

Parental Conflicts: Influences on the Development of Children

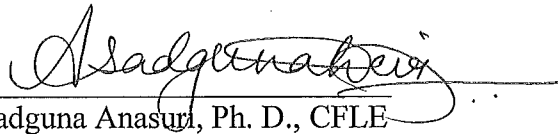
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sadguna Anasuri", written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

The current paper reviews several studies from the year 2000 to 2009 showing the effects of parental conflicts on the development of children. Parents have a great impact on the children. Parental conflicts influence children's development negatively. Children developed problems in internalizing and externalizing of parent relationships leading to harmful effects. Children, when exposed to every day conflicts between parents developed psychological, behavioral emotional, cognitive, physical and social problems. It was found that parental conflicts influence children's academic performance, parent-child relationship and thus affected how children perceive relationships in the future. Children who experienced parental conflicts and parental separation had less commitments and less confident in the future of their marriage. When children witness continuous conflicts between parents they may also imitate conflict prone and dysfunctional relationships modeled to them. By watching every day conflicts between

parents, children may think that it is okay to have conflicts and may follow parent's behaviors. Parental conflicts affect parent-child relationship thus influencing their attachment to parents which further increased depressive and aggressive symptoms in them. Research also showed that aggression caused due to parental conflicts affected peer relationships in children and behavior problems in adolescents. In terms of physical development, parental conflicts were also related to anxiety and insecurity in children which further lead into sleep and other health problems.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Children who are exposed to parental conflicts and divorce are at higher risk for developing various problems. As the rates of divorce are increasing there is a need to know the effects of divorce on development of children and its impact in their later life. It is hence very important to study the effects of parental conflicts and divorce on the well-being of children. Research during the past decade has addressed this problem to understand the harmful effects of parental conflict on children. Such research enables family scientists to understand the gravity of this issue thereby focus on possible remedial measures. Different educational, counseling, and therapeutic programs can be designed and offered to the families to understand prevent and treat the damaging effects of parental conflicts.

Effects of marital conflict and divorce on child development are well documented. Ellis and Garber (2000) showed that there is an increased probability for child disorders due to marital discord. Results showed that parental conflicts effects on cognitive, social, academic, and psychobiological functioning in children. Marital conflicts negatively affect family functioning, parenting and family relationships (Dunn & Davies, 2001; Noller, Feeney, Sheehan, & Peterson, 2000). Findings from research showed that children who were exposed to frequent, intense, and poorly resolved interparental conflict experienced increased risk of adjustment problems (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Grych & Fincham, 2001). In some cases this also increased the risks of maladjustment. Families in high marital conflict were associated with greater internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression, and externalizing problems, such as aggression and delinquency (Davies, Cummings, & Winter, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Children exposed to high levels of marital conflicts were rated as less socially competent by teachers and parents, and also experienced less positive interactions with siblings (Dunn & Davies, 2001). Marital conflict was found to be associated with children's physiological regulation (El-Shiekh, Harger, & Whitson, 2001), biological outcomes like early timing of menarche in girls (Ellis & Garber, 2000), sleep problems and physical illness (El-Shiekh, 2001). Studies have also examined changes in academic attainment (Unger McLeod, Brown & Tressell, 2000) and children's cognitive reactions to marital conflict (Clare-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000).

Among different types of marital conflicts, divorce has been the most disturbing process in child's life. The process of divorce brings many changes in children's lives as well as in parents. Parental emotions, their behaviors and their contact with children are highly influenced. And these changes were found to be more harmful during early childhood. Although most children adjust well, research shows that divorce may increase the risk of negative outcomes for older children (Amato, 2001). Sometimes adult children improved their relationships with fathers over 20 years after their parental divorce (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to review the research conducted during 2000 to 2009 on the multitude effects of parental conflicts and divorce on children. The review focused on both the positive and negative outcomes of such family structures and functions. However, there was not much positive outcome of parental conflicts and divorce was found in the research. The present research focused on various effects of parental conflicts and divorce on children like physical problems, sleep problems, alcohol problems, academic attainment, cognitive problems,

attachment problem, and parent-child relationships, representation of relationships, relationship anxiety, conflict expression, internalizing problem, psychological maladjustment, adjustment problem, depression, emotional problems, self concept, behavior problems, aggression, and peer relationships.

Assumptions of the Study

The author assumed that the marital discord among parents and conflicting family experiences influence children. It was also assumed that these influences could be multifold and impact children on different developmental domains such as physical, cognitive and socio-economical areas. Another assumption was regarding the possible disturbances these parental conflicts may produce in children's current and future development.

Limitations of the Study

The current paper is limited to reviewing of research conducted during 2000 to 2009. Research prior to 2000 was not taken into consideration. The studies were selected from limited databases and journals found electronically only. The paper summarized only peer reviewed and scholarly journals; magazines, news paper articles and other resources were not used.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Interparental conflicts influence children's overall development. Family professionals are in agreement that parental conflicts result in poor outcomes for children. Some children react to parental conflicts by acting out, like showing aggression, violent behaviors, poor relationships and delinquency. On the other hand some children develop depression, and isolate themselves from parents, peers and society.

Internalization of Parental Conflicts

Specific marital conflict like depressive marital conflict was connected in relations between parental dysphoria and children's internalizing problems (Schudlich, Shamir, & Cummings, 2004). Constructive, destructive, and depressive marital conflicts were related to children's internalizing problems and when each one was examined for their role in the links between parental dysphoria and child adjustment, depressive marital conflict served as the only moderator. Children's adjustment to marital conflict was examined in a sample of 136 school aged children and their parents (Stocker, Richmond, Low, Alexander & Elias, 2003). Results show that marital conflict was positively related with children's internalizing and externalizing problems. It was shown that children's feelings of self blame and being threatened by their parents' conflict mediated between marital conflict and children's internalizing problems but not the externalizing problems. Internalizing problems may increase if the children are worried that their parents may be hurt or may get divorced.

