



## Original Article

# The roles of adolescents' perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles in their self-perception: A structural equation modelling\*

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** Parental attitudes, and relations with parents and peers are of great importance in the developmental period of adolescence. This study was carried out to determine the roles of perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles in the self-perception of adolescents.

**Methods:** The data were collected from 700 adolescents who were 13–18 years old, using the Parental Attitude Scale, the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The research data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a structural equation model.

**Results:** Correlation analysis found that the perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles of the adolescents had a significant effect on their self-development. The structural equation model indicated that, while the attachment styles of the adolescents had a significant effect on self-perception ( $\beta=0.79$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), perceived parental attitudes had no significant effect on self-perception ( $\beta=0.11$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). However, they did have a positive effect on the attachment styles of the adolescents ( $\beta=0.77$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** This study found that perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles had a significant effect on the self-development of the adolescents. In getting through the developmental process of adolescence, in fulfilling current and future adult responsibilities, and in reducing mental problems, relationships with parents based on trust and perceived democratic parental attitudes are healthier and more productive.

**Keywords:** Adolescence; parental attachment; parenting attitudes; peer attachment; self-perception.

Adolescence is when individuals pass from childhood to adulthood. Physical, cognitive, psychological and social changes occur during adolescence.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Adolescents should discover who they really are, get to know their abilities and skills and form a healthy sense of self for adulthood. These are the basic developmental requirements of adolescence.<sup>[3,4]</sup> Adolescents need support, guidance and the fulfillment of their basic emotional and psychological needs from their parents for a healthy adolescence, self-development and positive self-perception.<sup>[5-7]</sup> Adolescents who can have strong attachments

with their parents, whose emotional and psychological needs are fulfilled and who receive support get through adolescence in a healthy way because they have high self-efficacy, are successful in social relationships, and their self-development is supported.<sup>[8-10]</sup>

Families have a significant role in adolescents' psychological and social development and in their sense of belonging and identity. Individuals, especially in childhood and adolescence, learn skills, develop behavioral patterns, learn about themselves through the attitudes of the people who are

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**What is known on this subject?**

- Relationships with parents and peers during adolescence lead to the establishment of secure attachments and the fulfillment of basic emotional and mental needs. They also contribute positively to self-development.

**What is the contribution of this paper?**

- Parental attitudes and secure attachment have a significant effect on the self-development of adolescents. This study's structural equation model found that secure attachment directly predicts self-perception, and that parental attitudes indirectly predict self-perception through attachment.

**What is its contribution to the practice?**

- Effective parenting skills help adolescents to fulfill the basic emotional and mental needs of their development, to have secure attachments in adolescence and adult life and to develop positive personalities. They also reduce psychological problems.

important to them and lay significant foundations for their adult personalities within their families.<sup>[11–13]</sup> Several factors play significant roles in the development of children and adolescents within families. The most important of them is parental attitudes. The changes that occur in adolescence are challenging and stressful, which is why parental attitudes are so important. However, dysfunctional families, incorrect parenting techniques and poor parental attitudes cause the difficulties and stress of adolescence to turn into problematic behaviors, which make it a difficult period for some adolescents.<sup>[13–16]</sup>

Sometimes, parents can be over-monitoring, permissive or negligent in their support of the development of adolescents. Dysfunctional parental attitudes can increase the challenges of adolescence.<sup>[12,13,16]</sup> Baumrind studying on parental attitudes defined four types of parental attitudes: democratic, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful.<sup>[17–19]</sup> Democratic parents fulfill their children's basic needs for love, closeness, belonging, support and care, and they act responsibly. Authoritarian parents always monitor, control and manage their children's behaviors, but they are not responsive to their children's needs for love, care and closeness. Authoritarian parents create environments with rules they want their children to obey, and carefully monitor their children's obedience. Permissive parents fulfill and are responsive to their children's needs for attention, love, care and closeness, but they do not control, monitor and guide their children's behavior. Neglectful parents do not fulfill their children's emotional and psychological needs, nor do they control or monitor their children's behavior. Neglectful parents do not support or guide their children. Neglectful parents constantly criticize their children and neglect their needs.<sup>[17–19]</sup> Baumrind's ideal parental attitude involves supporting adolescents' autonomy and positive self-development, fulfilling their basic emotional and psychological needs and guiding them without making too many rules.<sup>[11,20]</sup> If adolescents are not given adequate love and support, are constantly criticized or punished for their behaviors, significant problems in their self-development can occur. Adolescents who grow up

with democratic parental attitudes and strong attachments to their parents are more individualistic, healthier psychologically and assertive. They are also independent individuals who have better social competence and are able to manage their thoughts.<sup>[14,15,21]</sup>

