
NEWSLETTER

Parental and Child Educational Expectations and Adolescent Academic Burnout in Low-Income Families

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THIS STUDY seeks to examine the effect of the alignment or misalignment between parental and child educational expectations on teenage children's academic burnout in low-income families, with a sample of 3342 adolescents aged 8–16 from the database of 2018's "Construction of the Policy Support System for Disadvantaged Families in China" Project, which was sponsored by China's Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Research Findings:

- Aligned low educational expectations between the parents and children significantly exacerbated academic burnout in the latter, while aligned high educational expectations between them or the children's educational expectations exceeding those of their parents significantly alleviated academic burnout in the teenage children. This finding differs from the results of previous national studies, which suggest that only "aligned high educational expectations" are most beneficial for adolescent academic performance. It implies that with high educational aspirations, adolescents with disadvantaged backgrounds are still likely to achieve academic success.

- The effect of the intergenerational alignment of educational expectations on child academic burnout was mediated by parental educational involvement. Parental educational involvement could intensify the negative effect of "aligned low educational expectations" and boost the positive effect of "aligned high educational expectations." Yet, it had no mediation effect on the relationship between the "educational expectation divides" (no matter whose educational expectations were higher) and academic burnout in adolescents. This may be because parental educational involvement could be either inordinately high or low, unable to meet the children's actual needs, as a result of parent-child discrepancies in educational expectations

- Grandparenting could mitigate the exacerbating effect of "aligned low educational expectations" on adolescent academic burnout (playing the role of resource compensation) but also weakens the promotive effect of "aligned high educational expectations" on parental involvement

(playing the role of resource substitutes). Given the adoption of grandparenting in 43.6% of the surveyed families, it is recommended to provide grandparents with home education guidance and social work services to help them update their educational notions and improve their quality of educational involvement.

These findings can have theoretical and practical implications for policy making, school education, and home education by deepening the understanding of the mechanism influencing the effect of parent-child agreement or disagreement in educational expectations on adolescent academic burnout in low-income families. They underscore the necessity of supporting low-income teenagers in pursuing high educational aspirations with measures like increasing educational investment in low-income regions and offering scholarships and grants to those eligible to alleviate financial burdens on their families. In the meantime, it is important to establish a robust home education guidance system to provide parents with knowledge on scientific home education methods, including setting legitimate educational goals and ensuring effective educational involvement, to reduce academic burnout in their children. Additionally, the community can pool resources available, such as libraries and cultural centers, to organize activities like parent-child co-reading and handicraft making for families adopting grandparenting, in a bid to encourage parent-child emotional interaction, which can contribute to the mitigation of academic burnout of the adolescent children.

Source: China Youth Study, 2025; 2025 (08):51-59.