

Research Summary
Parent-Child Relations, Mental Health
and Morality of Thai School Adolescents
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The main purposes of the present study are as follows. First, this study is aimed to examine the relationship between mental and physical health in various types of adolescents. Secondly, the search for the amount of differences in each of the five indices of familial relationships among adolescents with different mental health statuses, is carried out. Thirdly, the relationship between mental health and moral reasoning is investigated. Finally, comparisons of the predictive powers of different indices of parent-child relationship on adolescents' level of moral reasoning are made.

In this field study, the research sample consisted of 917 male and female adolescents in two junior highschool levels (Mathayomsuksa 1 and 3) in Bangkok and Songkla, whose age ranged from 13 to 17 years. These adolescents were asked to respond to a set of questionnaires when they were assembled in their own classroom. Each questionnaire booklet consisted of many parts. The first part was the 15 six-choice items assessing the levels of moral reasoning according to Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Another 5 six-choice items of similar content to the first measure were later used to assess the adolescents perception of their parent's level of moral reasoning. One part of the booklets was used to measure various background characteristics

of the family of the respondents. The rest of the questionnaires employed rating scale method of assessment of the following variables: perception of the love-oriented type and reasoning-oriented type of child-rearing practices, attitudes towards father and attitudes towards mother, physical health status, and mental health status.

For the purpose of data analyses, the measured variables were divided into 4 levels. The first level consisted of the 8 background variables. The second level consisted of the 5 indices of parent-child relationship. The third level consisted of the 2 indices of mental health status. The fourth level was the level of moral reasoning of the respondent. One of the indices of the parent-child relationship was the amount of parent-child conflict on moral reasoning. This variable was operationally defined as the difference between the respondent's level of moral reasoning and the respondent's perception of his (or her) parent's level of moral reasoning on the same (5) issues. The variables in the first and the fourth levels were used as the independent and the dependent variables respectively. However, the variables in the second and the third levels were used on different occasions as the independent and the dependent variables in the statistical analyses. Seven hypotheses were tested in this study by carrying out the Analysis of Variance (3-way factorial designs) and the stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis on various parts of the data.

Four important parts of the research results are reported here. First, it was found that there was a significantly positive correlation between physical and mental health statuses in some types of the Thai adolescents, namely, male adolescents, young adolescents, rural adolescents, and adolescents from the lower and higher socioeconomic levels. Secondly, Love-oriented practice, reasoning-oriented practice, attitudes towards father and attitudes towards

mother were highly related to the mental health status of many types of adolescents especially adolescents who lived apart from their family. In addition, it was found that the rural fathers and the fathers in the working-mother's families played an important role in their adolescents' mental health. In the families at the higher-socioeconomic level, the adolescents were less mentally healthy than in the families at the lower levels. These findings could be partly accounted for by the less favorable attitudes towards the mothers in the former group. Thirdly, the fact that the higher the mental health level of the adolescents, the higher was their level of moral reasoning, was found to be prevalent in only one type of adolescents, namely, the girls in the higher-socioeconomic families (the correlation coefficient was .60). Finally, the results showed that 3 indices of parent-child relationships, namely, the amount of parent-child conflict in moral reasoning, love-oriented practice and attitudes towards father, were found to be highly related to the level of moral reasoning of many types of adolescents, especially rural adolescents. In conclusion, the five indices of parent-child relationships were more related to the mental health status than to the level of moral reasoning of the Thai adolescents. In addition, the Thai father was found to play a much more important psychological role than had been previously expected.

The results in this study were valuable in suggesting important approaches to the family-development program for the promotion of mental health and moral reasoning ability in the Thai youths. These approaches are through the modification of the child-rearing practices, decreasing the amount of parent-child conflict in moral reasoning and inducing more favorable attitudes towards the father and mother of the adolescents. Furthermore, important problems and suggestions remedying the situations were given for each of the 4 types of the Thai families, namely, the families in which the adolescents lived separately from their parents, the working-mothers' families, the families at the higher socioeconomic level and the rural families.