Attachment is the tendency for establishing strong bonds with others who are important to a person. Bowlby<sup>[22,23]</sup> suggests that the relationship babies establish with their primary caregivers form the basis for their attachment behavior with others in subsequent periods. Attachment patterns are shaped by mothers' reactions and greeting sensitivity to the physiological, emotional, psychological and security needs of newborns. Caregivers' fulfilling babies' basic emotional, psychological and security needs is the foundation of secure attachment.<sup>[22–25]</sup> Infants' secure attachments with caregivers are the basis for their subsequent relationships with others in adolescence and adulthood. Secure attachments are important for adolescents' development, socialization, individualization and autonomy.<sup>[23,24]</sup> Adolescents who have secure bonds with their parents are more trusting and satisfied and have better social skills and communication skills in their relationships with their peers than those who do not.<sup>[5,9,26,27]</sup> Adolescents who do not have secure bonds may completely drift apart from their parents and become depressed, anxious and lonely people who cannot establish close relationships or trust other people. They also try to cope with their problems on their own. This causes them to feel helpless and to have emotional difficulties, problems and dissatisfaction in their close relationships.<sup>[8,27–30]</sup> Adolescents who have secure attachments with their parents have higher social and emotional efficacy, and can ask for help and support, which supports their self-development in a positive way by affecting their physiological, emotional and physical health.<sup>[26,31–33]</sup>

Adolescents try to adapt to the physical, psychological, social and cognitive changes that occur during adolescence and to be autonomous, to establish strong attachments, to discover themselves and to form healthy identities. Caregivers' fulfilling basic emotional and psychological needs, relationships based on trust and parental attitudes during early childhood are important factors in healthy adolescent development. Adolescence is difficult both for adolescents and their parents. Previous studies suggest that both adolescents and parents need guidance during adolescence.<sup>[34,35]</sup> Preventive mental health counseling for adolescents in developmental crisis and their parents will help them get through adolescence.<sup>[36,37]</sup> Parental support programs should be developed and implemented to help parents develop effective parental attitudes and reduce dysfunctional attitudes. Preventive mental health practices that improve adolescents' adaptation to development, strengthen their self-perception should also be planned for at-risk groups.<sup>[38–40]</sup> Psychiatric nurses should improve adolescents' adaptation to development by making therapeutic interventions to help them with issues

such as knowing oneself, knowing and managing emotions, problem-solving and being assertive.<sup>[34,35]</sup>

This study evaluates the roles of perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles in the self-perception of adolescents. Here are its research questions: 1) Is there a relationship between attachment styles (peer attachment or parent attachment) and the self-perception of adolescents? 2) Is there a relationship between the perceived parental attitudes and self-perception of adolescents? 3) Is there a relationship between the perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles of adolescents? 4) What are the roles of attachment styles and perceived parental attitudes in the self-perception of adolescents?

## Materials and Method

### Study Design

This descriptive study evaluates the roles of perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles in the self-perception of adolescents. Its data were collected at three Anatolian high schools in Çankaya, Ankara. The data were analyzed using a structural equation model. A structural equation model is not only a statistical method but also a statistical analysis used to test theories and develop new patterns. Structural equation models involve several statistical methods. They test the patterns of causality and the processes underlying the behaviors in non-experimental studies. Therefore, they are a comprehensive statistical method monitored through a structural equation model and used for testing hypotheses regarding the relationships between latent variables.<sup>[41,42]</sup>

### Participants

The inclusion criteria were: (1) both the adolescents' and parents' voluntary participation and signing an informed consent form, (2) no psychological or mental disorders that could affect understanding the study questions, (3) both parents' being alive, and (4) being in ninth or tenth grade. Those who did not fit these criteria, did not want to participate or did not respond to all the questions were excluded from the study.

The study data were collected from 700 adolescents who met the inclusion criteria, were in ninth or tenth grade, and 13 to 18 (15.20±0.75) years old. They were students at three different Anatolian high schools. Of the participants, 57.3% were female. Of the participants' mothers, 37.7% had completed primary school, and 46% of their fathers had university or postgraduate education. Of the participants, 85.6% had nuclear families, and 67.0% had equal income and expenditures (Table 1).

