The Impact of Parental Conflict on the Academic Resilience of High School Students

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Abstract:

High school is a period when students are under tremendous academic pressure. The family environment, especially the relationship between parents, plays a crucial role in the development of teenagers. This study aims to systematically review the existing literature and explore the pathways and key factors of parental conflict on the academic resilience of high school students. This research indicates that destructive parental conflicts can increase students' emotional stress, consume cognitive resources, and thereby undermine their academic resilience. However, three factors significantly moderated this relationship: the types of the conflict, including destructive and constructive conflicts, the student's own coping strategies, and social support from the school and peers. The negative impact of constructive conflicts is minimal, while effective coping strategies and adequate support can buffer the detrimental effect of destructive conflicts. Understanding these dynamic relationships is crucial for parents, educators and psychological counselors to provide targeted support for high school students.

Keywords: Parental conflicts; academic resilience; high school students.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage for self-discovery. For high school students, this period of time means that they should face the interaction of internal uncertainty and external pressure. Also, academic requirements cast a long shadow that university admissions view every test score and assignment score as an important step towards future opportunities, pushing students into a ruthless cycle of competition. Intense schoolwork, frequent mock exams and anxiety about falling behind peers have strengthened this pressure, turning the pursuit of academic success into the source of persistent tension. In this background, in general, academic resilience is identified as a student's ability to successfully deal with impediments, pressure and challenges in the school settings [1]. It is precisely this adaptability, rather than merely the ability to learn, that determines whether students can cope with failure like getting a poor exam score or a

demanding course without giving up their learning goals, thus making it a key predictor of long-term academic achievement.

For high school students, in these tests, the family is usually a crucial fundamental support system. The disturbance parental conflict undermines relationships, exposes children to increased stress levels, and has a detrimental influence on their self-esteem and mental health, resulting in a decline in their well-being [2]. When their study pressure is too great, it is the main source of emotional comfort and learning attitude, a provider of practical resources from quiet study spaces to study materials, and a pillar for cultivating a sense of security. However, the family is not always a stable safe place. They can also be an important source of stress, especially when parents have conflicts. Conflicts between parents include destructive conflicts and constructive conflicts that exist to varying degrees in many families. Unlike occasional differences that rarely leave a lasting impact, persistent or intense parental conflicts undermine the emotional stability of the family, making teenagers feel anxious, insecure, or burdened with high level of pressure. This dynamic raises the core question guiding this study: How do the tension and instability arising from parental conflicts shape the academic resilience of high school students? Specifically, will this conflict weaken their ability to cope with academic setbacks, for example, failing grades, getting stuck on complex subjects, or will other factors reduce its impact?

It is of great theoretical and practical significance to explore the relationship between parental conflicts and the academic resilience of high school students. Theoretically, it addresses a gap in existing research: although academic studies have some research about the impact of family factors on adolescent mental health or identify predictors of academic resilience for example, teacher support, peer relationships, few studies directly link parental conflicts to students' ability to withstand academic challenges. In fact, this study offers a more specific understanding of students' academic struggles. Also, poor performance, lack of motivation or avoidance of difficult tasks are attributed to laziness or insufficient effort of students themselves, while the hidden family stress factors that may undermine students' adaptability are overlooked. By clarifying how parental conflicts affect academic resilience, this study provides a foundation for school psychological counseling to design targeted intervention measures for students from conflicting families, let them acquire emotional coping skills to counteract the negative impacts of family tension. It also provides guidance for family education, emphasizing that constructively resolving conflicts is not only crucial for marital harmony but also essential for fostering the stability needed for teenagers to thrive academically.

All in all, this study connect the gap between parental conflicts and students' academic development, providing a more comprehensive framework to support the growth of high school students.

2. Defining Key Concepts: Parental Conflict and Academic Resilience

Parental conflict is a significant issue that has adverse effects on both adults and children. Conflicts between parents are a destabilizing factor that this weaken children's interpersonal relationships, subject children to more intense pressure, damage their self-esteem and mental health, and ultimately lower their level of happiness. From the point of view of the repercussions that marital conflicts cause to the members, the conflicts can be classified as constructive or destructive [3,4]. Constructive marital conflicts are characterized by resolution-oriented behaviors, such as the use of effective problem-solving strategies, mutual respect, and maintaining positive perceptions even when some issues remain unresolved[5]. In contrast, destructive conflicts include strategies involving verbal aggression or physical violence between the members of the couple, nonverbal hostility [6].

The dependent variable in this study, academic resilience, is a key concept requiring clear definition. Generally, academic resilience is defined as a student's capacity to handle obstacles, pressure, and challenges in school environments successfully. Furthermore, some scholars conceptualize that academic resilience refers to the type of academic attainment regardless of hurdles and hardships [7]. For instance, if a student doesn't outperform their peers in exams, they can quickly adjust themselves and keep working hard,and have the courage to ask questions to their classmates or teachers.