Children from separated and violent homes displayed internalizing and externalizing problems that were constant and severe. Children from violent homes manifested significantly more internalizing problems compared to children from separated, non-violent homes (Lee, 2001). Results from a study showed that marital difficulties and adolescent's internalizing and

externalizing problems were interrelated with each other (Cui, Donnellan, & Davis, 2007). It was shown that marital conflicts influenced children, and had predicted delinquency and depressive symptoms in adolescents. Likewise adolescent children's maladaptive behaviors appeared to place a strain on their parent's marriage.

Kielikowski and Pryor (2008) discussed the effects of non-verbal or non-physical conflict. Children in non-verbal conflict showed behavioral changes, lack of resolution, avoidance and withdrawal. In spite of their negative effects, parents defended silent conflicts as an alternative preferable to intense arguments in front of the children. Studies show that lack of resolution of parental conflict has been related as problematic for children's psychological wellbeing (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Tschann et al, 2002). Silent conflicts resulted in feelings of confusion and helplessness (Pryor & Pattison, 2007). Results showed that due to the absence of explicit resolution, children misread their parents' behavior and detecting conflict when there was none (Grych, Harold & Miles, 2003). Research shows that children responded to verbal and nonverbal conflicts similarly (Arth-Pendley & Cummings, 2002; Goeke-Morey, Cummings, Harold, & Shelton, 2003). Pryor and Pattison (2007) found that the impact of silent parental conflicts on adolescents was significant and resulted in a wide range of internalizing and externalizing problems.

Effects on Physical Development

Research showed that women who reported interparental violence were less likely to report having a regular primary pediatric provider for their child (Bair-Merritt, Crowne, Burrell, Caldera, Cheng, & Duggan, 2009). It was also seen that abused women may avoid contact with pediatric medical care site because of previous negative experiences or for a fear that the provider will involve in Child Protective Services if current interparental violence is discovered.

Marital conflicts were examined as a predictor of the quantity and quality of sleep in a sample of 8 to 9 year olds (El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, Mize, & Acebo, 2006; El-Shiekh, Harger, & Whitson, 2001). Results showed that exposure to marital conflict is related with a reduced amount of sleep and poorer sleep quality. Increased sleep fragmentation and a higher level of subjective sleepiness were also reported. Findings showed that even in a sample of very normative marital conflict, parental conflict is associated with disruptions in the quantity and quality of children's sleep as well as children's reports of sleepiness. Subjective sleepiness was related with later sleep onset time, more delayed morning awakening time, reduced level of sleep time and sleep percent. Davies, Forman, Rasi, and Stevens (2002) explained that marital conflict may be more disruptive of children sleep if children perceive it as destructive or if they are very anxious or fearful about their own safety. When related to gender it was evident that girls slept longer and had less activity during the night when compared with boys (El-Sheikh et al, 2006). Whereas Laberge, et al (2001) showed that girls have shorter sleep times and poorer sleep quality when compared to boys. This related to higher pubertal status among girls.

Effects on Cognitive Development

Disruptions that take place during the divorce or marital conflict were found to have an impact on family characteristics and processes like economic position and parental responsiveness, which were in turn associated with the children's cognitive performance. (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000). A longitudinal study on 340 families found that children in separated or divorced families performed more poorly on tests of cognitive ability at the age of 15 and 24 months than that of children from continuously married and intact families. Parental marital conflict affects children continuously (Sun & Li, 2002). Students who were in the middle of this disruption process scored lower in all four academic

tests when compared to their counter parts.

Interparental conflict places youth at risk for difficulties in academic achievement (Unger, McLeod, Brown, & Tressell, 2000). Results show that the connection of interparental conflict and academic achievement operated in at least two ways: mediated by family support and directly. High levels of interparental conflict and family discord may relate to lower motivation by parents to be involved with their adolescents in school-related activities. Family support acts as a mediator between interparental conflict and academic achievement more for girls than for boys.

Effects on Parent Child Relationship

A study on children from birth to age 16 showed that children who experienced parental separation when they were young felt less closely attached to their parents than children who experienced parental separation at an older age (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). Although other family factors including demographic characteristics, interparental conflict and early mother-child interactions were controlled, the relationship between early parental separation and later attachment to parents remained significant. The majority of adult children's relationships with their fathers improved over the 20 years since their parent's divorce (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). As the child mature and transition to adulthood relationships with parents generally improved. Results showed that when interparental conflict decreases and parental support increases, post divorce adult children reported that their relationships with their fathers either improved or remained stable. Harper and Fine (2006) stated that nonresident fathers who can sustain a positive fathering identity can play an important role in the lives of the young children. On the contrary, findings from Stocker et al (2003) did not support that father's behavior to children has a greater impact than the mother's behavior.

Studies show that girl's relationships with their families and parents may slowly result to be more stressed and threatened by interparental conflict (Unger et al, 2000; VanderValk, Goede, Spruijt & Meeus, 2007). Research shows that girls in late adolescent are most sensitive to parent's marital problems when compared to boys and to younger girls. Women tend to ruminate more in the face of interpersonal stress resulting in increase in internalizing symptoms. Men in contrast tend to distract themselves and engage from interpersonal stress.