### Data Collection Tools

*The Personal Information Form:* This form included questions about the adolescents' age, gender, educational levels of

their parents and economic levels of their families.

*The Parental Attitude Scale (PAS):* This scale was developed by Kuzgun in 1972. Kuzgun and Eldeleklioğlu<sup>[43]</sup> did its Turkish validity and reliability study in 1996. It has 40 questions and 3 subscales: authoritarian, democratic and protective-willing parental attitudes. The Cronbach's alpha values of the subscales were 0.89, 0.82 and 0.78 for democratic attitude, protective-willing attitude, and authoritarian attitude, respectively. This study found the Cronbach's alpha values of the subscales to be 0.91, 0.85 and 0.82 for democratic attitude, protective-willing attitude and authoritarian attitude, respectively. The PAS is a 5-point Likert-type scale, and each item is scored from 1 to 5 (1=not appropriate, 5=appropriate). The democratic attitude subscale includes 15 questions. The highest possible subscale score is 75, and the lowest is 15. Higher scores indicate more perceived democratic parental attitudes. The protective-willing attitude subscale includes 15 questions. The highest possible subscale score is 75, and the lowest score is 15. Higher scores indicate more perceived protective-willing parental attitudes. The authoritarian attitude subscale includes 10 questions. The highest possible subscale score is 50, and the lowest is 10. Higher scores indicate more perceived authoritarian parental attitudes.<sup>[43]</sup>

**Table 1. The adolescents' descriptive characteristics (n=700)**

	n	%
Gender		
Male	299	42.7
Female	401	57.3
Mean age (15.20±0.75)		
13–15 years	455	65.0
16–18 years	245	35.0
Grade		
9 <sup>th</sup> grade	353	50.4
10 <sup>th</sup> grade	347	49.6
Mother's education level		
Primary school	264	37.7
High school	215	30.7
University-postgraduate	221	31.6
Father's education level		
Primary school	196	28.0
High school	182	26.0
University-postgraduate	322	46.0
Family type		
Nuclear family	599	85.6
Extended family	54	7.7
Broken family	47	6.7
Parent's economic level		
Income<expenditures	47	6.7
Income=expenditures	469	67.0
Income>expenditures	184	26.3

*The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (PHSCS)*: Piers and Harris<sup>[44]</sup> developed this scale to measure the self-reliance, self-concept, self-perception and self-assessment of 9 to 20-year olds in 1964. Its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Çataklı and Öner<sup>[45]</sup> in 1985. The scale includes 80 yes or no questions. Every correct answer receives one point, and every wrong answer receives zero points. The scale does not have a cut-off point, which is why higher scale scores indicate higher self-perception. Higher scores indicate positive thoughts and emotions, and lower scores indicates negative thoughts and emotions. The highest possible scale score is 80, and the lowest is 0. This study found the Cronbach's alpha value of the PHSCS to be 0.90.

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) Armsden and Greenberg<sup>[46]</sup> (1987) developed the IPPA to measure the parent and peer attachment. This study used the short form developed by Raja et al.<sup>[47]</sup> (1992). Its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Günaydın et al.<sup>[48]</sup> in 2005. The IPPA is a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=never, 7=always). The scale's subscale scores are calculated separately. The highest possible subscale score is 84, and the lowest is 12. Higher subscale scores indicate more secure peer or parent attachments. The Cronbach's alpha values were .88 for the mother attachment subscale and .90 for the father attachment subscale. This study found Cronbach's alpha values of 0.63, 0.80 and 0.84 for the peer attachment, mother attachment and father attachment subscales, respectively.

### Data Collection

Permission to collect the data was obtained from the Çankaya District National Education Directorate and the school principals. All the participants were informed about the study in the presence of their advisory teacher before data collection, and the voluntary participants were identified. The participants were under the age of 18, which is why permission was obtained from their parents. The adolescents whose parents gave permission were included in the study. The data collection tools were handed out to the participants by the researcher and the advisory teacher and the participants completed them in approximately 30 minutes.

