

## Exploring the dynamic of mother-adolescents closeness

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### *Abstract*

*This study aims to look at the dynamic of mother-adolescent closeness, and to exploring the reasons why the adolescents feel close to their mother. A total of 1523 university student (male = 479 ; female = 1044) at Diponegoro University completed an open-ended questionnaire developed by Kim (2010) that asked how close they feel to their mother as well as the reason why they feel close to their mother. The data was analyzed using indigenous psychological approach of analyzing the content of open-ended responses. Results have shown that adolescents feel close to their mother because she fulfilling her children emotional needs (63.5%), fulfilling physical needs (15.1%), being a good role model (7.5%) and because of consanguinity (5.3%). More verification on details of categories are required for the future research on closeness between mother and child relationship.*

**Key words:** *closeness, mother-adolescent relationship.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Aristotle described human beings as social animals. In recent years, the field of psychology has attempted to offer scientific and systemic knowledge of close relationships and their impact on individuals' life. One

of relation that involving closeness condition is mother-child relationship. As we know, mothers figure become very important, because they will transmiss the culture, developing of enculturated persons, the constitution of kinship,

family, and household, and the reproduction of society.

Mother spend between 65%-80% more time with father and by that so mother will have strong bond relationship or attach with their children or we can called that closeness. Closeness is an umbrella term for the degress to which individuals are affected by each others across time. Closeness and interdependence are evidenced in parent-child relationships and friendships (Laursen in Vangelisti, 2004; Burgees et al,2006).

Its common thing when child feel close to their mother, but how about when they get and become adolescents? Laursen (1995, in Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996) conduct survey to the adolescents and indicate that closeness between adolescents and their mother getting decrease while adolescents because disagreement with the mother most common appear at that time.

### **Closeness in Mother-Adolescents Relationship**

Laursen and Collins mentioned that closeness invoked indicators include interdependence, intimacy, trust, and communication (in Vangelisti, 2004). There is considerable continuity, however, between positive features of relationships during adolescence and those in earlier life, despite the altered patterns of interaction, emotion, and cognition (Collins, 1991). One longitudinal study showed that parent involvement during childhood predicted closeness during adolescence (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003), and the other side theories of adolescent development give a central role to increasing conflict in relationships with parents and to increasing closeness with peers and extrafamilial adults (Laursen & Collins, in Vangelisti, 2004).

Surveys of adolescents indicate that provisions for closeness and interdependence begin to shift from parents to friends and disagreements are most common with mothers followed by siblings, friends, and romantic partners, then fathers; angry disputes arise more frequently with family members than with close

peers (Laursen & Bukowski, 1995; Laursen, Furman & Mooney, 2006). But parents especially mothers tend to appraise the family more positive even adolescents said the difference things. Silverberg and Steinberg (in Bornstein, 2002) noted that the opinion is an attempt toward off the decline in maternal life satisfaction that accompanies adolescent detachment. Discrepant views of parent-child relationship vary developmentally, however. Mismatched perceptions and discrepant expectations are highest at the outset of adolescence, and views gradually converge over time (Collins, 1995; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995).

Laursen and Collins (in Vangelisti, 2004) said that theories of adolescent development give a central role that increasing closeness with peers and extrafamilial adults. Hartup and Laursen explained that closeness during adolescence is manifest in forms that differ from closeness in earlier parent-child relationships when was child, closeness mark with as cuddling and extensive joint interactions, decreases as children

mature, whereas conversations in which information is conveyed and feelings are expressed increase (Laursen & Bukowski, 1997). So its interesting thing to find out how about in Indonesia especially at Semarang, Central Java?. Which known that Java is the 13th largest island in the world. The Javanese people is an ethnic group native to the Indonesian island of Java and the largest ethnic group on the island and also in Indonesia. They are predominantly located Central Java, Semarang consist of 32,4 million people (<http://www.bps.go.id/aboutus.php?p=0&kota=33>)

### **Mother-Adolescents' Relationship in Javanese Context**

Culture may be defined as a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning (Matsumoto, 1999). This definition suggests that culture involves three key components: what people think,

what they do, and the material products they produce. Cultural values and beliefs, particularly those pertaining to developmental goals and socialization practices, may affect the function and organization of parent-child relationships.