Walper, Kruse, Noack and Schwarz (2004) suggested that interparental conflicts forced children to monitor their behaviors toward parents. Children realize that toward positive affection toward one parent may cause the other parent to feel rejection, disappointment, disapproval and even negative sanctions. This weakens children's feelings of security in relation to mother and the father. Among adolescents however, interparental conflicts effect their relationships with their mothers. In response to marital conflicts parent-child role reversal may occur in which children take responsibility for family functioning (Keller, Cummings, Davies & Lubke, 2007).

Lengua, Wolchik, Sandler and West (2000) reported that parents of those who had experienced a family transition indicated more fights with their adolescents. Similarly, adolescents reported lower relationship quality overall with their parents. Research shows that parents engaged in continuous conflict have less time for effective parenting and thereby tend to be harsh and conflict prone in their interactions with children (Riggio, 2004). When children observe continuous conflict between parents, they may these models and develop conflict prone and dysfunctional relationships. Riggio also found that in comparison to the children in intact families, young adults in divorced families may experience close and satisfying relationships with their mothers. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (2009) found that

parent-child relationships marked by low conflict situations have been linked to varied child outcomes; including lower levels of anxiety and depression, higher levels of self esteem and lower incidences of substance abuse and conduct problems. Parental support is related to depression, substance use, and delinquent behavior and also related to better mental well-being in children.

Kitzmann (2000) showed that negativity in the marital exchange was not associated with more parental rejection but it was associated with less positivity in the form of lower support towards the child. Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro and Semel (2003) found that intimate partner violence has an impact on the maternal-child relationships and preschool-age functioning. In contrast to findings from previous studies, Huth-Bocks (2007) found that severity of partner violence was not related with parenting stress, parenting behavior, or child out comes. Dunn, O'Connor, and Cheng (2005) findings highlighted the importance of biological relatedness. The results showed that children were more likely to take the side of the parent to whom they were biologically related. Conflicted relationships between stepfathers were resulted in frequent conflict between mothers and stepfathers with the likelihood that the children would become involved in the conflict. It was also seen that a child who was particularly close and affectionate in a relationship with one of the parent might get involved into the arguments and take sides with that parent.

Effects on Relationships

Representation of relationships. In a study conducted to know the attitudes of college age women towards marriage and courtships, Long (2001) found that daughters of broken marriages showed more negative attitudes toward marriage. Moreover, they were planning to marry later when compared to the daughters of happily married parents. Furthermore, daughters of broken

marriages showed more negative attitudes toward marriage and lack of progression in courtships. On the same note, daughters of intact marriages were more positive about marriage and were seen progressing toward it.

In adults romantic relationships were found to relate to higher levels of friendship, intimacy and enjoyment (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001). Only fewer problems were seen in young adults' romantic relationships. Mother's marital status also contributed as a factor to a higher quality of the participant's romantic relationships. Maternal remarriage was associated to young adult's higher levels of friendship, enjoyment, intimacy, and passion and fewer problems in the romantic relationships. It was also found that it is more difficult to achieve trust and commitment in young adults from divorced families.

Relationship anxiety. Most of the studies on older children have studied about parental monitoring of children's activities and parental involvement (Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Research on younger children has studied more about parental warmth and responsiveness (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Parental warmth and responsiveness are very important factors throughout the childhood as well as adolescence. But parental monitoring and involvement becomes more important in middle childhood and adolescence as children are involved in activities outside the home or with peers most of time. These factors seemed to have a greater impact on children through their growing years.

Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2008) showed that women whose parents had divorced reported lower relationship commitment and less confidence in the future of the marriages than the women from non-divorced families. Parental divorce was not connected with men's relationship commitment and confidence. It was seen that experiencing parental divorce appears to have a stronger impact on women than men's belief about the future of their own

marriages. When compared to those from lower conflict families young adults from high conflict families reported fewer available social supports and greater anxiety in personal relationships (Riggio, 2004).

Effects on Psychosocial Development

Psychological maladjustment. Strudge-Apple, Davies, and Cummings (2006) indicated that destructive interparental conflict increases in parental emotional unavailability. Parental emotional unavailability at times was associated with increase in child psychological disturbances including internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, externalizing problems and scholastics adjustments. On a similar note Katz and Woodin (2002) found that children whose parents engaged in hostile detachment during interparental conflicts showed higher levels of psychological problems than children whose parent exhibited hostility or constructive behaviors during conflicts. Dunn et al (2005) found that when conflict is continuous between separated parents after the immediate period of separation, the risk of adjustment problems increased.

Depression. Divorce impacts on many aspects of family life for young children. Divorce involves changes in the financial condition of one or both parents (Amato, 2000). Early childhood is a sensitive period and parental conflicts may have a greater impact on school-age children's adjustment. Adaptation during one developmental stage has an effect on individual's adaptation to later developmental stages (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand how parental divorce at early stages affects the later stages. In a laboratory setting, when children were exposed to marital conflicts, children of aggressive marriages showed an increased level of dysregulation when compared to children of nonaggressive marriages (Martin & Clements, 2002). Dysregulated behaviors such as whining may be understood as children's

bids for external support and structure. This behaviors of children are difficult to ignore by parents and may reduce immediate levels of marital conflicts.

Study conducted by McClellan, Heaton, Forste and Barber (2004) showed that overt conflict increases aggression. Whereas covert parental conflict seems to more directly influence depression in adolescents. When compared to males, females scored high on depression symptoms. Furthermore, children who reported more intense, frequent and unresolved conflict between their parents were more likely to report symptoms of depression and conduct problems (Gonzales, Pitts, Hill & Roosa, 2000). Studies suggest that children and adolescents who have experienced transitions are significantly worse off in terms of behavioral adjustment (Ruschena, Prior, Sanson & Smart, 2005).