### Data Evaluation

The study data were coded and analyzed by the researchers using SPSS 20.0 software. Descriptive statistics are shown as numbers and percentages. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationships between the PAS, the PHSCS and the IPPA. A structural equation model was used to evaluate the roles of the perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles of the adolescents on self-perception and analyzed using AMOS 23 V software. The roles of the perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles of adolescents in self-perception were evaluated using standardized regression

coefficients. CMIN/df, CFI and RMSEA values were examined to evaluate the validity of the structural equation model. The CMIN/df value was between 0 and 3, the CFI value was above 0.95, and the RMSEA value was under 0.08, which indicates that the model had good fit and were acceptable.<sup>[49]</sup>

### Ethical Considerations

Ethics committee permission was obtained from the Hacettepe University Non-Invasive Clinical Studies Ethics Committee on July 8, 2015 with decision GO 15/431-12.

## Results

### Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 shows the relationship between the participants' mean scores and standard deviations on the measurement tools, and the relationship between measurement tools. Correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between democratic attitude and the IPPA subscales, and negative relationships between protective-willing attitude and authoritarian attitude, and the IPPA subscales and self-perception. A positive relationship was found between the IPPA subscales and self-perception ( $p < 0.01$ ).

### The Structural Equation Model

The structural equation model was used to determine the roles of the attachment styles and perceived parental attitudes of the adolescents in their self-perception. The model used attachment styles and perceived parental attitudes as independent variables, and self-perception as the dependent variable. The approximate standardized results of the model are shown in Figure 1. The factor loads for the latent variables of parent and peer attachment ranged from 0.52 to 0.79, the factor loads for perceived parental attitude ranged from 0.63 to 0.90, and the factor loads for self-perception ranged from 0.11 to 0.79. Of the explained variance of self-perception latent variables, 50% was calculated as the direct effects of the perceived parental attitude and attachment latent variables.

Evaluation of the model fit index of the structural equation model found values of  $\chi^2/df=29.231/9$ ,  $CMIN/df=3.248$ ,  $CFI=0.991$  and  $RMSEA=0.057$ , which are acceptable fit indices. The standardized regression (beta) coefficients indicated that attachment styles had a positive effect ( $\beta=0.79$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) on self-perception. Mother attachment ( $\beta=0.79$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) had the highest predictor effect for self-perception, followed by father attachment ( $\beta=0.70$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and peer attachment ( $\beta=0.52$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Perceived parental attitude did not have a significant effect on self-perception ( $\beta=0.11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ); however, it did have a positive effect on attachment styles ( $\beta=0.77$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Authoritarian parental attitude ( $\beta=-0.90$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) had a negative and the highest predictor

**Table 2. PAS, IPPA and PHCSCS descriptive and correlation analyses**

Subscales	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1- Democratic attitude	60.24	11.48						
2- Protective-willing attitude	19.83	7.36	-0.426*					
3- Authoritarian attitude	38.55	11.10	-0.728*	0.647*				
4- Peer attachment	59.48	10.86	0.340*	-0.191*	-0.300*			
5- Mother attachment	64.77	14.55	0.673*	-0.405*	-0.620*	0.404*		
6- Father attachment	59.32	17.47	0.594*	-0.309*	-0.506*	0.402*	0.544*	
7- Total PHCSCS score	55.56	11.82	0.497*	-0.332*	-0.530*	0.478*	0.515*	0.503*

\*p<0.01. PAS: Parental Attitude Scale; IPPA: Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment; PHCSCS: Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale; SD: Standard deviation.

