



The Influence of Confucianism on the Self-Esteem of the Adolescents with Self-Destructive Behaviour: A Vietnamese Phenomenological Study

Konfüçyüsçülüğün Kendine Zarar Veren Davranışları Olan Ergenlerin Benlik Saygısı Üzerindeki Etkisi: Bir Viyetnam Fenomenoloji Çalışması

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Abstract

Confucianism has a substantial impact on the Vietnamese family culture. Over many generations, Confucianism in Vietnamese families has been distorted, affecting the behavior and mental health of family members. This paper presents the influence of Confucianism on the self-esteem of adolescents with self-destructive behavior. The study applied a phenomenological study approach in qualitative research to find out the essence of the adolescents' self-destructive behavior and how it affected to the adolescents' mental health. An in-depth examination of three typical cases was implemented to triangulate the data and obtain the trustworthiness. The findings showed that self-destructive behavior stemmed from the participants' needs for being recognized and loved by parents that were not satisfied due to loose family attachment caused by their parents' Confucian ideology. This reason led to consequences that the adolescents' self-esteem appeared to be incomplete and that they tended to exhibit negative behaviors. As a result, the essence of self-destructive behavior is the consequence of prejudices about Confucian ideology in family education that still exists in Vietnamese family culture. These findings offer an essential reference source for counseling and mental health care services in supporting those with self-destructive behavior caused by family.

Keywords: Confucianism, Self-destructive behaviour, Family education, Adolescent, Self-esteem.

Öz

Konfüçyüsçülüğün Vietnam aile kültürü üzerinde önemli bir etkisi vardır. Vietnamlı ailelerde, Konfüçyüsçülük nesiller boyunca çarpıtılmıştır. Bu durum, aile üyelerinin davranışlarını ve ruh sağlığını etkilemiştir. Bu makalede, Konfüçyüsçülüğün kendine zarar veren davranışlara sahip ergenlerin özsaygıları üzerindeki etkisi tartışılmaktadır. Araştırmada, ergenlerin kendine zarar veren davranışlarının özünü ve bunun ergenlerin ruh sağlığını nasıl etkilediğini ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla nitel araştırma kapsamında fenomenolojik çalışma yaklaşımı uygulanmıştır. Verileri üçgenlemek ve güvenilirliği elde etmek için üç tipik vaka, derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Bulgular, ergenlerde kendine zarar verme davranışının, ebeveynlerin Konfüçyüsçü ideolojisinin neden olduğu gevşek aile bağlılığı nedeniyle tatmin olmayan ergen katılımcıların, ebeveynleri tarafından tanınma ve sevilme ihtiyaçlarından kaynaklandığını göstermiştir. Bu durum, ergenlerin benlik saygısının eksik görünmesi ve olumsuz davranışlar sergileme eğiliminde olmaları gibi sonuçlara yol açmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, kendine zarar verici davranışının özünün, Vietnam aile kültüründe hala var olan aile eğitiminde Konfüçyüsçü ideolojiye ilişkin önyargıların sonucu olduğu ifade edilebilir. Bu bulgular, aileden kaynaklanan kendine zarar verici davranışlar sergileyen bireylerin desteklenmesi açısından, danışmanlık ve ruh sağlığı hizmetleri için önemli bir referans kaynağı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Konfüçyüsçülük, Kendine zarar verme davranışı, Aile eğitimi, Ergenlik, Benlik saygısı.



Introduction

According to the World Health Organization's prediction, by 2020, suicide will be the leading cause of death in developed countries and the second in developing countries. The expressions of self-destructive behavior (SDB) also include self-harm (e.g., hunger strike; using a knife to cut hands and feet; pulling hair; burning skin or scratching the body; punching a wall; slapping the face); irresistible behaviors (e.g., gambling, overeating, stimulant use, unsafe sex, excessive shopping); neglect (e.g., inattention to needs, health, refusal to receive help); and thoughts/actions that can be detrimental to the mental health (e.g., pessimism, obsession, denying responsibility, allowing people to mistreat themselves). These behaviors are common among adolescents (Kerig, 2017). Although, according to DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), suicidal acts are different from SDB even though they are closely related. Therefore, these two behaviors cannot be separated from research and clinical practice. Stivers (1990) found that, for adolescents, the lack of self-esteem can lead to self-destruction. Thompson and Bhugra (2000) agreed that there is a correlation between children's self-esteem and SDB. These researchers also pointed out that the main factor affecting a child's self-esteem is family education (FE).

FE, or family culture, is the foundation of a child's personality education throughout their lifetime. If the culture of a family tends to impose, control, and ignore the role of the child, their self-esteem system will be affected because they will not be able to develop autonomy and cannot achieve excellent academic performance in this family system (Schmidt and Padilla, 2003). The way these children tend to relieve the repression brought about by the family is through SDB, which attracts the parents' attention or escapes from the reality of grief and frustration.

