The Impact of Negative Labeling as Emotional Abuse on Teenagers

Syeda Kaniz Fatima Haider* & Syeda Nabahat Asher†

Abstract

The major purpose of present research was to study the impact of labeling on adolescents personality. This research was carried out on three hundred adolescent girls and boys with age ranging between 14 and 22 years from different schools, colleges and university of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The participants were selected on the basis of their availability through self-administered questionnaires. The sample of three hundred participants was divided into two groups. (a) Labeled group (N=150) and (b) Non-labeled group (N=150). Self-image scale and Sixteen-personality factors (16pf) test were administered to know the relationship of labeling with their personalities. The study found that labeling effected the self-image of the participants but there was no strong impact on their personalities. Results indicate that labeled and non-labeled groups both have same personality, their age, mature and stable beliefs, norms, personality differences and environmental changes were the major reasons of their stable personalities. Adolescents having good home environment and normal health were more stable than participants with poor health and unhealthy home environment.

Keywords: Labeling, Adolescents, Personality, Self-Image, Behavior

Introduction

When people assign labels to one another, it may actually reflect how they perceive themselves. The labeling perspective of unexpected behavior has been the subject of considerable debate among today's researchers. Some regard labeling as useful for better personality building while some refer it as very dangerous thing for growing personalities. Labeling is most commonly associated with the sociology of crime and deviance, where it is used to point out how social processes of labeling and treating someone as criminally deviant actually fosters deviant behavior and has negative consequence for that person since others are likely to be biased against them because of the label.

Labeling theory states that people tend to act in accordance with the labels that other assign to them. When people are assigned label they tend to view themselves and act in such a way that promote them to be labeled in that way. For example, when people label a person as nonsense, he tends to act in ways that reinforce the label he is given. Cassandra and Kelly (2005) have characterized labeling theory as "truly developmental in nature, because of its explicit importance on processes over time". Official labeling is seen as a transitional event that can considerably change the life course by reducing

---

* College of Home Economics, University of Peshawar
† College of Home Economics, University of Peshawar

opportunities for a usual life. Thus, labeling is seen as being indirectly related to subsequent behavior through its negative impact on predictable opportunities (Joe, 2011). Names are consider to be a big part of adolescents' identity, personal names normally express some personal trait, some incident associated with birth, some hope, desire, or wish of the parents (James, 2006).Sometimes the names given at birth express the time of birth, the place of birth, religious names were frequently given, the simplest being expressive of thanks to Allah for the gift of a child. Similarly, Nadhim and Christine, (1994) Adolescence is a period of rapid physical and psychological changes which demands significant adjustment to these changes. Their names also play very significant role in their adjustment (Howard, 2003).

According to Elbaum, and Vaughn (2003) sometimes the adolescents are labeled because of their specific characteristics e.g. naughty. If the person is fat people label him/her as "motto" meaning fat. People mostly attach labels to each other which can be either positive or negative. For adults labeling has little effect but the names or labels which are given in childhood retain their effect throughout their live. For instance, positive labeling helps in enhancing the person's confidence, surety and he / she tries to improve his or her skills, while negative labels give birth to the deviant behavior (Claudia, 2008).

Labeling is crucial; once we state any specific word for someone then it holds meaning. One of the best definitions of labeling given by Faith (2006) is that "labeling is a process of creating descriptors to identify persons who differ from the norm. According to Carolyn (2000) school plays an important role and remains a significant cause in defining, labeling and treating disability. Some psychologists have specified the word labeling to the negative aspects of personality and they define labeling as a negative process. For example, according to Kalkhoff, Alabakovska and Burke (2005) labeling is "the process by which a person becomes fixed with a negative identity, and is forced to suffer the consequences of outcast status".

The risk of labels is that adolescents have a tendency to believe what is thought about them and live up to that expectation (Davis, 2004). When person start thinking about what other said about him, it unconsciously affects his personality because they change personality built by society like family members, sibling, teachers etc. Research studies have shown the dangers of labeling and how people tend to believe what is said about them and live up to that negative expectation (Antczak, 2011). This might be a key factor for adolescents to have a more positive lifestyle. Instead of labeling, we need to teach adolescents what they are supposed to learn at this particular stage of their lives. Often there is nothing wrong with the child but because of labeling they spoil their personality and it is very common in our country especially at school level (Marsh, Chessor, Craven and Roche, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to investigate impact of labeling on adolescent which is a common phenomenon at schools homes and other institutes in Pakistan.

Objectives
The major objective of the present study was to investigate the negative impact of labeling on adolescents' personality.

Hypotheses
The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

1. Negatively labeled adolescent will have poor self-image than non-labeled adolescents.
2. There will be less personality differences among labeled and non-labeled groups.

Selection of Sample
Three hundred respondents i.e. one hundred and fifty girls and boys from labeled group and one hundred and fifty girls and boys from non–labeled group with ages ranging between 14-22 years from grade ninth, tenth, intermediate and bachelor level were selected. Respondents were selected on the basis of their availability through convenient sampling technique.