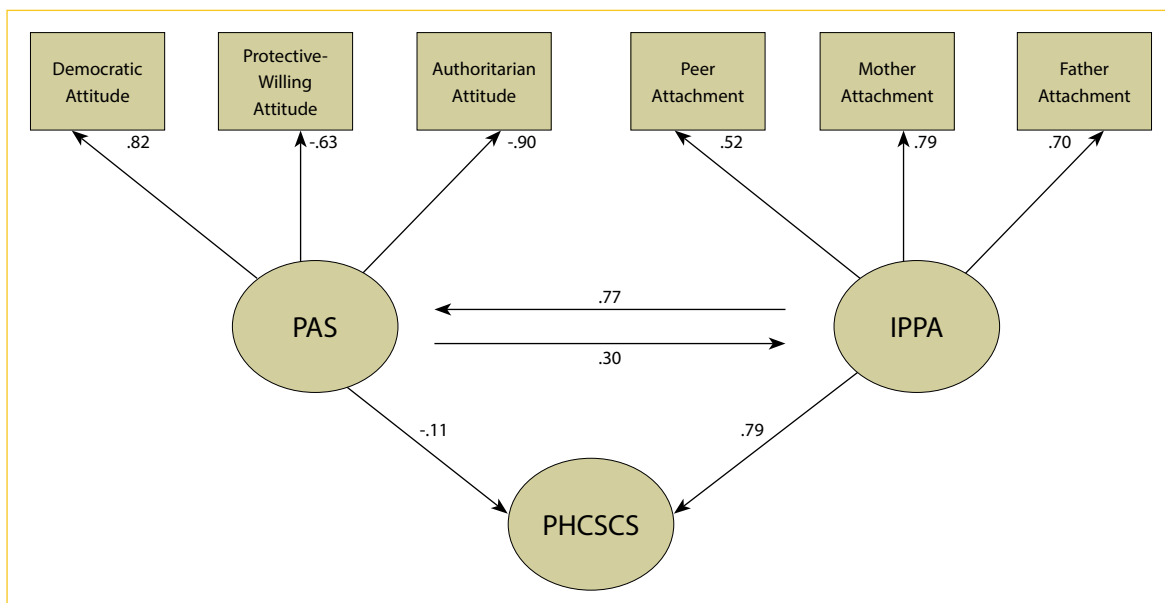
effect on the attachment styles of the adolescents. Democratic parental attitude ( $\beta=0.82, p<0.05$ ) had a positive predictor effect on the attachment styles of the adolescents, and protective-willing parental attitude ( $\beta=-0.63, p<0.05$ ) had a negative predictor effect on their attachment styles. These results indicate that attachment styles had more effect than perceived parental attitude, and that perceived parental attitude indirectly affected the adolescent's self-perception through attachment styles.

### Discussion

Previous studies frequently suggest that parental attitudes and family environments are important for the physical, psychological and social development of adolescents.<sup>[7,50,51]</sup> Family structures have changed in recent years, and parents' increasing levels of education have caused parental attitudes to become more democratic, but some families still retain traditional family characteristics. In these families, mothers take

care of the children, while fathers take economic responsibility for the household and have limited relationships with their children.<sup>[52,53]</sup> This may cause adolescents to question their relationships with their parents, compare them to those of their peers and internalize problems. This study evaluated the roles of perceived parental attitude and attachment styles on adolescents' self-perception.

Descriptive analysis found a positive relationship between the attachment styles and self-perception of adolescents. The adolescents who had secure peer and parent attachments had higher mean self-perception scores. The literature supports this study result and indicates that secure parent and peer attachments positively affect adolescents' self-perception and causes them to have healthier adolescent development.<sup>[8,27,54,55]</sup> Adolescents who have secure parent and peer attachments establish strong emotional and social bonds and become more autonomous individuals by securely separating from their parents but getting emotional



**Figure 1.** Structural Equation Model. PAS: Parental Attitude Scale; PAS: Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment; IPPA: Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.



and behavioral support from them when necessary. This increases their self-reliance, social and emotional support mechanisms and causes them to be more assertive, which positively affects self-perception. Higher perceived democratic parental attitude correlated with higher mean self-perception scores. Higher perceived protective-willing and authoritarian parental attitudes correlated with lower mean self-perception scores. Parents with democratic attitudes meet adolescents' basic emotional and psychological needs, establish close relationships and positively affect their self-development by supporting their autonomy. However, authoritarian or protective-willing parents do not adequately support the autonomy and individualization of adolescents. Their overprotective, oppressive and critical behavior, and psychological and behavioral control cause adolescents to have problems with self-development.<sup>[7,9,10,50]</sup> The literature indicates that close relationships, supporting autonomy and democratic parental attitude positively affect the self-development of adolescents. However, protective-willing, authoritarian and neglectful parental attitudes cause adolescents to form negative attitudes towards themselves, which negatively affects their self-development.<sup>[13,16,21,51]</sup> Democratic parental attitude supports the autonomy, roles and responsibilities of adolescents with parental guidance, which positively affects their self-development. However, protective or authoritarian parental attitudes lead adolescents to hide their problems from their parents and thus not get adequate support, which causes physical, psychological and social problems and negatively affects self-development.

