different reasons, such as different skin color, struggle in learning the new language, different religious rituals, sometimes even difficulty in identifying with their parents, who are themselves in a cultural conflict with Israeli culture (Adelstein, 2000).

Due to these findings, the aim of the current research was to investigate the contribution of individual (attachments style to mother and father) and family factors (the domestic atmosphere) to the relationships to the peer group, aggressive behavior, and cultural styles of adolescents whose parents are immigrants from Ethiopia.

Participants: 60 students, who were born in Israel and are children of Ethiopian immigrants, from high schools of the central area of Israel, took part in the research. The participants, 34 girls, and 26 boys, were from ninth to twelfth grade (age:  $M=16.03$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ) and were part of the 'Branco Weiss national project'.

Measures: five measures were included. The students completed four self-report measures: 1. Relationship with peer group scale 2. A questionnaire aimed at identifying cultural styles- the questionnaire was adapted to examine cultural styles of

immigrants to Israel by Margolyn (2002) 3. The Hebrew version of the attachment style questionnaire (Kerns, Klepac & Cole 1996) "What type of kid am I?" (Granot & Maysless, 2001). This questionnaire evaluates the respondents' feeling of security in the relationship teenager-parent. 4. The Hebrew version of the family evaluation questionnaire- Faces III (Taichman & Navon, 1990) which estimates the family's levels of cohesiveness and changes adjustment.

A social-aggression questionnaire, in its Hebrew version (Efrati-Virtzer, 2005), which evaluates the aggressive behavior of adolescents, was filled by project's coordinators.

Results: the first hypothesis, about the differences in social adjustment measures, aggression and cultural styles among adolescents with a secure/insecure attachment style to mother and father, was confirmed. This is consistent with previous research that found differences in aggression measures between participants with secure/insecure attachments style to father. A father-child secure attachment leads to a better social adjustment. Nevertheless, in the attachment to mother no difference was found in the dependent variables.

Still within the first hypothesis about cultural styles of adolescents secure and insecure in their attachment to their fathers and mothers, it was found that the cultural style level 'marginality' was higher when the father-teenager's relationship was graded less than average. Furthermore, a significant effect for the cultural style "division" was found. As hypothesized, this style was higher when the relation with the father was less good.

Regarding the second hypothesis about the difference in social adjustment measures, aggression and cultural styles among participants with different levels of domestic atmosphere measures, the results are consistent with the hypothesis. Social adjustment was higher when the domestic atmospheres tended to be 'over-involved' or 'chaotic'. Aggression was lower when the domestic atmosphere tended to 'over-involvement'.

As predicted, lower cultural styles of 'marginality' or 'divisions' were associated with 'over-involved' or 'chaotic' domestic atmosphere.

The third hypothesis concerned the contribution of the attachment style to mother and father and domestic atmosphere measures to differences in peer-group relations. It was found that a secure attachment to father significantly contributed to

this variable variation. However, the influence of the secure attachment to mother was not significant.

The fourth hypothesis regarded the attachment style to mother and father and domestic atmosphere as explaining differences in aggression. The results showed that there was no contribution of individual and family factors to this adjustment measure, contrarily to the fourth hypothesis.

The fifth hypothesis examined the association between attachment styles to mother and father and domestic atmosphere measures and the differences in cultural styles. As hypothesized, family atmosphere and secure attachment with father contributed to differences in social adjustment.

The next hypothesis concerned correlations among the variables with the sixth hypothesis examining the association between social adjustment, aggression and cultural styles and predicting that peer-group relations, aggression and cultural styles will be correlated. As predicted, cultural style 'marginality' and social adjustment were negatively correlated.

Last, it was hypothesized that there would be an association between the independent variables: attachment styles to mother and father and domestic atmosphere. The results did not support this hypothesis.

This current research emphasizes the crucial role of the adolescents' attachment to their fathers and that the domestic environment is important for a secure and stable adjustment of the immigrant's children in Israel. A secure attachment to father, an open to change and united domestic atmosphere that protects the teenager, led to a better social adjustment, lower aggression, and cultural style 'integration' and 'assimilation'.

There were a few limitations in this research. It included 60 teenagers, second generation to Ethiopian immigrants and four project coordinators. This sample is not representative of teenagers that are second-generation immigrants but a unique group of Ethiopians' children. These findings should be investigated among other groups of immigrants' descendants and among children of Ethiopian immigrants of different age groups.

Another limitation was in respect of the data collection. The current research relied mostly on self-report measures and reports from the project coordinators, who know the participants in a limited manner. Furthermore, it may be useful to collect information from peer group members. Thus, the data collected may present an only

partial picture and thus other ways to evaluate the participants' social-emotional adjustment should be considered.

These findings may have important theoretical and practical implications. First, previous research has mainly dealt with the immigrants' population and not with the second generation. Second, studies that did involve this population, did not consider attachment to both father and mother. The current research investigated both of these sets of relationships.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, this research has also a few practical ones. It emphasizes the importance of the relationship teenagers have with their parents, especially their fathers. Research findings emphasize the need to give space to the conservation of the original cultural identity, as seen from the results about the cultural styles, so the teenager will be able to have a sense of an integrative and accepted identity and not of strangeness.

There could be different lines of future research. First, the body of research about children of immigrants in general, and children of Ethiopian immigrants for whom the question of identity is very significant, should be extended. Second, other measures, that could add information and thus improve the research practical implications, should be used.