Scrutinizing the Respondents
The respondents were selected and scrutinized on the basis of self constructed questionnaire especially designed for the identification of labeled and non labeled adolescents. Three basic questions were asked: 1) Did people in family call you by any other name or did they label you because of your any special trait or habit; 2) Did people in your institution call you by any other name or did they label you because of any special trait or habit; and 3) Did people around your friends and peers call you by any other name or did they label you because of your any special trait or habit. Then the sample of three hundred respondents was divided into two groups i.e. labeled group (N=150) and non labeled group (N=150).

Instruments
1. *Self-Constructed Demographic Sheet* was designed which included two parts. The first part dealt with general demographic information including their nick name (if any), age, education, institute, family system, and gender and birth order. While second part focused on the respondents aims, complains, academic interests, adjustment problems, psychological, physiological and social environment.
2. *Self-Image scale* was administered to know self-image of respondents about themselves. While Standardized Personality Test 16PF developed by Raymond Cattell (1949) was used to study participant's personality. Sixteen Personality Factor measures the traits such as: Warmth, Reasoning, Emotional stability, Dominance, Liveliness, Rule- Consciousness, Social Boldness, Sensitivity, Vigilance, Abstractness, Privateness, Apprehension, Openness to Change, Self-Reliance, Perfectionism, Tension.

Procedure

The researchers contacted administration of different schools, colleges and departments for their permission and briefed them about the purpose of the study. Self-image scale and I6PF was administered to the groups. Moreover, self- constructed questionnaire was also designed and administered to get demographic data and other information about the participant.

Duration of Data Collection

Data collection took almost four and a half months, because of too-much lengthy test the respondent took more than expected time. Response was recorded on questionnaire in order to keep proper record.

Table 1   Mean Difference and t-value of Labeled Group and Non-labeled Group on the Score of Self-image Scale (N=300)

Group	N	X	SD	*t*-value	*p*-value	*Cohen's d*
labeled group (Group-I)	150	1.96	0.18			
				9.07	.000	1.06
Non-labeled group (Group-II)	150	1.26	0.36			

d. f=298   Effect size (r)= 0.47(medium)

Note: The lower the score on the scale the lesser will be their self-image.

Table 1 indicates the total number of the sample, the means, and standard deviations of the score on self-image. The result shows that non-labeled group showed higher mean as compared to labeled group. The mean difference 0.40 is statistically highly significant at (p<.01).

Table 2   Reasons and Personal Feelings of Labeled Group (N=150)

Reasons for Labeling	F	%	Feeling when labeled	F	%
Habits	16	21.5%	Accepted	24	32%
Behavior	11	14.5%	Conscious	07	09%
Looks	17	22.5%	Tense	06	08%
Dressing	16	21.5%	Don't care	30	40%
Physique	15	20%	Shy	08	10%
Total	75	100%	Total	75	100%

Table 2 shows the major causes of labeling and also indicates the feelings of the respondents when they were labeled. Majority of them were labeled because of their looks, dressing and habits. The data indicates that 40% of the respondents don't care about people opinion feel highly satisfied, while 24% accepted how people label them.

Table 3   Mean and Standard Deviation of Male and Female Adolescent on 16PF Test (N=300)

	Factors	Male		Female	
		M	SD	M	SD
1.	Reserved Vs Outgoing	5.82	1.24	4.35	1.43
2.	less intelligent Vs More intelligent	2.42	1.38	3.8	1.71
3.	Affected by feelings Vs emotional stable	4.55	1.38	4.93	1.64
4.	Humble Vs Assertive	4.88	1.64	6.53	1.39
5.	Sober Vs Happy-Go-Lucky	4.28	1.24	4.15	1.75
6.	Expedient Vs Conscientious	4.73	1.27	4.55	1.67
7.	Shy Vs Venturesome	4.91	1.23	5.28	1.17
8.	Tough-minded Vs Tender-minded	5.77	0.92	3.77	1.64
9.	Trusting Vs Suspicious	6.08	1.7	6.28	1.87
10.	Practical Vs Imaginative	5.28	1.65	5.17	1.66
11.	Forthright Vs Astute	6.84	2.15	6.35	1.95
12.	Self-assured Vs apprehensive	6.68	1.47	6.31	1.8
13.	conservative Vs Experimenting	6.11	1.26	6.8	1.4
14.	Group dependent Vs Self sufficient	5.53	1.32	6.04	1.58
15.	Undisciplined self-conflict Vs controlled	5	1.71	5.31	1.86
16.	Relaxed Vs Tense	5.08	1.06	4.86	1.12

Table 3 represents the mean and standard deviation scores of male and female group of adolescents. This table indicates slight difference between male and female group. Highest mean in male group is M=6.84, SD=2.15 in 10 factor i.e. forthright Vs astute while female scores high in same factor i.e. M=6.35, SD=1.95.