3. Mediating Pathways: Unpacking the Influence of Parental Conflict

Existing research indicates that the negative impact of parental conflicts on academic resilience is not direct but is indirectly caused by several psychological pathways.

Firstly, some research asserts that significant pathways emerged to suggest emotional security as a mediator between constructive interparental conflict and children's externalizing problems, but only when parents reported a high level of disintegration avoidance. Regardless of the level of disintegration avoidance, children's emotional security was associated with both internalizing and externalizing problems. Some studies found that high frequency and intensity of parental conflict in the family system

has a negative impact on children's mental health [8,9,10]. The family environment, which should have been a safe haven, has instead become a source of stress and unpredictability, disrupting daily life, reducing a sense of security and making it difficult to develop stable habits.

Secondly, some studies show that the relationship between husband and wife is an important factor affecting a number of dimensions of family functioning [11]. Family functioning reflects the emotional connection between family members and the ability of the them to solve different problems together. Meanwhile, there are also studies that found that family functioning is a factor affecting adolescents' emotion [12]. In the face of parental conflict, children tend to blame themselves for the discord between their parents, believing that the parent's conflict is caused by themselves, and their self-evaluation will be reduced [13]. Also, an unhappy marriage can consume parents' emotional and cognitive resources, leading to reduced or inconsistent parenting styles, such as less supervision over academic activities. In some severe cases, parental conflicts can lead to the imbalance of the family function. As a result, children may feel lonely or unsupported, and their performance in their study will become negative no matter at school or at home. This will make them feel unable to face the setbacks or difficulties in their studies and unable to solve the problems they encounter.

Finally, parental conflict is an important family factor and is considered closely related to adolescent anxiety.There is evidence that youth anxiety is positively associated with conflict frequency [14]. A meta-analysis study confirmed that a significantly positive association between parental conflict and youth anxiety, implying that youth showed higher levels of anxiety when encountering more parental conflict [15]. Students usually experience intense anxiety, and this emotion tends to carry over into their learning process. When learning amid this anxiety and overwhelming pressure, they can easily feel frustrated which is a response that exerts a relatively significant impact on their enthusiasm for learning. This anxiety is also evident in contexts related to academic evaluations, particularly before tests. Test anxiety has been defined as the emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses in the anticipation of negative evaluation from an upcoming test or exam [16]. The consequences of such anxiety have two aspects: excessive anxiety can directly lead to a decline in students' academic scores; meanwhile, for adolescents, anxiety makes it exceptionally difficult to recover their learning enthusiasm after experiencing academic setbacks.

4. The nature of the conflict is key: destructive conflict vs. constructive conflict

Crucially, contemporary research emphasizes that it is not the mere presence of conflict, but rather the nature of that conflict, that determines its impact on adolescent development. Different kinds of conflicts will bring different impact to children. Moreover, not all types of conflict will have negative impact on children's psychology.

Firstly, destructive conflict has negative effects to children's psychology. Destructive parental conflict, such as excessive conflict, hostile conflict, and unmanaged reactions to relationship issues, is marked by behaviors like yelling, insults, criticism, blame, and attempts to manipulate the other person's actions [17]. When children witness these, they usually feel scared, helpless, and even feel that they have been drawn into a conflict. This exposure can lead to internalization and self-blame, prompting children to question their own role in the conflict. If this goes on for a long time, this sense of self-blame will make them doubt themselves. This lack of confidence will naturally spread to their school life. A student who doesn't believe in himself may not dare to ask questions in class or give up easily when faced with difficult problems. Moreover, living in such a stressful family will also make their emotions more unstable, making it difficult for them to concentrate on their homework. For a long time, it will make children lose confidence. This lack of confidence will also affect their studies, especially for high school students who are in their adolescence. Their mood swings will intensify as their parents' destructive conflicts become more frequently.

Another form of conflict is constructive conflict which brings positive effects to children. Parents who constantly have constructive conflicts tend to solve problems with an obviously positive attitude. This characteristic is clearly reflected in their ability to solve problems calmly, listen actively, seek each other's viewpoints, negotiate and compromise, express support and emotions, as well as use humor or reconciliation to ease tensions. They seldom magnify conflicts to affect their children. By observing this process, the children saw a good example of how to handle differences respectfully. They learned that problems could be solved through communication rather than Shouting. This taught them a valuable problem-solving skill. This technique is useful everywhere, including in study. When they are faced with a difficult assignment, they may not feel panicked but think more like their parents do: "Well, this is a problem. How can I break it down and solve it?" Also, this constructive conflicts can reduce children's feelings of threat and emotional insecurity [18]. Therefore, children will think that they are learning and growing up in a warm environment and can receive sup-

port from their parents.