The adolescents with perceived democratic parental attitudes had higher secure parent and peer attachment scores, and those with perceived authoritarian and protective-willing parental attitudes had lower secure attachment scores. Nunes and Mota<sup>[7]</sup> (2017) also found that adolescents with perceived democratic parental attitudes had higher secure attachment scores, and that those with perceived authoritarian parental attitudes had lower secure attachment scores. Other studies have found that adolescents with perceived democratic parental attitudes had higher secure parent and peer attachment scores.<sup>[10,56]</sup> The literature also supports the finding that the adolescents with perceived authoritarian and protective-willing parental attitudes had lower secure attachment scores.<sup>[5,9,57]</sup> Adolescents whose basic emotional and psychological needs are met and get adequate guidance and support have secure parent attachment. As a result of secure parent attachment, adolescents generalize this attachment behavior to all close and emotional relationships and securely bond with other people.

The roles of perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles were evaluated using a structural equation model. The model indicated that secure parent and peer attachment had a significant effect on self-perception. Secure mother attachments were better predictors of the self-perception

of the adolescents than secure father or peer attachments. Parental attitudes had no significant effect on self-perception. Parental attitudes did not directly affect self-perception, but perceived parental attitudes significantly accounted for attachment styles. Authoritarian and protective-willing parental attitudes negatively predicted the secure attachment behavior of the adolescents, and democratic parental attitude positively predicted it. Thus, perceived parental attitude did not directly predict self-perception, but did so indirectly through attachment styles. Previous studies have indicated that perceived parental attitude had an effect on establishing strong bonds with parents, and that democratic parental attitude positively affect the establishment of strong emotional attachments, while authoritarian and permissive parental attitudes negatively affect the establishment of strong emotional attachments.<sup>[7,51,57]</sup> Parental attitudes, the establishment of trust-based relationships with parents and fulfillment of adolescents' basic emotional and physical needs have positive effects on their secure attachment behavior and self-perception and reduce behavioral and psychological problems.<sup>[8,10,50]</sup> Adolescents with secure attachment behaviors with their parents and peers have more positive self-perception, autonomy and self-efficacy, and fewer physiological and behavioral problems.<sup>[51,54,55]</sup> The maternal relationship during early childhood development is the basis of secure attachment behavior. Basic trust and the fulfillment of emotional and psychological needs in maternal relationships cause children to generalize these behaviors. Therefore, secure mother attachment had more effect on self-perception. Attachment behavior had a direct predictor effect on self-perception. The indirect effect of parental attitudes is due to the fact that attachment behaviors are more effective during children's early development. More perceived democratic parental attitudes indicate stronger secure bonds, and more perceived protective and authoritarian parental attitudes damage bonds, which is why they had an indirect effect on self-perception.

## Conclusion

This study found that adaptation to the changes and self-development during adolescence are significantly affected by perceived parental attitudes and secure attachments. Psychiatric nurses should make significant protective psychiatric health interventions for both adolescents and parents. They should educate parents about secure attachments and effective parenting skills to help adolescents and children to get through their developmental processes. Effective parenting skills education for parents can minimize the behavioral and psychological problems of children and adolescents. Mixed pattern studies with more comprehensive qualitative and quantitative methods should examine adolescents' expectations of their parents concerning parenting

skills education. Studies suggest that such educational programs should be culture specific. Psychiatric nurses should also develop individual and group-based programs to improve adolescents' adaptation to adolescence. These interventions will help adolescents to get through adolescence physically and psychologically, to be autonomous and self-reliant, and to have strong social relationships and positive self-development.

### Study Limitations

This study has some limitations. The perceived parental attitudes and attachment styles of the adolescents were only evaluated by the adolescents. The parents' own attitudes and attachments to the adolescents were not evaluated. The adolescents who were under 18 years old and willing to participate in this study, but were not allowed to do so by their parents to participate were not included. The adolescents who had lost one or both of their parents were not included since attachment styles were evaluated separately for mothers and fathers. This study only included participants from three Anatolian high schools in Çankaya, Ankara, so its results cannot be generalized.

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- \* *This study, it was presented as oral presentation V. International IX. National Psychiatric Nursing Congress held in Antalya between 20-23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2018, it was produced under the guidance of Professor Fatma Öz in 2017 Hacettepe University Institute of Health Sciences in the department of psychiatric nursing from the doctoral dissertation.*