Correlates of Alienation in Adolescents

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Research conducted in the field of adolescent behaviour depicts that, in the recent years a great deal of interest has been shown regarding the theme of alienation. Social commentators concern with growing frequency that, "Alienation" is one of the greatest problems confronting us today (Mohan, et al., 1999). Alienation is an experience which has become more and more a fact of life in these days of modernization. Probably adolescents feel this much more than the aged or children. They experience powerlessness, normlessness, rootlessness and drift in values. Though very old, the concept of alienation has become the hallmark of modern age. It is increasingly being recognized as a symptom of man's contemporary crisis a human problem which is reflected in the vast literature in the lonely crowd the dehumanization of modern man. It is revealed in large number of adolescents today who have lost faith in and are actively rebelling against many accepted standards of society and among others who dropout from the society (Sharma, 2002).

Alienation is the result of the technical advancement, industrialization, urbanization and excessive competition in urban

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areas. While in rural areas it seems to be byproduct of poverty, social and cultural discrimination, economic exploitation, a sense of deprivation and growing unemployment (Sharma, 2002).

Concept of Alienation

The Latin word alienatio has a legal sense (the transfer or sale of a good or right), a psychological sense (dementia, insanity), a sociological sense (dissolution of the link between the individual and others), and a religious sense (dissolution of the link between the individual and the god). In German, the word Entfremdung (literally, to become estranged from or a stranger to) covers a range of meanings, but to large degree these are parallel to those of the Latin alienatio (Harre & Lamb, 1983).

Although the concept of alienation has a central place in the history of sociological thought it is only recently that attempts have been made to define it in empirically operationable and to relate it to specific social systems or sub-systems rather than to such global references as 'the' culture or 'society as a whole' (Cohen, 1974).

Following Seeman's (1959) important theoretical paper which identified five uses of the concept of alienation i.e., powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and social estrangement. Researchers have developed a verity of alienation measures based upon some or all of those five dimensions. A growing number of studies has selected educational setting as the social referents for measuring alienation. Dean's (1961) scale of alienation, for example was used to measure feelings of powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation in high school pupils while Burbach (1972) employed the powerlessness, meaninglessness and social estrangement components to explore alienation in the setting of a university.
Alienation refers to a sense of social estrangement, an absence of social support or meaningful social connection (Mau, 1992). Alienation can be viewed as deriving from dilemmas associated with issues of common identity, common bond, or both. Alienation associated with issues of common identity may occur when young people are forced to take on roles or are expected to comply with group expectations to which they do not subscribe. This might occur as a result of stereotypy, racism, or elitism within a school or community. Under these conditions, adolescents perceive that their opinions, beliefs and values differ substantially from those of the groups they are viewed as belonging to. In many schools, some students are marginalized due to some markers such as minority status, physical abnormalities, or developmental delays, or as a result of poor social skills and low academic motivation. These students are often typed as "nobodies," "loners," "disengaged," or "outcasts" (Brown et al., 1993; Clark, 1962; Rigsby and McDill, 1975). In a longitudinal study of crowd identity, Strouse (1999) found that not all students in the uninvolved crowd remained so over the four years of high school. In many instances, they changed to the "average" crowd orientation, usually by finding new friends, engaging in social activities and placing more emphasis on getting good grades. Nisha, (1991) found positive relationship of educational levels with alienation. Sharma (2002) in his study found no significant relationship of alienation with residence of the students.

Adolescents were found to share regularly a variety of recreational activities with grandparents and expressed positive feelings about spending leisure time with grandparents. Findings also suggested that the onset of adolescence may result in a positive change in the nature of the grandchild grandparent relationship. Future research was suggested which views the
family as a system and explores the role parents play in determining the quality of teenagers' relations with grandparents (Jenkins et al., 1987).

**Alienation and Minorities**

Over the years there have been both conceptual and empirical attempts to examine the determinants of alienation on campus and the role these determinants play in the cognitive and affective development of minority students. In Fleming's (1984) student developmental model, for instances, exposure to a climate of prejudice on campus is one of the most important factors impinging on the cognitive growth (i.e., academic achievement, critical thinking) and the affective development of minority students attending predominantly white institutions.

Alienation among minorities, usually defined as no involvement with or estrangement from the institution brought on by a sense of meaninglessness and powerlessness, has been addressed by two approaches. The first builds upon Student Institution Fit Models (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1994). A second a more recent approach has introduced transactional models of stresses and coping behaviors (Munoz, 1986; Prillerman, Myers, & Smedley, 1989; Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993).

**Alienation and Group Identity and Individual Identity**

Erikson (1968), perceived that 'crisis of identity' and conflict are characteristic of adolescence period and youth. Young people lack the sense of personal responsibility for the experiences and outcomes and generally blame the external forces like luck, chance, fate etc., which are out of their own control.