Vietnam is a country with the Confucian heritage culture, a religious ideology system, that has strongly influenced Vietnamese education and family culture for over 2000 years, from the time Vietnam was colonized by China (Chu, 2019). Therefore, the Vietnamese family culture (up to the present time) is always more or less influenced by Confucian ideology (Pham, 2019). Some modern Confucian educational ideas are no longer appropriate because they violate gender equality rights and family education methodology but are still preserved in the traditional educational methods of many Vietnamese families. It can lead to generation conflicts between parents and children as well as among other family members. As a result, too many adolescents feel that the family is not a safe environment and become autistic, live in a virtual world, or harm themselves to reduce their stress.

Based on these points, this paper presents the influence of Confucianism on the self-esteem of adolescents with SDB in Vietnamese families. The study offers insights into the causes of adolescents' SDB and explores the experience of the Vietnamese adolescents having SDB caused by living in the Confucian family within the context of phenomenology.

The Confucianism and its influence on the self-esteem and SDB of the adolescents in Vietnamese families

Studies on the impact of religious thought on human SDB are not a new field. However, each religion will have different influences on such behaviors. In Western countries, in Christianity, suicide is an unforgivable act of violating filial piety to parents (Sanders, 2020). In Eastern countries where Buddhism is popular, it is believed that suicide is a great sin and the worst for humans. Besides, some other religions consider suicide to be a sacred thing. In Japan, the Samurai did not complete the task of choosing a form of self-dissection to atone for the act of failure because they revered the culture of "death is protecting the dignity" in Shinto. This cult of suicidal behavior seems to be engraved in the minds of Japanese and has become one of the leading causes of the nation's high suicide rate in the world (Leenaars, 2017).

Hinduism and some ancient countries (such as Champa) have a tradition of voluntary/forced wives to be burned with their husbands (Gearing and Alonzo, 2018; Kitts, 2018). With Confucianism, the teaching system does not seem to mention the issue of suicide, however, in the concept of three obligatory tasks of women clearly defined issues of life – death: ‘when in your family, obey your father; when married, obey your husband; when your husband died, obey your son.’ The fate of a woman is decided by the family’s main man (Cheung, 2020). This view was imprinted on the educational ideology of Confucian families and easily realized, this thought strongly influenced the education of parents, especially in personality education for their children.

Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam many years before Christ when China invaded Vietnam. It has more than 2,000 years of existence and nearly 500 years as Vietnam’s national religion. Confucian ideology strongly influenced the cultural foundation of Vietnamese families (Weiming, 2017). Dormeier Freire and Giang (2012) found that Confucianism had both positive and negative impacts on Vietnamese families. On the one hand, Confucianism emphasizes the gratitude and responsibility of people towards their families and considers it an emotional focal point for people to fulfill their obligations towards the country and their families. In other words, Confucianism highly values discipline and order within the family.

On the other hand, it brought about selfish familyism, whereby the father and the grandfather have absolute authority; the daughters-in-law must follow their husbands and their husbands’ families. Unlike sons, daughters have no voice in the family. Jayakody and Phuong (2013) analyzed and evaluated the negative influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese families today, showing that the thought of three obligations and; respecting the absolute decision-making power of the father has made many Vietnamese families ‘incomplete’. The gap between generations has become too high; the children have no voice in family and are obliged to follow all the decisions of grandparents and parents. In career orientation, family decision making is directly and almost decisively with the career choices of high school students (Tran, 2017). In the marriage, without the consent of the parents, a couple cannot conduct the marriage; even, some families still have the habit of ‘getting engaged’ to their children from an early age (Tran, 2019). In business or vocational orientation, children often have to continue the family line, not in a different field other than the family tradition (Dormeier Freire and Giang, 2012). In daily life, during meals, the woman can only eat after the man is served (Tran, 2019). The studies of Van (2003) and Nguyen (2019) on the psychological trauma of children in incomplete families also suggest that the imposition and the separation of parents are one of the causes of children’s trauma. This problem stems from the idea of teaching children from a Confucian perspective. Dinh et al. (2019) analyzed the self-esteem of children living in incomplete Vietnamese families and yielded similar results that the self-esteem system of these children is almost below average, and this leads to negative behaviors such as committing suicide and SDB (e.g., hunger strike, slitting hands, self-isolation).