Spence, Najman, Bor, O'Callaghan and Williams (2002) showed that anxiety and depression symptoms in adolescence increase significantly if the mother's experience relationship difficulties or marital status change during the first 5 years of life. Results showed that single mothers who remained single throughout their child's first 5 years had adolescents whose rates of anxiety depression problems were no different from those of the adolescents of mothers in stable, non-distressed relationships. Research showed that nonverbal conflict behaviors used in parental conflict also have impact on children in similar ways as verbal conflict (Arth-Pendley & Cummings, 2002). Younger children were more likely to actively avoid intervening in parental conflict than adolescents which suggests that conflict is more distressing and threatening for younger children.

Effects on Emotional Development

Self-concept. Physical violence between parents develops negative emotions of sadness, anger, and guilt in children (Lee, 2001). Moreover findings also showed that these children

experience emotions of loyalty conflict. Results indicated that children from separated and violent families experience intense loyalty conflict compared to children from separated but non-violent homes. Children in the families with higher level of marital conflict perceived more self-blame and threat when compared to children in families with lower levels of conflict (Stocker et al, 2003). When young children experience silent conflicts they may conclude that the disagreement is about them or they blame themselves for their parent's tension (Pryor & Pattison, 2007). Some of the adolescents also take the responsibility to resolve their parents' conflict by mediating or by helping out in household work.

Emotional Problems. Studies showed that exposure to destructive conflict and parental drinking problems were associated with decreased emotional security in children (Davies, Forman, Rasi & Stevens, 2002; Keller et al, 2007). Findings suggest that boys and girls may be prone to different expressions of emotional security. It was seen that in such instances, boys are less emotionally secure than girls. When unresolved conflict was compared to resolved conflict, resolved disputes have been shown to increase less negative emotions in children. Unresolved conflict was identified by children as a greater threat to family stability and to their own emotional security (Gonzales et al, 2000).

Study on children's exposure to specific tactics and their emotional responses show that children react both negatively and positively to everyday conflicts (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003). Threat, personal insult, verbal hostility, defensiveness, nonverbal hostility, marital withdrawal, and physical distress were associated with heightened negative emotions. On the other hand, calm discussions, support, and affection were related to positive emotionality in children.

Effects on Behavioral Outcomes

Behavior problems. A study was conducted on adopted and biological children regarding the links between parents' marital conflict, divorce and children's behavior problems (Amato & Cheadle, 2008). Results showed that adopted children were at greater risk than are biological children for a variety of behavioral and emotional problems. Studies showed that the associations between parental divorce and children's school and social adjustment were stronger among biological children than adopted children. (O'Connor, Caspi, DeFries, & Plomin, 2000). Gerard, Krishnakumar, and Buehler (2006) found that the associations between marital conflict and children's externalizing and internalizing problems were largely mediated by parents' use of harsh punishment and parent-child conflict. Study revealed that marital conflict and divorce increased the risk of children's problems. The connection between parental divorce, children's school and social adjustment were stronger among biological children than adopted children. (Amato & Cheadle, 2008)

Amato and Cheadle (2008) found that marital conflict and divorce increased the risk of children's problems. Increase in behavior problems was reported in children of divorced parents than the children of continuously married parents (Amato & Cheadle, 2008). When there was an increase in marital conflict there was an increase in children's behavior problems (Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Gonzales, Pitts, Hill & Roosa, 2000). Adolescents react to resolved conflicts more positively than unresolved problems. They perceived unresolved conflicts as more unstable. When parents are defensive to work toward the resolution of conflict, children perceive particularly threatening and will be motivated to intervene in their disputes.

Aggression. Studies showed that boys react with anger and aggression to family dysfunction while girls are more likely to display internalizing behavior problems (Unger et al,

2000). Schudlich et al (2004) found that negative father-child relations and negative mother-child relations were associated with more child aggression. Exposure to anger and parental marital conflict and less affectionate parenting was found to be emotionally and psychologically arousing for children (Brook, Zheng, Whiteman, & Brook, 2001). Anger cognitions and hostility in children may be stimulated when exposed to marital conflicts which may be expressed as aggressive behaviors in toddlers. They also saw that angry parenting was associated with childhood anger.

Ybarra and Lange (2006) provided evidence that parental conflict can be arousing for preschoolers. Children who overheard an argument were more physiologically distressed. However, in a study when the association between the variables of positive marital interactions and child outcomes were analyzed, neither mother's nor partner's reports of marital interaction were related to child behavior outcomes (Stutzman, Miller, Hollist, & Falceto, 2009). These results showed that the presence of positive marital interactions between spouses was not associated with child behavioral outcomes. It was seen that girls experienced higher overall levels of behavior problems and specifically, more internalizing problems including anxiety and depression (Ruschena et al, 2005).

Furthermore, through modeling verbal or physical aggression, parents "teach" their children that disagreements are resolved through conflict rather than calm discussion. Parent's aggression may teach children that aggression is normal and may model to them to be aggressive (Gerard, 2006; Lee, 2001; Riggio, 2004; Straus, 2001). A study conducted on adolescents to understand the impact of parental conflicts showed that open parental conflict plays an important role in adolescent's aggression (McClellan et al, 2004). It was seen that parental conflicts reduced the mother's ability to monitor children's behavior which then increased children's

aggression. Further, analysis revealed that males were more aggressive when compared to females.