To some degree, experiences of alienation are important for the continued formulation of both group and individual identity. A period of feeling alone and lonely may help teens appreciate how good social acceptance feels and how important it is for their
well-being. What is more, experiences of alienation within a group may help a young person see the I against the backdrop of the We. The discomfort of not fitting in helps one recognize the distinctiveness of one's point of view. In the extreme, however, the lack of so resolution of this crisis can have significant implications for adjustment to school, self-esteem, and subsequent psychosocial development. Chronic conflict about one's integration into a meaningful reference group can lead to lifelong difficulties in areas of personal health, work, controlling anger, and the formation of intimate family bonds (East et al., 1987; Spencer, 1982, 1988; Weigel et al., 1998). Evidence of a crisis of group identity versus alienation is associated with heightened concern about issues of group acceptance and rejection (Newman & Newman, 2001).

**Alienation and Personality**

Alienation may result from personality characteristics such as shyness, introversion or lack of sociability. Some young people experience social anxiety, mistrust in others or are cautious in interactions that prevent them from forming interpersonal connections. Others are overly self-conscious, becoming so preoccupied with their own feelings and thoughts that they withdraw from social interactions (Kochanska et al., 1997). Feelings of shame over an illness, disability or perceived inadequacy may lead to perceptions of peer rejection or unwillingness to form social bonds (Fife and Wright, 2000). Gould (1969), discussed the personality traits of alienated youth and found that they are characterized by a generalized distrust of others, a rejection of socially approved 'rules' of inter-personal conduct, social introversion, poor impulse control and ambivalence. Mohan, *et al.*, (1999) found that, adolescents high on alienation differed significantly from those who are low on alienation on the all dimensions of personality viz. Psychoticism, Extraversion, Neuroticism and lie scale (social- desirability) as well as on
aesthetic values, home, social, emotional and total adjustment and self-esteem. This study has definite implications for the educators, parents, psychologists dealing with adolescents. Personality, values and locus of control were found positively related with alienation (Nisha, 1991). Kulka, et al., (1982) found that, boys who more frequently break school rules and engage in aggressive or deviant behaviour may often come to have more negative attitudes toward school staff and less involvement in school.

**Alienation and Emotion**

Alienation associated with issues of common bond occurs when adolescents are unable to form inter personal ties that provide feelings of acceptance and emotional support. This type of alienation may arise from several different sources. Under conditions of parental coldness, distancing, neglect or rejection, children find that they cannot count on the family to serve as a source of emotional or instrumental support (Dishion et al., 2000). They lack a template for experiencing the foundational benefits of belonging that are associated with group identity. As a result of harsh parenting, some adolescents have poor social skills they are either overtly aggressive and domineering or overtly withdrawn and socially inept (Poulin et al., 1999). Over time, children with poor social skills are less likely to form satisfying social relationships with friends and are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours that reflect their sense of alienation from family and peers.

**Alienation and Self Esteem**

Worchel and Goethals (1985) viewed that, whenever one's self-esteem is threatened, stress is produced e.g., other people's negative evaluations can be very threatening and stressful. When resources are not sufficient to meet threats to self-esteem, individuals may become intensively anxious or may have feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and despair. These negative and debilitating feelings can lead to self-alienation. Williamson and
Cullingford (1998), found that alienation negatively correlated with self-esteem but was positively associated with truancy, exclusion and disruptive behaviour. They further concluded that, whilst alienation remains a useful concept for educational research, it is unhelpful to see it as an inevitable consequence of deprivation or membership of certain social groups.

**Alienation and Adjustment**

Advocates of the Student-Institution Fit Perspective Model regard alienation as the manifestation of maladjustment or lack of fit between the minority student and the institution (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Smith, 1989; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Feelings of not belonging and unpleasantness at an institution are some of the elements commonly mentioned as comprising alienation from the institution (Munoz, 1986 and Smith, 1989). Kaplan et al., (1977) reported that, alienation could be a source of adjustment problems even though it does not occur as frequently as it is generally assumed. The problems of personal and social adjustment are frequently marked by displays of guilt and alienation.