A child’s self-esteem develops through schooling and learning from their own families. Barry et al. (2007) found that, when children’s self-esteem was harmed, they were more likely to engage in adolescent offenses. Goodson et al. (2006) agreed that when self-esteem is not strengthened, children not only tend to exhibit standard deviation when they reach adulthood, but they also tend to live in isolation or retreat from social interactions for the simple reason that they lose faith in social relationships. Schou Andreassen and Pallesen (2014), when studying social network addiction behavior of high school students, found that one of the significant causes of student’s addictive behavior is the lack of family interaction. A study on social isolation syndrome of Coles et al. (2016) also showed that adolescents chose this way of reaction because they did not feel safe in the family, did not receive respect, recognition, and attention from their parents. Nguyen et al. (2018), in a study on Vietnamese teenage self-isolation behavior, emphasized that the lack of family interaction and opposing educational ideology of parents led to such behavior, causing involved children’s SDB.

The interaction and attachment between family members, especially the cultural and religious aspect of the family, also has an impact on the children's self-esteem and behavioral tendencies. Rothbaum et al. (2002) believed that children observed the interaction between parents and their parents' solutions in family conflicts. This taught them a range of excellent and essential values for maturity. Behavior with people around, the way they play and choose friends, team spirit, and many other things about children are also influenced by how parents treat each other. If the relationship between parents and children is not strong enough to make children safe to learn and develop, it is straightforward for children to develop unwanted behaviors and risk illegal behaviors in the future. The role of parents has not stopped there; parents are also responsible for teaching children to understand the family's religion, praying, and understanding what to do and what is wrong (Walsh, 2012). Parents should teach children how to accept and have faith in the right things to help them be more aware of their future goals. However, do not try to bind the child to any religion they do not want, leave them free to explore the spiritual world in their own way. Heinke et al. (2019) agreed with the spiritual education for children in the family that children should not be forced to follow the standards of the mental and religious life of their parents. Parents should let the children choose their own beliefs and religions. Exline and Rose (2005) found that religious imposition in the family was a source of many mental disorders, even psychotic symptoms and personality disorders in children when they matured. At the same time in Vietnam, Tran (2019) stated that religion and spiritual culture of the family is one of the factors that strengthen family ties among generations. When analyzing loose cohesion and incomplete families, previous Vietnamese studies found a conflict of ideological, religious, and spiritual life between parents and children is the seed of the breakdown, unhappy and prone to violence (Nguyen, 2019; Van, 2003).

From the discussion of the literature, globally and locally, the relationship between family members has a substantial impact on children's psychology, and Confucian ideology has been affecting the family educational methods. As a result, the children experience many adverse effects on self-esteem, especially when they enter a period of psychological crisis (puberty period). The researcher raises the question of how the ideology of Confucian education in the family affects the self-esteem and SDB of Vietnamese adolescents. Therefore, this study is conducted to understand the essence of the Vietnamese adolescents' SDB, approaching the Confucian viewpoint.

Method

Study Design

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the SDB for Vietnamese adolescents at the Confucian family ideology. At this stage in the research, the SDB will be generally defined as the expressions of the external behavior of a conflict between Confucian parents and children. The study contributes to the discussion of the theoretical basis for the influence of religious views on SDB and the prevention measures for SDB in school counseling services, as well as other mental health services.

In a phenomenological study, the researcher overcomes or suspends prior knowledge and experience to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level (Casey, 2009; Creswell and Creswell, 2017). As a mental counselor and researcher with adolescents with SDB, the interviewer needs to acknowledge and try to frame those experiences. No participant was a client of the interviewer. Discover how the Confucian ideology affected the family education method of parents of the adolescents having SDB could reveal the intervention strategies for this group of Vietnamese SDB adolescents.

Participants

The researcher used the screening method through a questionnaire to find adolescents who exhibited SDB. The screening questionnaire was built in 2 steps: (1) Design and finalize the official questionnaire:

An open questionnaire consisting of 10 items was distributed to 30 adolescents (from 12 to 16 years old) to be surveyed; then, combined with the theoretical framework into a test questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to 10 experts in the field of counseling - psychotherapy for students with SDB for professional advice. After being commented on the questionnaire was distributed to 50 adolescents for feedback on the language and format. The questionnaire was completed after removing the necessary evaluation and suggestions of the questionnaire on the aspects of language, quantity, content, and form with Cronbach Alpha reliability of 0.863. (2) Conduct an official questionnaire distribution with 18 items (including four parts: understanding the status, understanding the perception, attitudes, and behaviors of the participants about SDB; understanding the influence of SDB; learning about living situations and assess the satisfaction with intervention strategies). The number of participants screened was 280 out of 1043 adolescents (from 12 to 16 years old).

Of the 280 participants screened as SDBs, the researcher conducted an in-depth structured interview. Each participant was asked to verbally respond to the following: 'What is your experience with SDB? Can you describe the expressions of SDB you have done? What does the SDB mean to you? Are your parents involved in your motivation to implement SDB? How do you feel about your relationship with your parents?'. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. This step was conducted by the school counselor at the participant's school. The results of the first interview were systematically compiled into a list of client information with SDB and sent to the research team for processing. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the native language of both the researchers and participants. The translation process from Vietnamese to English was done by two experts in English teaching and proofreading to ensure the Vietnamese words, phrases and expressions had almost equivalence in English.