From Javanese words, woman comes from *wani* (brave) and *tapa* (suffer), which means figure who brave to suffer for others. Mothers become central figure in the family for forming and maintaining families. This condition called as *matrifokalitas* symptom. By that so mother is an ever-present figure and pay attention, can be trusted completely. Naturally mother figure in Javanese culture always respected than anything, she will always be embedded deep in the emotion and life of her children.

By giving birth and nurture, she is the living symbol of self-sacrifice; by being accessible and attentive to her offspring, she extends trust and emotional warmth and the symbol of homeliness; as the first teacher, she lays the foundation for the evolution of the child on its way to becoming fully Javanese or fully human (*dadi*

*wong*). Mothers obtain their honor because of self-sacrificial care (Mulder, 1996).

In Javanese family, closeness relationship between mothers and her children appear from expression of affection who emerge explicitly in the way mother take cares her children. Disclosure of affection are not done yet explicitly proven in the treatment of mother to child. The quality of the mother child relationship seems to be the primary indicator of identity, self-esteem, and moral attitudes of adolescents in Java (Handayani & Noviyanto, 2004)

## **METHOD**

### **Respondents**

A Parent-Child Questionnaire developed by Kim (2010) was sent to 1523 undergraduate students studying in Semarang (male = 479 ; female = 1044) ; Aged range between 17-26 years old (mean = 19.15; SD = 2.719).

### **Instruments**

Respondents were asked the question from questionnaire about “*How much they feel close to their mother?*” as well as the reason why they feel

close to their mother. The researcher decided to use questionnaire to elicit information in order that respondents received an identical set of questions, phrases in exactly the same way, leading to standardisation of the responses which higher reliability (Hayes, 2000). It was also proper to use questionnaire for the purpose of this study, because as a larger number of subjects could be reached. An extra benefit of using questionnaires is that information can guarantee confidentially and therefore may elicit more truthful responses (Hayes, 2000). Open questions ensure higher ecological validity as the respondents is not confined by choice of answers, and as result this allows 'true opinions' to be confirmed (Hayes, 2000).

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using content analysis. The responses to the open-ended questions were coded into

categories through listing all the thematic ideas that emerged from the data. When a response revealed a new topic, a category was created to accommodate that topic. The final category structure emerged after four coders had discussed and made an agreement. To account for any bias in the coding, three undergraduate research assistants were trained and coded 20% of the surveys.

### **RESULT**

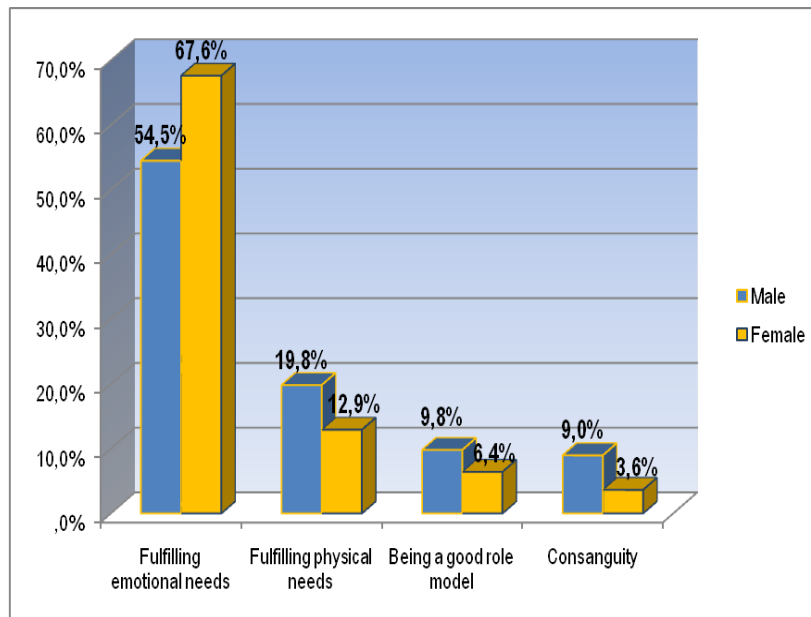
The research question asked the reason why the participants feel close to their mother. The frequency data pointed out that the most reason they feel close to their mother were providing emotional needs (63.4%, n = 967), fulfilling physical needs (15.1%, n = 230), being a good role model (7.5%, n = 114), and because of consanguinity (5.3%, n = 81). Completed categorization showed at table.1.