**Alienation and Classroom**

Seeman's discussion, the alienated pupil is one who perceives that he can do little, if anything, to influence his future in the school and can see little in the work required there of any relevance to his future beyond school. He 'goes along' with the system to the extent that he tells the teachers what they want to hear but he is quite ready to violate school rules and regulations, provided of course, that he doesn't get caught. School activities are not self-rewarding because basically the pupil does not accept the value system of the school nor does he consider it worthwhile to attempt to achieve within that system. What are the ways in which pupils become alienated from school? In a thoughtful paper, Jackson (1965), observes that although every child experiences the pain of failure and the joy of success long before he reaches
school age, it is only when he enters the classroom setting that his achievements (or lack of them) become official in the sense that a public record of his progress begins to accumulate and he himself must accept that 'pervasive spirit of evaluation that will dominate his school years'. Jackson's discussion is particularly directed toward unraveling the etiology of alienation among those pupils whose classroom failure arises out of their 'inappropriate' responses to the values and the reward systems that constitute the culture of the school. Fundamental to Jackson's thesis is a conjunction between self theory and the etiology of alienation. A basic proposition of self theory is that the individual strives to achieve and to maintain a favourable self image or self concept. He does this through on-going interaction with others in multifarious social settings. Where such interaction rewards him by allowing him to achieve status recognition and thus maintain and enhance a favourable self image, he will continue to invest his time and energy in such interaction. Where he fails to achieve status recognition and a favourable self image, he will tend to avoid participation in the activity and devalue its worth. Implicit in Jackson's discussion of the signs, the symptoms, and the pervasiveness of alienation is the idea that alienation evolves over a period of time.

Quite explicitly, Browning (1961) has suggested that alienation is best seen as a process consisting of three successive stages. The predisposing stage, in Browning's terminology is one, in which unrewarded pupils in unrewarding classroom settings experience feelings of powerlessness, meaningfulness, and normlessness which leads them to reject the values of the school. This act of rejection is the beginning of the second stage which Browning calls the stage of cultural disaffection. The third and final stage in the process of alienation is that of social isolation in which the pupil perceives that he has lost effective contact with fellow pupils and teachers and probably experiences intense feelings of
loneliness and rejection. If alienation is to be seen as a process then there is, as Shepard (1972), observes, a clear need for longitudinal studies by way of demonstrating some causal ordering of the processual relationships between the various dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and social isolation. In their studies of selective and non-selective British secondary schools, Lacey (1970) and Hargreaves (1967), have demonstrated the ways in which the organizational frameworks of schools, through their reward structures, are associated with the development of different pupil sub-cultures. Sharma (2002) reported no relationship of alienation with academic streams.

Alienation and Educational Achievement

Integrated educational experiences are particularly important because of the negative consequences of alienation on the learning process itself. In their comprehensive study of the American educational system, Coleman (1996), and his associates, found that educational achievement was strongly related to the child's sense of control over his own fate. Children who felt that they had little power over their own lives did not learn well. Learning alienation demonstrated an inverse relation to academic achievement. In most cases, significant predictive relationships between academic achievement and student use of WebCT were curvilinear (Johnson, 2007).

Suggestion for Reducing Alienation:

1. Social relationships play an important role in determining alienation (Mau, 1992; Brown et al., 1993; Clark, 1962; Rigsby & McDill, 1975). Affection and care of parents and grand-parents is vital to reduce alienation in the adolescents (Jenkins et al., 1987). So they should take proper care and attention of their children by providing adequate love and affection.
2. School environment and infrastructure facilities and its relationship with teacher and co-fellows are found to be negatively related with alienation (Jackson, 1965). So teachers and school administrators should pay more attention to these areas. They should treat the students as their friends and philosopher and help them to adjust in the school life. They should provide proper guidance to the students.

3. Academic achievement has negative relationship with alienation (Coleman, 1996 and Johnson, 2007), thus, every essential help should provided to the students, so that an alienated person can improve his performance in academic life. This will develop confidence and self-concept and reduces alienation.

4. Deviance behaviour, disruptive behaviour and emotional instability are positively correlated with alienation; efforts should be made to improve cooperativeness, group participation and democratic environment in the school and home. To improve social participation of alienated adolescents intervention programmes should be planned & organized.

5. Research indicates that personality and emotional stability of a person found to be significant determinants of alienation (Mohan, et al., 1999; Dishion et. al., 2000; Poulin et al., 1999; Nisha, 1991 and Williamson & Cullingford (1998). School administrators should provide different personality development programmes to adolescents. Teacher and school administrators should make efforts to develop emotional environment in the school and should also make efforts to strengthen Teacher-Student and Student-Student relationship in the school. Cultural, co-curricular activities and group activities should organised and social relations also should
strengthened by the school to reduce alienation. Parent should also provide emotional strength to their children.

6. Adjustment problem is also a significant determinant of alienation at adolescent stage (Kaplan, et al., 1977). Proper guidance should be provided to adolescents, so that they are able to overcome adolescent crisis and solve their problems. This will improve adjustment among them and reduce alienation.

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Journal of Family and Economic Issues, Springer Netherlands, 8, (3-4), 35-46


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