When the abundance of cognitive representation appears, it is clear that greater depth can be achieved by asking participants to describe their experience of living in the family with parents treating them in Confucian ideology ways and providing explanations of their feelings and experience. Three participants clearly described their experiences of living in a Confucian traditional family. All collected data about the interviews was asked for permission from the participants to record by taps; some used handwritten notes to record the information. This data is committed to confidentiality and is used for research purposes only.

Data Analysis

The phenomenological method was used in analyzing the participants' transcripts. In this method, all written transcripts are read several times to get an overall feeling for them. From each transcript, key phrases or sentences directly related to the life experience of SDB and family relationships are identified. The meaning is then made up of essential sentences and phrases. Formula meanings are grouped into themes that allow for popular themes to appear on all participant transcripts. The results are then integrated into a complete, insightful description of this phenomenon. After the description and topic have been obtained, the researcher at the final step can approach several participants a second time to confirm the results. If new relevant data appears, it is included in the final description.

This study employed a thematic approach in the analysis of interview data (Guest et al., 2011). Key themes emerged from the analysis. All quotations cited in this paper have been translated from Vietnamese to English from interview transcripts. The findings are presented as a theme that represents the overall picture of how Confucian ideology in a family affected the SDB of Vietnamese adolescents. The participants' names are coded as Phu, Ha, and Vy. Based on these findings, the researcher discovered how the relationship between FE, family ideology, and family culture affected adolescent SDB tendencies. The analyzed evidence will be the concrete foundation to describe the essence of the SDB of Vietnamese adolescents in an intercultural context.

Results

From three verbal transcripts, 42 significant statements were extracted. Table 1 includes the example of significant statements with their formulated meanings:

Table 1. Selected examples of significant statements of Vietnamese adolescents with SDB caused by living in the Confucian-affected family and related formulate meanings

Significant statement	Formulated meaning
(Ha) Parents only love my brother. Therefore, I want to win over my brother’s love to avenge my parents ... I often skip meals and take my life to scare my brother to take care of and depend on me. Since then, my parents will pay more attention to me.	The adolescent wants to self-destruct to get attention and be recognized for existence by family members.
(Phu) My father always imposed everything, not giving me any decision. I have to study well, I have to become a wealthy person to continue the family tradition. I have to shoulder the responsibilities of the family, I must live for the reputation of the family ... My father never even asked if I liked those things?	The adolescent feels the gap between generations in the family is too big; parents do not sympathize with children and always want to impose everything.
(Phu) I want to live in a virtual world [online game], where I can be a heroic knight, with a great, healthy appearance. I can win against all enemies, and I am free to do what I want.	The adolescent’s self-esteem system is incomplete and negatively developed by the adverse effects of the parent’s Confucian educational perspective.
(Vy) I do not want to kill myself, I want to self-destruct. I want to take revenge on my parents. They always consider me a “sin”, a child should not be present in this world. I do that [SDB] to please them. I will torment them. I want them to regret treating me like that.	Family relationships strongly influence adolescent SDB tendencies.

Arranging these formulated meanings into clusters resulted in 2 key themes: (1) the family recognition on the formation of an adolescent’s personality, and (2) the family attachment and adolescent behavioral trends.

Theme 1: The Family Recognition on the Formation of Adolescent’s Personality

Committing SDB as a request to recognize family existence. Phu was always dissatisfied with his father’s treatment. Phu does not have the right to decide for himself. Phu likes to live in the online gaming world to be himself and to decide his life. He stated that:

‘My father is very strict with me. What my father wants me to do, I must follow. I am the only son in the house, the heir of the family. Therefore, I have to study really well and be very manly. My father always scolded me for not being like a man, being tall and strong. I am under pressure. The online gaming world is my savior. That is the only place I can be myself and be respected by everyone.’

Not just venture into the online gaming world. Phu also expressed his secret aspirations through the appearance of the avatar in the game:

‘My representative character in the game is a fierce warrior, with great body and unrivaled strength. When controlling the characters participating in in-game battles, as well as interacting with other players, I feel their trust in me. Whenever my father scolded me because my study was not good, or when I skipped meals, I would log in and play the game right after. I feel this gives me a sense of comfort and under no pressure.’

Excessive gaming makes Phu almost out of control in the real world. Phu gradually skipped meals, did not eat or drink, just focused on playing games. Phu shows signs of online game addiction, but he is very self-reliant when it comes to this issue. Phu is aware of his frequency of playing games, but he does not want to stop. Because the online gaming world is the only place, he feels secure, respected and uplifted in his desires. Phu confirmed:

‘I am not addicted to the game even though I spend much time playing. I am depressed in real life. The lower academic results made my father scold me more. I wish I could live in the gaming world, to be a strong man, not as weak as I am now. I want to be recognized. I want my dad not to be so harsh with me. I want to be free.’