Peer Relations. Schudlich et al (2004) examined the links among marital relations and children's representations. Children's negative representations of father-child relations were associated with poor relations with peers. Children's tendency towards more negative conflict strategies with peer and aggressive behavior were associated with more covert and overt conflict behaviors exhibited by mothers and fathers. These results show that conflicts threaten emotional security in children, which effected their reactions to stressful conditions which in turn influenced peer conflict situations. Children's negative representations of mother-child relationships also effected children's more negative dispositions towards peer conflicts.

Research showed that children who were exposed to interparental conflicts engage in relatively low amounts of peer interaction (David & Murphy, 2007). Preschoolers who were low in effortful control and are from high conflict homes were likely to become overwhelmed by their own emotions. Due to exposure to negative interactions both at home and with peers. Children developed negative interpretations and assessments of social situations which were displayed in hostile interactions with peers (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000).

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review for the Years 2000-2009

Title / Year	2000-2001	2002-2003	2004-2005	2006-2007	2008-2009
Internalizing Problems	Lee, 2001	Arth-Pendley & Cummings, 2002 Cummings & Davies, 2002 Goeke-Morey et al, 2003 Grych, Harold & Miles, 2003 Stocker et al, 2003 Tschann, et al, 2002	Schudlich, Shamir, & Cummings, 2004	Cui, Donnellan, & Davis, 2007	Kielikowski & Pryor, 2008
Physical Development	Laberge et al, 2001	Davies et al, 2002		El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, Mize, & Acebo, 2006	Bair-Merritt, et al, 2009
Cognitive Development	Clarke-Stewart et al, 2000 Unger et al, 2000	Sun & Li, 2002			
Parent-child Relationship	Kitzmann, 2000 Lengua et al, 2000 Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000 Unger et al, 2000	Ahrons & Tanner, 2003 Levendosky et al, 2003 Stocker et al, 2003	Dunn, O'Connor, and Cheng, 2005 Riggio, 2004 Walper et al, 2004	Harper & Fine, 2006 Huth-Bocks, 2007 VanderValk et al, 2007 Keller et al, 2007	Department of Health and Human Services, 2009

Effects on Relationships	Long, 2001 Shulman et al, 2001 Whiteside & Becker, 2000	Martinez & Forgatch, 2002	Riggio, 2004	Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008
Psychosocial Development	Amato, 2000 Gonzales et al, 2000	Arth-Pendley & Cummings, 2002 Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002 Katz and Woodin, 2002 Martin & Clements, 2002 Spence et al, 2002	Dunn, O'Conner, & Cheng, 2005 McClellan et al, 2004 Ruschena et al, 2005	Strudge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006
Emotional Development	Gonzales et al, 2000 Lee, 2001	Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003 Davies et al, 2002 Stocker et al, 2003		Keller et al, 2007 Pryor & Pattison, 2007
Behavioral Outcomes	Amato, 2001 Ellis & Garber, 2000 Grych & Fincham, 2001 Gonzales et al, 2000 Lee, 2001 Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000 Straus, 2001 Unger et al, 2000 Brook et al, 2001	O'Connor et al, 2000	McClellan et al, 2004 Riggio, 2004 Ruschena et al, 2005 Schudlich et al, 2004	David & Murphy, 2006 Gerard, Krishnakumar, & Buehler, 2006 Ybarra & Lange, 2006 David & Murphy, 2007 Amato & Cheadle, 2008 Stutzman, Miller, Hollist, & Falceto, 2009

Chapter III: Discussion

The review of research conducted during 2000-2009 has been compiled in the chapter II. In the current chapter an analysis and interpretations of these studies is composed. Recent research revealed that children living in a family or home surrounded with conflicts are at high risk of developing emotional, behavior, psychological and social problems. Interparental conflicts negatively influence children which lead to developing problematic behaviors. Research has shown that children exposed to parental conflicts are at greater risk of developing many problems than the children in non conflict homes or resolved conflict homes.

Internalizing of Parental Conflicts

Children from families with parental conflicts and divorce undergo many physical, emotional and psychological problems. Marital conflict was related to children's internalizing and externalizing problems (Schudlich et al., 2004; Stocker et al., 2003). Internalizing problems may increase if the children are worried that their parents might get hurt or may get divorced. Children from separated violent homes displayed internalizing and externalizing problems that were constant and severe when compared to children from non-violent home (Lee, 2001). Marital problems and adolescents internalizing and externalizing problems were interrelated which in turn, leads into delinquency and depressive symptoms in adolescents (Cui et al., 2007). And, these maladaptive behaviors will place a strain on the parents marriage which further increase the conflict between parents (see Figure 1).