Table 4   Mean and Standard Deviation of Negative Labeled and Non Labeled Adolescent on 16PF Test (N=300)

Factors		Negative labeled group		Non labeled group	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	Reserved Vs Outgoing	4.73	1.61	5.2	1.66
2	Less intelligent Vs More intelligent	3.06	1.72	2.86	1.52
3	Affected by feelings Vs emotional stable	5.8	1.19	4.51	1.32
4	Humble Vs Assertive	4.7	1.03	5.73	1.85
5	Sober Vs Happy-Go-Lucky	4.06	1.50	4.33	1.26
6	Expedient Vs Conscientious	3.6	1.07	4.83	1.34
7	Shy Vs Venturesome	3.03	0.92	5.06	1.14
8	Tough-minded Vs Tender-minded	4.8	1.64	4.53	1.63
9	Trusting Vs Suspicious	4.86	1.09	6.63	1.51
10	Practical Vs Imaginative	4.96	1.54	5.2	1.64
11	Forthright Vs Astute	6.53	1.75	6.9	2.24
12	Self-assured Vs apprehensive	6.73	1.41	6.7	1.64
13	Conservative Vs Experimenting	6.56	1.50	5.5	1.07
14	Group dependent Vs Self sufficient	6.56	1.95	5.1	1.20
15	Undisciplined self-conflict Vs controlled	6.1	1.60	4.86	1.73
16	Relaxed Vs Tense	5.3	1.09	4.9	1.09

Table 4 reflects mean and standard deviation scores of negative labeled group and non labeled group result indicates that both groups have little difference.

Discussion

It was observed that children develop and define their sense of self by processing what others tell them about who they are, what they are good at, how they behave. The present research confirms that sometimes adolescents are facing the same problems and feel doubtful, they were always conscious about their physic, their body weight especially girls.

This study gives incredible results. Labeling has significant impact on self-image of adolescents. As the researcher assumed that the personalities of male adolescents will be significantly different than female adolescents. Data shows little difference in the personalities of male and female adolescents except male adolescents were more reserved, humble and relaxed as compared to female adolescents while females were more emotional than males. Both labeled and non- labeled does not showed any personality problem and no significant differences were found between their personalities because they had more stable beliefs as education, media and technology are the powerful sources which influence their perceptions. The researcher also studied a comparison between labeled and non-labeled group so it is found that there were no real difference in the personalities, labeling itself does not affect adolescent personality, it may be due to their poor self-image which affects their behavior and personalities.

Conclusion

It was concluded by the research that parents, teachers and sibling play very important role in individuals life, healthy relations and positive encouragements are the major sources in personality development. Though there are many factors which effect the self-image of adolescents and create a sense of learned helplessness. They may feel that since they are labeled they just cannot do well but if the parents are encouraging and home environment is good they will recover their low self-esteem and will not develop personality problems

References

Antczak, A. (2011). Advantages and disadvantages of diagnostic labeling: pros and cons of labeling people with clinical mental disorders. Available at < http://voices. yahoo. com/advantages-disadvantages-diagnostic-labeling-0168987.html>, Last accessed on June 12, 2015).

Carolyn, P. Edwards. (2000). *The Age Group Labels and Categories of Preschool Children.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Cassandra, K. and Kelly, T. (2005). Women's Self-Concept and the Effects of Positive or Negative Labeling Behaviors. *Journal of Undergraduate Research* VIII, pp.1-13.

Claudia, M. M. & Carol, S. D. (2008). Praise for Intelligence Can Undermine Children's Motivation and Performance, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 75, No. 1, pp. 201-221.

Davis, K. (2004). *What's in a name: Our only label should be our name: Avoiding the stereotypes*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Elbaum, B. & Vaughn, S. (2003). For which students with learning disabilities are self-concept interventions effective?, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, pp.101-109.

Faith, G. H. (2006). The effects of labeling and social desirability on perceived success of learning disability students", *Journal of Undergraduate Psychological Research*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp 9- 21.

Howard, M. K. (2003). The assessment of child and adolescent personality, New York. Guilford Press.

James S. C. (2006). The Adolescent Society*, Harvard Education Review,* Vol. 29, No. 4, pp.132-141.

Joe., L. (2011). The Physiological and Psychological Development of the Adolescent. *Journal of Psychology*. Vol. 5, No. 3, pp.100-112.

Kalkhoff, W., Alabakovska, K. and Burke, J. (2005). *Relational Distance and the Acceptance of Mental Health Evaluations: A Social Influence Approach to Labeling,* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

Marsh, H.W., Chessor, D., Craven, R., Roche, L. (2005). The effects of gifted and talented programs on academic self-concept: The big fish strikes again. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 285-321.

Nadhim, I. & Christine, G. (1994). Labeling Effect on Adolescents' Self-Concept, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 47-57.