Ha’s SDB is somewhat similar to Phu’s, but the hidden purpose of the behavior is different. Ha is the second daughter in a family of 2 children. Ha is an unwanted child, so she is always looked down upon by her father and does not seem to exist. In the family, Ha’s elder brother is the only one who cares about her. Therefore, Ha always wants to monopolize the affection of his brother for herself. Ha wants his brother to love her for the parents [because Ha does not get it]. Ha will torture her own body if her brother does not care about her or even asks for suicide. She noted:

‘Without my elder brother, I cannot sleep peacefully, I cannot feel secure in living in this family. Parents do not care about me. My father did not take my existence seriously. I am like a surplus in the family. Only my elder brother is the only one who loves me... Recently, my brother is on a business trip, I feel very insecure when I am with my parents. I decided to skip meals, not to eat or drink to avoid facing my parents. When my brother comes back, I will eat. But it seems that my brother does not seem to care about me anymore.’

Ha always feels insecure when living with her family. She always felt guilty for her appearance. The fact that her brother cared less about Ha made her feel scared and worried, so she locked herself up and did not eat or drink. However, the purpose of such SDB is not only to attract the attention of her brother but also of her parents. She spoke her feelings:

‘Although I was very uncomfortable when I fasted, stopped drinking, and locked myself in my room, I felt delighted. Parents pay more attention to me. However, my father always scolded me. My father even threatened that if I were fasting, he would send me away from home. I am terrified. I almost panicked [crying]. My father said that because I am a girl, I cannot carry on domestic work, so it is okay to have me, and not. I am not important in this family. My father can only have my brother ... [continue crying]’

Precisely because Ha received no recognition from her father, Ha hated her father more. Ha decides to win her brother’s affection, forcing her brother to depend on her, to care for her without caring for her parents. Ha wants her father to regret his actions. She stated:

‘I must monopolize the affection and concern of my brother. In this way, parents will not dare to scold me anymore and have to recognize me. As long as my brother depends on me, my parents will have to defend and take care of me more.’

Hatred, negative feelings for parents who have acts of imposing children, especially on girls, are not just seen in Ha's case. Vy also has similar circumstances. Vy is the only daughter and the unwanted child. Vy's parents want to have a son. Since Vy was born, the whole family almost ignored her family. Vy's parents are no longer happy because Vy is not a boy. Vy is considered 'sin' of the family. Her parents only raised Vy for gratitude but did not love her. Since then, Vy developed a hatred for her parents, especially her father. She expressed:

'My parents just want to have a son, so why they give birth to me? Why give birth to me and then do not love me. I am their child [angry to share]. The whole family always despises me, my father despises me. My mother cared for me, but she was afraid of my father, so she did not dare to care for me much. I am very angry with him. I hate him. He just neglected my family's reputation. He always poured negative emotions at me. Whatever he wants to do, he does not agree. He even judges and imposes all ugliness on me.'

Because of being unrecognized, unloved in the family, Vy participated in social networking activities. The pictures that Vy posted were many people loved and praised. Vy became interested in that and gradually became addicted to social networks. Vy cannot live without social networks because that is the place where Vy is praised and respected. Nevertheless, in the real world, Vy has no friends. She does not care about other real relationships (even at school, or with neighbors). Unfortunately, Vy's father disliked her over-using social network and banned her from using a smartphone. Vy seems to have lost control when sharing:

'He is too much. He forbade me to use a smartphone, even smashed my smartphone in front of me. He does not love me; I am used to it. Now my hobby, my only joy he also deprived. What does he want? [angry sharing] What did I do, so he did it to me? Just because I am not a boy? Or am I the reason why the clan does not recognize my father, as well as unfairly treating my father?'

Not only stopped at expressing hatred and resentment for her father, but Vy also began to perform acts of SDB and widely publicized on social networks to avenge her father. Vy wants her father to regret treating her that way. She wants her father to suffer like the pain he caused her; she described:

'Once I uploaded a cut-off-hand photo on my social network [Facebook] and shared that for my father to cause, social networkers interact a lot. They shared my articles a lot to create public opinion. My parents' neighbors, friends, and colleagues all know and scold them a lot. My parents were in crisis because of criticism. I am delighted. Although after that, my father yelled at me more, even beaten and threatened to kick me away, I was not afraid, I was happy to see him suffering. It is the consequence that my father has forbidden me, been strict with me, hated me ever before.'