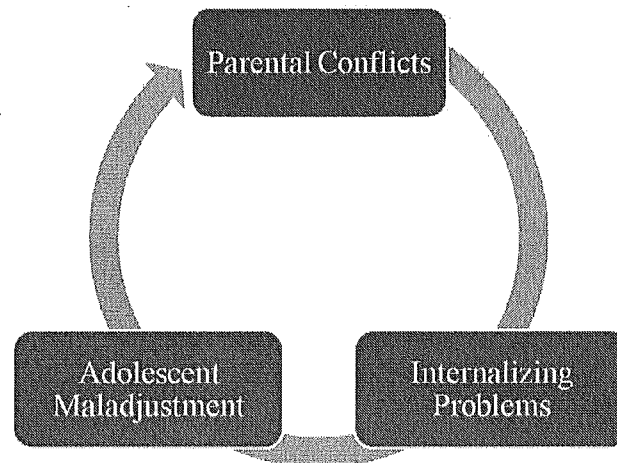


Figure 1. Internalization of Parental Conflicts

Research showed that adolescents who were exposed to silent conflicts showed a range of internalizing and externalizing problems (Pryor & Pattison, 2007). Silent conflicts lead the children to confusion and helplessness. Children exposed to non-verbal conflicts showed behavioral changes, lack of resolution, avoidance and withdrawal (Cumming & Davies, 2002; Kielpikowski & Pryor, 2008; Pryor & Pattison, 2007; Tschann et al, 2002). Children perceived verbal and nonverbal conflicts similarly (Arth-Pendley & Cummings, 2002, Goeke-Morey et al, 2003). Parents defended silent conflicts as an alternative preferable to intense arguments in front of the children. However, lack of resolution of parental conflicts effected psychological wellbeing of children. Due to lack of explicit resolution, children misread their parent's behavior and imagined conflict between parents even when there is none.

Influences on Cognitive, Psychological and Social Development

Interparental conflicts increased children psychological disturbances including internalizing symptoms, externalizing symptoms, externalizing problems and scholastics adjustments (Strudge-Apple et al, 2006). Parental emotional availability is affected by interparental conflicts which then affects children's psychological maladjustment. Children who

saw parents engaging in hostile detachment showed higher levels of psychological problems (Katz & Woodin, 2002). Divorce, a major changing family event, showed a greater impact on children (Amato, 2000; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000) leading to changes in living, financial arrangements, feelings of insecurity, physical separation, emotional detachment highly influenced children.

Similarly, research showed that children's inability to control or cope with parental conflicts affected their self concept, Children blame oneself for the cause of the conflict which may lead to learned helplessness, pessimism, and perceived inadequacy which may further lead to depression (Martin & Clements, 2002). Overt conflict increased aggression in children especially, in males (McClellan et al, 2004). In contrast, covert parental conflict seemed to increase depression in adolescents. Children exposed to intense, frequent and unresolved conflict between parents were more likely to report symptoms of depression and conduct problems (Gonzales et al, 2000). Children who experienced transitions were worse off in terms of behavioral adjustment and showed anxiety and depression (Ruschena et al, 2005, Spence et al, 2002). They found that conflicts further effected academic achievement in children (see Figure 2).

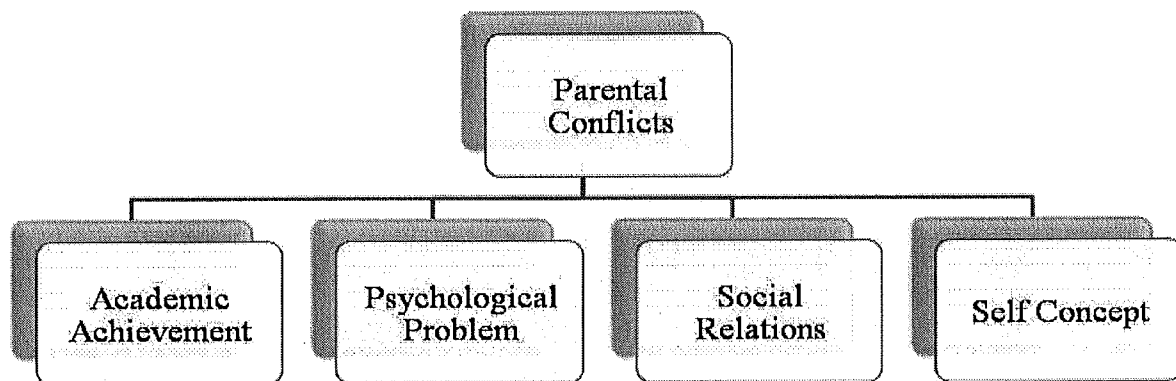


Figure 2. Influences on Cognitive, Psychological and Social Development

Studies showed that marital conflicts would have an impact on economic position and parental responsiveness which were in turn associated with children's cognitive performance (Sun & Li, 2002; Clarke-Stewart, 2000). Children performed poorly on tests of cognitive ability when experiencing divorce. This children scored lower on all four academic tests when compared children for married families. Interparental conflict places youth at risk for difficulties in academic achievement (Unger et al, 2000). Interparental conflict and family discord were related to lower motivation by parents which affected school related activities in adolescents. Among girls, family support acted as mediator between interparental conflicts and academic achievement.

In another instance, father-child negative relations were associated with poor relations with peers (Schudlich et al, 2004). In other words negative conflict strategies with peer and aggressive behavior were associated with more covert and overt conflict behaviors exhibited by mothers and fathers. Conflicts threaten emotional security which effects children's reactions to stressful situations which resulted in conflict situations with peers. Negative representations of mother-child relationships also effected children's more negative dispositions toward peer conflicts. Children exposed to interparental conflicts engaged in relatively low amounts of peer interaction (David & Murphy, 2007). Preschoolers from high conflict homes become overwhelmed due to exposure to negative interactions both at home and with peers. This contributed to negative interpretations and assessments of social situations thus resulting in hostile interactions with peers (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000).

Influences on Parenting and Parent-Child Relationship

Marital conflicts and divorce were found to increase the risk of children's problems. Studies shows that adopted children were at greater risk than biological children with regard to

behavioral and emotional problems (Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Gerard et al, 2006). Physical violence between parents developed negative emotions of sadness, self-blame, feeling of threaten, anger and guilt in children (Lee, 2001; Stocker et al, 2003). Children, when exposed to silent conflict may conclude that the disagreement is about them or blame oneself for their parents' tension (Pryor & Pattison, 2007). They showed that adolescents try to take the responsibility of their parents' conflict by mediating or helping parents in household work. Such internalizations lead to changes in behaviors—cognitive, emotional and social.