5. Buffering and protection: Factors that can resist negative impacts

Despite the various risks like emotional distress, disrupted focus, and strained peer that parental conflict can pose for their children, adolescents do not experience its effects in the same way. There are obvious differences in the extent to which they are affected. In fact, some researches have pointed out a set of critical protective factors, each playing a role in mitigating the adverse influence of parental conflict and safeguarding adolescents' academic resilience.This will let their ability stay engaged in learning, overcome academic setbacks, and maintain progress even amid familial stress. Despite the risk of parental conflict, teenagers are not passive victims. Their experiences and outcomes vary significantly. The research has identified several key protective factors that can resist negative impacts. These factors help protect students' ability to maintain their learning engagement and overcome setbacks. This section will explore three key areas of protection: personal self-worth, supportive family relationships, and external support from peers and teachers.

Firstly, if children have a sense of self-worth, it can serve as an umbrella to protect them from being influenced by their parents' conflicts. Researchers have confirmed that positive self-perception and high self-worth promote students' engagement in class. Because students' strong sense of self-worth can make them more courageous in exploring new knowledge, they will not be so greatly affected by conflicts with their parents. This means that when children believes they have a high self-worth, they can be more determined to persist in their studies. The engagement spotlights the intentional and proactive motivational contribution of students to learning flow [19]. Just like outgoing students can take the initiative to communicate and interact with classmates and teachers, they can study in a efficient way. Also, if they have any troubles caused by their parents' conflicts, they will also take the initiative to tell this to the people around them. In this way, they can quickly solve the problems and adjust their mindset, reducing the impact on their parents' relationship.

Furthermore, a strong bond between one parent and their kids can protect them from the damaging psychological effects of parental disputes. A young person's social development is greatly influenced by the attitudes of their parents and the nature of their relationship with them. It's true that the relationship between parents and children forms the basis for how young people navigate social life and how well they are able to handle difficult social

situations and issues. It suggests that, despite parental disputes, parents can foster a positive environment for their children's development if they are able to provide them with enough attention, encouragement, and affirmation. Children can also be in a healthy mental state to deal with such warmth. A young person's social development is greatly influenced by the attitudes of their parents and the nature of their relationship with them. It is true that the relationship between parents and children forms the basis for how young people navigate social life and how well they are able to handle difficult social situations and issues. It suggests that, despite parental disputes, parents can foster a positive environment for their children's development if they are able to provide them with enough attention, encouragement, and affirmation.

In addition, there are also some external factors that can serve as a buffer for children when facing conflicts with their parents. There are findings show that the collective presence of classmates creates a robust supportive environment for their peers and this peer support, in turn, correlates with more effective coping strategies when facing stressful circumstances, as well as stronger academic performance. At the same time, teachers can offer more consistent support and give more help to their students that can help them manage stressors and reduce feelings of helplessness. This means that if children can receive care and support from their peers and teachers at school, they can build confidence. Those peers and teachers can also offer support and strength to provide psychological protection for children. In conclusion, a strong social network at school can provide a "psychological safety net" to make up for the possible lack of confidence and emotional support at home, this can protect children's sense of happiness and academic concentration.

6. Conclusion

According to this study, parental conflict is a complex process rather than a single factor that directly contributes to the decline in high school students' psychological resilience in their learning. The destructive nature of the conflict, which undermines students' emotional stability and cognitive capacities, is the primary cause of the "toxicity" of its influence. Therefore, how conflict is handled rather than its existence itself is the key factor that determines its impact on children.

This study's primary focus on the psychological effects of high school students generally, however, is one of its limitations. Nonetheless, there might be some distinctions between nations due to their disparate educational systems and policies. This study's primary focus on the psychological effects of high school students generally, however,

is one of its limitations. Different countries have different policies and educational approaches, and there may be certain differences between them.

Future studies ought to concentrate more on how the destructive nature of the conflict, which undermines students' emotional stability and cognitive capacities, is the primary cause of the "toxicity" of its influence. Therefore, how conflict is handled rather than its existence itself is the key factor that determines its impact on children. Meanwhile, research on the behaviors and influences of family conflicts in different cultural backgrounds (such as East Asian collectivist culture) is also in urgent need of deep study. In addition, in the future, more focused attention should be paid to high school students, who are highly sensitive groups during adolescence. They are under high academic pressure and are more likely to greater stress because the conflicts with their parents, which has a negative impact on their psychological resilience in learning. Finding the right solutions can enable them to face learning and development with a more positive attitude.

This research provides a guidance for schools and families, suggesting that the main focus of intervention efforts should be placed on several key areas. First of all, provide parents with practical strategies and skills to engage in constructive communication, such as calmly solving problems, actively listening, and respectfully expressing different statements, rather than let conflicts get into a higher level. Moreover, it is necessary to support students in establishing a diverse and reliable social support system that may include trustworthy teachers and supportive peers of the same age. In this way, they will have multiple sources of emotional and practical assistance and can communicate well with them. Also, schools and families can work together to help students better withstand the adverse effects that excessive parental conflicts often have on their academic performance and psychological resilience in learning.

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