However, the motive for Vy's SDB is not entirely derived from hatred for parents, but also from the desire to be loved and be protected. When Vy finished clearing the anger in her heart, Vy began to cry and share:

'I was in so much pain, so painful [hugging her face]. However, I could not stop banging my head against the wall and cutting my vein. When it hurts me, my parents seem to be more concerned about me. When my father scolded me, I felt like I was still valuable, still a family member. Normally my father does not care about me. He saw me as invisible. Over here, every day my father looked at me and scolded me. When I held sharp objects in my hand, my father immediately dissuaded and scolded me, not allowing me to use them. I feel pleased about that. I gradually became visible to my father [smiled bitterly].'

It can be noticed, the recognition of family members always affects the personality and behavior of children. Injustice, coercion, and non-recognition are among the causes that cause adolescents to commit SDB to avoid reality, to get revenge and, more deeply, to be concerned by their parents.

Theme 2: The Family Attachment and Adolescent Behavioral Trends

In the group of adolescents exhibiting SDB, family attachment is always missing and a cause for them to do so. This is evidenced by the confession of three participants on the question, ‘How do you feel about your relationship with your parents?’. They expressed their feelings:

Phu: ‘Father always kept his distance from me. The fact that I share my thoughts and feelings with my parents seems to be something that is not in the family. Every time I spoke my feelings, my father would scold me for being weak, not being a man. I was very disappointed and did not earnestly share and confide with my father anymore. I went to the online gaming world, where there are always friends listening. That [the online gaming world] is really where I belong. My parents are too conservative, too traditional.’

Ha: ‘I hardly feel my parents’ feelings for me. I feel like my parents consider me an acquaintance who lives in the same house. Each day we meet and greet, but I do not feel like living in a proper family. My father is always strict with me in everything, from studying to making friends. Most recently, the relationship between me and my brother, my father did not want me to be too close to my brother. My father said that because of me, my brother did not work well. I hate that father’s way of thinking. Moreover, my mother is helpless before my father. I love my mom, but I can not help it because my mom loves my brother after all.’

Vy: ‘Since I was born, I have always been a child destroying family happiness. My appearance makes my parents not happy anymore. My father was abandoned by my father’s head family, my mother was disappointed at giving birth to a daughter [me] so she did not open her heart to me. I feel like my parents only support me for my obligations. They do not love or care for me. I want to be cared for by my parents, even once...’

As such, the tendency to perform SDB of three participants is also for a reason: To receive the parents’ attention. They described that:

Phu: ‘The fact that I spend so much time playing games and neglecting food and drinks, my health becomes weaker and my academic performance goes down. This made my parents more concerned about my feelings than before. My father, for fear of losing this ‘only son’, treats me with ‘gentleness’ more than before, not overly imposing or scolding me. Although still strict, at least every day my father called me downstairs to eat and reminded me to go to bed early. I feel happy about that. Father cares about my feelings more. I do not know when I stopped playing online games, my father still treated me like that or not. I might continue torturing myself for a little more, so my father could change his treatment to me...’

Ha: ‘Parents will have to regret not loving me. I will win the affection of the son my parents love the most [Ha’s brother]. Parents will know that my existence is what makes parents concerned ... Why do parents only care about my brother, but never me? Do my parents ever understand my feelings? Why did they give birth to me? [Ha pity to share]’

Vy: ‘My father will not live in peace with me. I will make my father pay for prohibiting me, hating me. I will not commit suicide, I will torture this body so that my father will be criticized by public opinion. Do fame, status, and honor be more important than his child? My father is too important in the appearance and dignity of the family. I just want him to be a little more concerned about me. After all, I am his daughter, his child!’ [Vy sobbed to share].

Results were integrated into an essential approach of SDB in adolescents. The lived experience of adolescents with SDB showed that the influence of the family is the leading cause of the SDB. More profound is the traditional ideology of the parents themselves that directly affect negatively to the self-esteem system of their children. The results analysis will be presented more clearly in the Discussion section.

Discussion

Through an in-depth study of the three cases with typical expressions of SDB, the researchers found that some common characteristics of adolescent mental trauma were all related to family education. In particular, the tradition of Confucian education appeared to have a substantial impact on the self-esteem system of children. Ha (2015) stated that Confucianism in modern society is not bad, but it is the cultural and social changes through different historical periods of the country that have made Confucian thought distorted and change in a negative way. It is different from the original ideology mentioned by Confucius. Confucian educational views emphasize the role of filial piety and the respect of children for parents, as well as the economic and social role of the men in the family. However, that viewpoint becomes a pressure, a framework of moral standards for families. The father has the absolute right, the right of a woman to be lowered. Children must obey their parents (especially their fathers), lowering the children's freedom and equality in the family. At the same time, the son must be the heir, not accepting the presence and inheritance of the daughter. The influence of Confucianism on the Vietnamese family tradition is the result of this distortion. This inadvertently harms family relationships and seems to influence the mental trauma of children. The pressure between family members is growing, and it is difficult to deal with. Children want to be cared for and acknowledged by their parents, but parents are dominated by negative thoughts, which threaten the children's self-esteem system. As a result, negative behaviors break out so that children receive the attention of their parents, typically the SDB. Unlike the purpose of SDB found in other religions (Gearing and Alonzo, 2018; Leenaars, 2017; Sanders, 2020), Confucian ideology only indirectly influences and is the main factor affecting parents' views and styles of parenting. From there, creating stifling, pressure and suppression in the mental health of children, they burst out into the act of SDB. The researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of how the ideology of Confucian education in the family affects the self-esteem and SDB of Vietnamese adolescents as followed themes:

The Impact of the Recognition on the Formation of Adolescent's Self-esteem

Social studies have shown that an essential factor in determining the future development of children lies in family education rather than school education (Li, 2007; Guven and Yilmaz, 2017). Parents are the best role models for children; each of their words and actions will influence their children's behavior and personality (Muris et al., 2000). For children who lack the care and recognition of their parents, problems arise. The case of children living in a family with a Confucian education tradition is similar. The imposition of roles and non-recognition of existence are the causes of the vulnerability of the child's self-esteem. Then, the indirect cause of SDB when the child enters the stage of encountering many difficulties in managing emotions and behaviors, the adolescence. Three analyzed cases support this finding.

All three lived in a family with a Confucian educational tradition, the father had all the family power, and the mother had almost no authority. The repression of negative emotions of Phu, Ha, and Vy all stemmed from the imposition of the father's perceptions, and the culmination of the act of SDB is from the act of causing a negative source from the father (with Phu being the imposition and long-term family pressure from his father; with Ha being her brother's love and hatred for her father; with Vy being an act of banning the use of phones and social networks). Previous studies stated that, in Confucianism, the father was always the mainstay of the family and was primarily responsible for helping that family maintain its lineage and develop its generation; therefore, the children in the family absolutely must obey what the father taught to be a bright heir to the family (Jayakody and Phuong, 2013; Tran, 2017; Tran, 2019). Although this thought is no longer suitable with the times, it seems to have become a genetic trait in the minds of Vietnamese people; this is the most reasonable explanation when the father of Phu, Ha, and Vy's families negative imposing educational style. As a result, not only do Phu, Ha and Vy had rather low self-esteem, they felt unconfident in the real world and wish to be recognized through the virtual world. With Phu, the only son has to shoulder the responsibilities of the whole clan in the

strict upbringing of his father. This has made Phu's self-esteem not unique and fully developed. This is the cause of Phu's inner conflict, one side is the need to be recognized, expressed, and to be himself; and one side is the clan, the family responsibility. With Ha, she did not receive love from her parents; her parents are always biased towards her brother; therefore, Ha developed feelings of hatred for her parents, and desire to possess her brother for revenge. However, hidden behind that, is the desire to be loved, recognized by parents, even if only a little. This was an inner conflict that promoted Ha to self-destruct so that she not only attracted the attention of her brother but also attracted the attention and care of her parents - the affection she longed for since childhood. For Vy, her negative emotions stemmed from her birth - an unwanted child. Throughout her development, Vy has never received love from her parents, as well as from her father's family. It is the pressure from the family tradition that Vy's family cannot become a safe environment for her to develop healthily. Vy understood and tried to repress her negative emotions to please her parents. At the same time, she transformed her negative emotions into the virtual world - the social network, the only place that recognized her existence. However, everything collapsed when Vy was banned from using the smartphone by her father. This event triggered a long series of negative emotions in Vy and expressed to the outside by SDB. Vy was unconsciously driven to do it, but hidden behind was the desire to receive love and recognition.

The Confucian educational ideology in the family has a direct negative impact on the development of children's self-esteem, making them unable to build a positive image for themselves. This problem lasted and was repressed from childhood to adolescence - a period of dramatic changes in mental life that makes past repressions unable to continue and flare up when there are adverse impact events. Compared with previous global and local studies on the impact of self-esteem on adolescent SDB (Barry et al., 2007; Coles et al., 2016; Goodson et al., 2006; Nguyen et al., 2017; Schou Andreassen and Pallesen, 2014), the findings in this study discovered that the influence of religion (Confucianism) on family education ideology is the main reasons for the imperfect self-esteem and the motive leading to the SDB of the current Vietnamese adolescents.