Children react negatively and positively to everyday conflicts (Cummings et al, 2003). Studies showed that high conflict between parents was associated with decrease in emotional security in children (Davies et al, 2002; Keller et al, 2007). Unresolved conflict on the other hand, was identified as a greater threat to their emotional security and overall family stability. Resolved conflicts increased amount of negative emotions in children (Gonzales et al, 2000). Threat, personal insult, verbal hostility, defensiveness, nonverbal hostility, marital withdrawal, and physical distress were associated with negative emotions. On other hand, calm discussions, support, and affection were related to positive emotions in children. Divorce and marital conflicts were shown to affect the behavior of children (Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Gonzales et al, 2000). Resolved conflicts were considered more positively than unresolved conflicts as the adolescents perceived unresolved conflicts as more unstable. When parents were aggressive in resolution of conflict, children perceived threatening and intervening in disputes. Boys reacted with anger and aggression to family conflicts while girls displayed internalizing behavior problems (Unger et al, 2000).

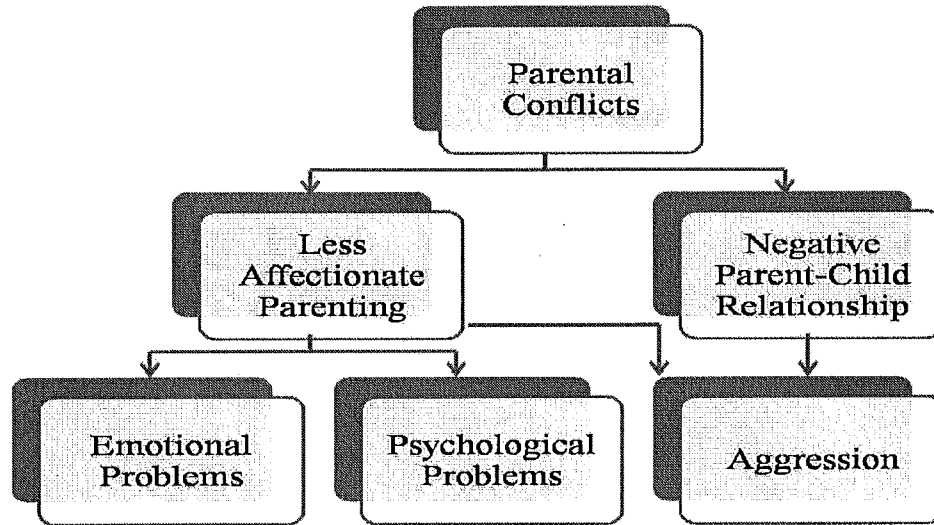


Figure 3. Influences of Parenting and Parent-Child Relationship

Studies showed that exposure to anger and parental conflict and less affectionate parenting were emotionally and psychologically arousing to children (Brook et al, 2001; Ybarra & Lange, 2006). This further stimulated anger conditions and hostility in toddler's behaviors. Anger parenting was associated with childhood anger. Children who overheard an argument were more physiologically distressed. Girls showed higher levels of behavior problems and internalizing problems, anxiety and depression and overall behavioral problems (Ruschena et al, 2005). Negative parent-child relations were associated with more aggression (Schudlich et al, 2004). Through witnessing verbal and physical aggression, parents teach their children that disagreements are resolved through conflict rather than calm discussion. (Amato & Cheadle, 2008; Gerard, 2006; Gonzales et al, 2000; Lee, 2001; McClellan et al, 2004; Riggio, 2004; Straus, 2001). Children may think that aggression is normal and may begin to learn how to be aggressive. Males were found to be more aggressive than females. Along with parent-child relationship, children's aggression was also related to mother's ability to monitor children's behavior.

Influence of Parental Conflicts on Relationships

Besides being an immediate outcome, interparental conflicts affected relationships at later stages. Daughters coming from malfunctioning marriages showed more negative attitudes towards marriage (Long, 2001; Whitton et al, 2008). On contrary divorce was found to be related to higher levels of friendship, intimacy and enjoyment (Shulman et al, 2001). Higher quality of romantic relationships were associated with mother's marital status. It was difficult to achieve trust and commitment in young adults from divorced families. Adults from high conflict families also reported fewer available social supports and greater anxiety in personal relationships when compared to those from lower conflict families. Parental warmth and responsiveness are very important factors throughout the childhood as well as adolescence (Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Interparental conflict negatively affected parent-child relationships.

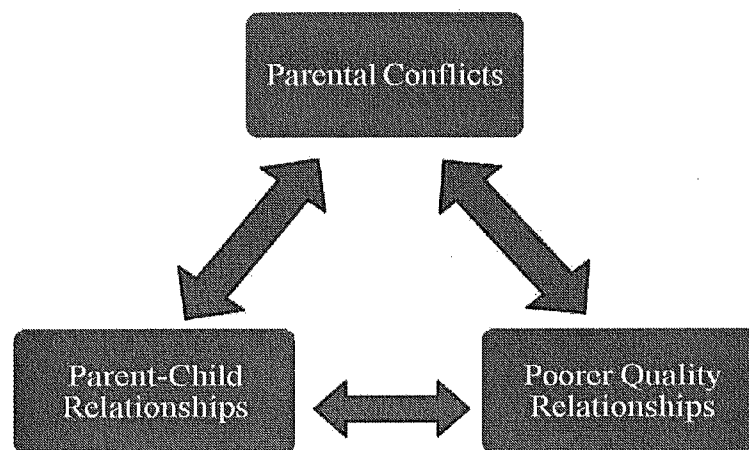


Figure 4. Influences of Parental Conflicts on Relationships

Parental separation at young age showed that children felt less closely attached to their parents (Woodward et al, 2000). Majority of adult children reported that their relationships with their fathers improved over the 20 years of parents' divorce (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003). As interparental conflict decreased the parental support increased. Post divorce adult children