**Table 1. Mother-adolescents closeness in Indonesia**

Category	Sex				Total	
	Male		female			
<b>1. Fulfilling emotional needs</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>(54.5)</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>(67.6)</b>	<b>967</b>	<b>(63.5)</b>
Willing to share everything	95	(19.8)	304	(29.1)	399	(26.2)
Understanding child	53	(11.1)	196	(18.8)	249	(16.3)
Give love	70	(14.6)	79	(7.6)	149	(9.8)
Give comfort	23	(4.8)	85	(8.1)	108	(7.1)
Emotionally close	20	(4.2)	42	(4.0)	62	(4.1)
<b>2. Fulfilling physical needs</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>(19.8)</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>(12.9)</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>(15.1)</b>
Physical presence	51	(10.6)	101	(9.7)	152	(10.0)
Nurturing	44	(9.2)	34	(3.3)	78	(5.1)
<b>3. Being a good role model</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>(9.8)</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>(6.4)</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>(7.5)</b>
Being meaningful figure	33	(6.9)	45	(4.3)	78	(5.1)
Being a good role model	14	(2.9)	22	(2.1)	36	(2.4)
<b>4. Consanguinity</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>(9.0)</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>(3.6)</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>(5.3)</b>
Gave birth	20	(4.2)	27	(2.6)	47	(3.1)
Child obligation	23	(4.8)	11	(1.1)	34	(2.2)
<b>5. Others</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(1.5)</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>(1.2)</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>(1.3)</b>
Unidentified + do not feel close to the mother	7	(1.5)	13	(1.2)	20	(1.3)
<b>6. Blank</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>(5.4)</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>(8.1)</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>(7.3)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>	<b>1523</b>	<b>(100.0)</b>

Separately, closeness between sons and daughter slightly have differences, the figure 1 shown that female tend to higher than male in

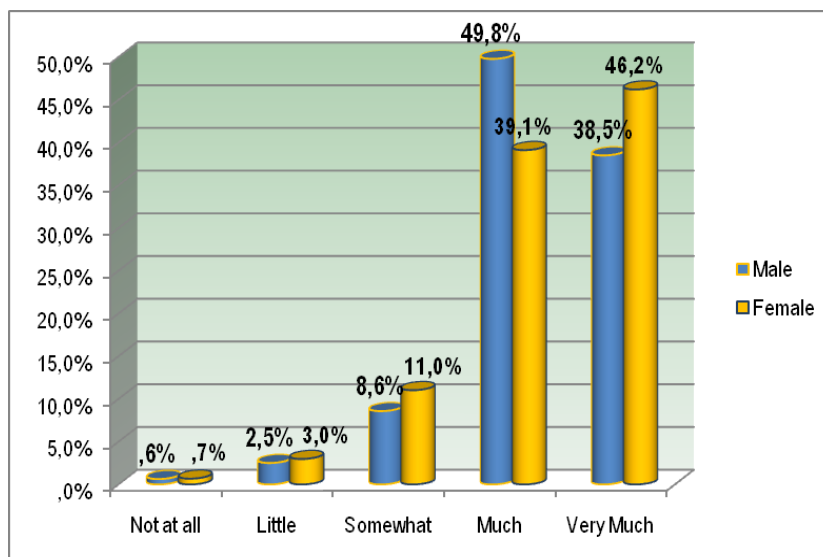
answer about fulfilling emotional needs, male are higher at physical, good role model and consanguinity.



**Figure 1. Closeness between male adolescents and female adolescents**

Figure 2 shown about how close adolescents with their mother. From that chart, we can initiated that about 49.8% male adolescents respondent

feel much close to their mother and 46.2% female adolescents feel very much close to their mother.