Family Attachment and Adolescent Behavioral Trends

In this study, all three cases were assessed without family cohesion, and this was the leading cause leading to the negative behavior trend [the SDB] of Phu, Ha, and Vy when entering adolescence - a period of age when it is difficult to control emotions and impulsive behaviors. Phu, even as an only son, holds a unique position in the family; but, Phu has no choice for his own life. He must live for his father and family tradition. Parents love Phu but love by creating authority and pressure for him to achieve his goals (or his parents' goals). The forced compliance with family rules made it impossible for Phu to build a value system for himself and to release SDB when he was under excessive stress. For Ha, who is an unwanted child in the family, so the family connection is almost nonexistent between Ha and her parents. Her father never once acknowledged the existence of her. Ha did not feel the family connection, which led to the suppression of negative emotions in for a long time. Precisely because she is not cared for, not recognized, and loved in the home, Ha always wants to get the attention and care from her parents. This led to Ha's behavioral tendency to do something that caught her parents' attention and care for her, even if it was a negative behavior. Vy's case is severe. Vy is both an unwanted child and a "sin" that the whole clan assigns Vy's family. Vy is not recognized as a family existence because she is a girl. Vy received negative thoughts from her parents during her development, which led to not only the broken connection between Vy and her family but also between Vy and the society. The trend of socially isolated and immersed living behaviors is the result of family interaction received by Vy.

Compared to previous studies on the influence of family attachment on children's behavioral trends (Exline and Rose, 2005; Heinke et al., 2019; Jayakody and Phuong, 2013; Rothbaum et al., 2002; Tran, 2019; Walsh, 2012), the results of this study continue to confirm these above findings when placed in

the context of Vietnamese families, with the Southeast Asian family culture, and mainly traditional FE from a Confucian perspective. The tradition of Confucian FE has broken family ties, creating too great emotional distance between parents and children. Children living in these families cannot fully and positively learn from their parents. Therefore, negative emotions are repressed from an early age and tend to flare up when the child enters adolescence. The expressions of SDB, in the three analyzed cases, all have the same purpose that they want to be more attentive to their parents. They wanted to have cared about their emotions and received recognition from parents – the things they could not have since childhood. With these findings, the intervention strategy and mental support for these clients are required to approach the family system and adjust from the perception of FE. Besides, strengthening the self-esteem and family culture are essential requirements to reduce the risk of SDB of this group.

In summary, through the analysis of causes and factors affecting the SDB of Vietnamese adolescents, it can be noticed that the essence of SDB is the consequence of prejudices about Confucian ideology in family education that still exists in Vietnamese family culture. Without interfering with the influence of this culture in the parenting style, the SDB prevention strategies for Vietnamese adolescents will not be sufficient. The limitation of this study is to focus only on the in-depth analysis of three adolescents with SDB living in families whose parents are the ‘product’ of an outdated Confucian educational perspective. The issue of women’s rights and gender equality has not been addressed in the analysis, nor has the researcher overlooked the positive aspects that other religions (Buddhism, Christianity) bring to Vietnamese families and culture. The method of educating children according to modern psychological and educational theories has not been proposed and analyzed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From an in-depth analysis of two key themes through a phenomenological study, the essence of the SDB of three typical participants, the family education was affected negatively, degenerated from Confucian ideology; which led to the educational methodology of parents who face many obstacles and create mental pressure that prevents children from developing with positive mental health. In particular, it was these negative perceptions that made the adolescent’s self-esteem not develop positively; they were deprived of the right to control their own lives and could not become fully. Adolescents living in these families always wanted to be recognized and loved, but it was the old strict law that made these precious records buried, leading to an unintended outburst when they enter a period of psychological crisis during puberty. Only with the negative stimulation from their parents, the children release acts of SDB to ‘take revenge’. However, hidden behind them are emotions, the desire to receive love, care, recognition, and understanding from parents. The results of the study have shown that the ‘incomplete’ family picture considered as a consequence of the remnants of religious culture in family education is no longer suitable for the times. This is a negative aspect that still exists in the Vietnamese family.

With these findings, to provide timely mental support and appropriate intervention strategies, the family system approach in mental counseling, school counseling, school-based prevention program, or social work projects, need to be paid attention to support those with SDB the most effective way. These findings are expected to add to the reasoning system on the causes of adolescent’s SDB in modern society, especially in Vietnam and other Asian countries that have Confucianism, as well as to provide mental support strategies for the counseling services and other mental health care services. It can be concluded that this study achieved the research question. It will be further developed and researched in the future to adjust and propose the most effective intervention strategies.

Declarations

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Ethics approval and consent to participate: This study received approval from the Research Ethics Board of the Department of Science and Technology of a critical pedagogical university under the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (supervised committee: QD4167-DHSP) and adheres to the Declaration of Helsinki. Access to participants was granted by providing a clear language statement and consent form. Participants were given the option to decline participation or withdraw at any point, and they could choose the interview format (online/on-site) and location. Prior to the study, the lead researcher held private meetings with selected participants to provide detailed information and obtain consent. Participants were required to sign written consent forms, ensuring confidentiality and authorization for publication of findings. All data collection, including audio recordings, was conducted with participants' explicit permission. To further demonstrate respect, interview questions were shared with participants at least three days before the interview. After translation and coding, interview data were sent to participants for review to ensure accuracy.

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