reported improvement or stability in their relationship especially, with their father. Some studies show that fathers' behaviors toward children had a greater impact than the mothers' behavior. Women tend to think more about interparental conflict which leads to an increase in internalizing symptoms (Unger et al, 2000; VanderValk et al, 2007). Interparental conflicts increase the risk for children in that they are forced to monitor their own behaviors. Children understand that their affection towards one parent may make the other parent feel rejected, disappointed, disapproved and even as one having negative sanctions (Walper et al, 2004). Lack of independence in relationship will weaken children's feeling of security toward mother and father. The adolescents' relationship with the mother is affected due to loyalty conflicts. Marital conflict may also result in parent-child role reversal (Keller et al, 2007). Such role-reversals consisted of children caring and supporting their parents instead.

It was found that parents who experienced family transitions indicated more fights with adolescents (Lengua et al, 2000; Riggio, 2004). This led to overall lower relationship quality with their parents. Parents engaged in conflicts have less time for effective parenting and this effected relationship with children. Parents support is related with less depression, substance use, and delinquent behavior and also related to better mental well-being in children. Negativity in marriage conflict was associated with lower support towards the child (Kitzmann et al, 2000; Levendosky et al, 2003). In contrast, a study showed that partner violence was not related with parenting stress, parenting behavior, or child out comes (Huth-Bocks, 2007). Biological relatedness with the parent was also found significant (Dunn et al, 2005). It was found that children related more to biological parents compared to non-biological parents such as step-parents, adaptive parents and others.

Influence of Parental Conflict on Physical Development

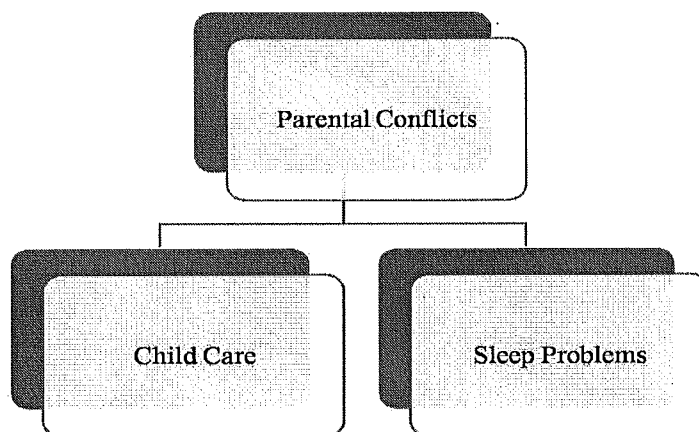


Figure 5. Influence of Parental Conflict on Physical Development

Finally, interparental conflict also affected child's physical development. Women who reported interparental violence were less likely to report having a regular primary pediatric provider for their child (Blair-Merritt et al, 2009). This is because of the fear that the providers will involve in child protection services if interparental violence was discovered. On a physical note, children's sleep was affected as a result of interparental conflict (Davies et al, 2002; El-Shiekh, Harger, & Whitson, 2001; El-Shiekh et al, 2006, Laberge et al, 2001). Children showed reduced amount of sleep and poorer sleep quality when exposed to parental conflicts. Parental conflict was associated with disruptions in the quantity and quality of children's. Sleep onset time, more delayed morning awakening time, reduced level of sleep time and overall sleep percentage were among other sleep disturbances.

Conclusions

The purpose of the current paper was to review of the research available from 2000 to 2009 on the various effects of interparental conflicts. This review helps to conclude that interparental conflicts negatively influence children on different levels. Children who are

exposed to parental conflicts are at a greater risk of developing behavior problems—emotional, psychological, and physical. As a result they also had poor social relationships. This shows that parents have a great impact on the children and that interparental conflict causes stress in children. Family stress theory (Ingoldsby, 2004) explains that interparental conflicts play a major role in the development of distress among family members and influence their relationships. This imbalance in the family influencing its structure and function, can create several problems more severely affecting the children.

Recommendations

Overall, during the decade an abundance of research has found strong relationships between parental conflict and physical, social and emotional development of children. As professionals in the field of family sciences there is a need to understand and explore ways to alleviate this negative impact. Family scientists bear the responsibility of educating and preparing parents to handle marital conflict, manage and preventing their reoccurrences.

Studies show that strong effects of parental conflicts and divorce can be reduced to some extent. Dykeman (2003) findings show that pre-referral intervention can reduce the number of students placed into special education for acting out behavior due to parent separation. Community agency counselors can play a unique role in assisting schools in helping students who were exposed to family dissolution. Child inclusive intervention incorporated separate consultation by a specialist with the children in each family considering children's concerns with the parents. This was found to reduce conflict levels in the majority of the families (McIntosh, Wells, & Long, 2007).

Further research in this area can help design intervention programs to reduce the negative effects of parental conflict on families—adults and children. Such measures will help families

handle stress caused due to parental and marital discord and thereby, enable smooth transitions and increase healthy coping behaviors.

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