**Figure 2. How close respondents feel to their mother?**

## DISCUSSION

Result reveal that fulfilling emotional needs become most respondent answer which is 63,4%. At this themes, relationship with mother is characterizes by willing to share everything, giving an unconditional emotional support, giving love, comfort and emotionally close with children. At second place followed by fulfilling physical needs, because mother being good role model and because their consanguinity. Its quite different in addition what Kim (2008) found, that South Korean parents traditionally tend to consider high levels of (strict) control and involvement in their children's daily lives as a way of expressing parental love (affection) and caring toward their children. In this research, mother are describing as loving person (*trisna*), gentle, fully affection, and understanding her children, which demonstrated by an example of respondents answer, such as:

*295.1.A. because my mother is the one who most understands me.*

*1154.1.A. She always understand my condition and what I felt.*

With that ways, children dont think twice when want to share about their self. Its apparent from answers like:

*299.1.A. because mother is the place to share my sense and the story of my life*

*330.1.A. because I always tell her everything.*

From figure 1 above, we can conclude why there are differences about male and female adolescents perceived their closeness to their mother, it could be happened, its because mother talked more about emotions, affected more to her daughter than sons. Its also the ways of the mother nurturing and inherit the daughter, who prepared to be an adult women and someday become a mother too, in order to fulfil the culture expectation that woman should be tender, and fully affectionally.

This results, in line with parent-child relationship research, conduct by Kim and Choi (1994) at South Korea who found that mothers are to be benevolent and understanding, providing themselves as the emotional provider of the family. Mother will nurturing by emotion



work, means that women supporting feel responsible for meeting the emotional needs of the children (DeVault in Vangelisti, 2004).

At figure 2, 84.7% respondents feel very much close to their mother. It proved that relationship with mother remain as strong and secure as before and still going through until adolescents. It interesting part, why they feel close eventhough they already become young adult? This finding different with several other studies that mention there are increases in negativity and decreases in the closeness between parents and youth (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; McGue et al., 2005). From Javanese context, being close to mother represents one of the devotion of the children to their parents (*dharma bakti*). Closeness, as well as one form of child respect to the mother, because there statement in our society that "*surga berada dibawah telapak kaki ibu*" (heavens lays on mother feet) so parents blessing especially mother is representation of God blessing, with when childs dont close with their mother it means that they ignoring the mother, and when

it happens it will become bad behavior, being sinner or godless. Its exist in respondent answer, like:

*1239.1.A.heaven lays on mother feet.  
1415.1.A.because i respect her. In religion, blessing from God is similar to parents blessing. Heaven = when mother give her blessing (ridha) to her children.*

From that answer, it is also seen that Moslem value become heavily influenced respondent lives, where most of respondents are moslem (88%). One well-known narrative in the Hadith underlines the respect paid to mothers. It tells of a man who asked the prophet Mohammad to whom he should be dutiful. The answer was, "your mother, your mother, your mother and your father." It caused eventhough they are growing up, mother remained an important figure in their life.

When adolescents develop and maintain their closeness with the mothers, simultaneous provide maternal support. Laursen, Furman & Mooney (2006) have shown that perceived maternal support is associated with adolescents' global self-worth. And from the result we can said that theres interdependence pattern among

adolescents to their mother. Interdependence as form of relation in collectivistic culture have point out that interdependence is a hallmark of all close relationship and is manifest in frequent, strong, and diverse interconnections maintained over an extended time (Kelley *et al* in Vangelisti,2004). So with interdependence with other adolescents could fulfil one important developmental task that find their self identity (Handayani & Novianto,2004). Because this is parent-child relationship pilot study conducted in Semarang, so it must gave valuable basic foundation for the development of a similar family studies at Semarang. This study discovered that mother had an enormous influence in the lives of adolescents. Mother is a figure who loved and respected by their children. However this research has some limitations and requires further investigations. For example, reorganizing the categorization in order to create a solid result, then balancing proportion of male and female respondents, age group, and include mother in the process of collecting the data.

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