The Impact of Parental Conflict on Adolescents' Negative Emotions and Aggressive Behaviors

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Abstract: In modern society, the mental health issues of adolescents are increasingly receiving public attention. The emotional and behavioral growth of adolescents is deeply influenced by their family environment, especially PC. The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of perceived parental conflict on the negative emotions and aggressive behaviors among adolescents, as well as to analyze the psychological mechanisms involved. By analyzing different research cases, it was found that PC is positively correlated with depression, social anxiety, and emotional insecurity in middle school students, and it can positively predict AB in these students. The fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs and positive psychological capital serve as intermediaries in the relationship between perceived PC and AB, including chain mediating effects. The family environment, particularly PC, significantly influences the psychological well-being of teenagers. To promote the mental fitness of adolescents and prevent undesirable behaviors, it is essential to strengthen family harmony education, raise parents' awareness of the impact of conflict behaviors, and provide psychological support at the school and community levels.

Keywords: Parental conflict, negative emotions, aggressive behaviors.

1.   Introduction

In today's society, the mental health issues of adolescents have increasingly become a focus of public concern. As the pace of life quickens and societal competition becomes fiercer, adolescents are facing an increasing number of psychological pressures during their growth. Among them, the family setting, serving as the primary context for adolescent development, exerts a significant influence on their mental health and the evolution of their behavior. In particular, parental conflict, as a common issue, has been widely recognized as a key factor affecting the emotions and behaviors of adolescents. However, despite existing research pointing out the association between PC and the mental health of adolescents, there are still many unknowns about the specific mechanisms and extent of this influence.

This article aims to explore how Parental conflict (PC) affects the Negative Emotions (NE) and Aggressive behaviors (AB) of middle school students, and further analyze the psychological mechanisms behind this influence. Children's psychological representations are considered to be one of the foundations of their emotional security [1], thus have an important impact on their adaptability and sense of well-being. This study will collect and analyze data regarding the emotional instability of adolescents in middle school and attempts to explain the association between PC and adolescent depression, social anxiety, and emotional insecurity, and explores the intermediaries of positive

psychological capital and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs during this process. In addition, this study will also examine how PC predicts adolescents' AB by affecting their psychological capital and the fulfillment of essential psychological requirements, including potential chain intermediating effects.

Understanding the specific impact of the family environment concerning the emotional stability of teenagers holds not only crucial theoretical importance within the fields of psychology and education but also has practical guidance value for formulating and implementing targeted family education and school intervention measures. By deeply analyzing the relationship between PC and adolescent psychological and behavioral problems, people can better understand the psychological responses of adolescents when facing family conflicts, providing a scientific basis for promoting the mental health of adolescents and preventing undesirable behaviors. The findings of this article are expected to provide valuable insights for parents, educators, and policymakers, helping them adopt more effective strategies to support the psychological adaptation and emotional regulation of adolescents when facing family conflicts.

2. Introduction to the Key Concept

2.1. Parental Conflict

Parental conflict refers to the disputes and conflicts that arise between parents in their daily interactions due to differing opinions and ideas on lifestyle, values and beliefs, educational concepts, and other aspects. These conflicts may include verbal arguments, emotional alienation, and behavioral confrontation. PC significantly shape the progression and evolution of a child's development [2].

2.2. Sensitive-aggressive Psychology

Sensitive-aggressive psychology is a psychological response that an individual has to external stimuli, which is usually related to the individual's emotional regulation abilities and psychological expectations in social interactions. This psychology is a multidimensional concept, such as interpersonal sensitivity, rejection sensitivity, aggressiveness, etc., which involves the way individuals perceive and process external stimuli.

2.3. Negative Emotions

NE refers to unpleasant emotions that an individual experiences when facing situations of frustration, challenge, stress, etc., such as anxiety, anger, fear, sadness, jealousy, etc. These emotions can manifest physiologically and psychologically, and can be either short-lived or long-term, affecting the individual's mental health to a certain extent and potentially leading to mental health issues and social dysfunction. However, NE are not always harmful; they can serve as emotional signals, prompting individuals to take specific actions to deal with challenges or change situations.

3. The Impact of PC on NE in Middle School Students

The impact of PC on the NE of middle school students is a topic of high social concern. PC refers to spoken arguments or physical altercations between parents from disagreements or differences in lifestyle for other reasons. Such conflicts can not only affect family interactions but may also adversely affect the psychological health of middle school students, especially in terms of emotional development during their growth. Additionally, some researchers have indicated that healthcare professionals should focus greater attention on the frequent incidence of PC in households and its impact on the comprehensive growth and well-being of children [3]. Therefore, this section will discuss the impact of the degree of PC on various NE experienced by middle school students, such

as anxiety, depression, emotional insecurity, and other emotional effects. The emotional unease refers to the negative subjective experience that children form regarding their parents' relationship after experiencing or witnessing PC [4].

Firstly, the discussion will focus on the negative emotional impacts of PC on depression and social anxiety in middle school students. Wang and his colleagues conducted a study on this topic. Their research subjects were 481 high school freshmen and sophomores, and they used a convenience sampling method for data analysis. The study employed various measurement tools, including the scale for Children's Perception of PC, which was developed by Grych and colleagues and it is used to assess students' perceptions of PC. This scale includes multiple dimensions, for instance, the conflict frequency, degree of confrontation, and points of conflict, reflecting children's understanding of different facets of PC. Additionally, the Parental Relationship Security Scale created by Davies and his colleagues was used to measure students' emotional insecurity in the context of PC, which includes seven factors reflecting three aspects of emotional insecurity: emotional reactivity, behavioral disorder, and constructive and destructive family representations. The study also used the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire, which includes two subscales for interpersonal dependency and self-criticism, to assess students' experiences of depression, as well as a Social Anxiety Subscale to assess students' levels of social anxiety. After data collection, the researchers employed structural equation modeling to assess the fit of the hypothetical models, including single-mediator models (M1 and M2)，。Model M1 tested the mediating role of cognitive appraisal as an independent mediator between PC and adolescents' internalized problems, such as social anxiety and depressive symptoms. Model M2 investigated how emotional insecurity acts as an intermediary factor linking PC to the internalizing issues experienced by adolescents. As well as the composite mediator model (M3) that integrates both cognitive evaluation and emotional vulnerability. The data analysis concluded that PC could positively predict adolescents' cognitive appraisal and emotional insecurity, and it can positively predict social anxiety and depression. Cognitive assessment and emotional instability can act as separate intermediaries in the pathway between perceived levels of PC and inner issues like social anxiety and depressive symptoms in teenagers. Adolescents' cognitive appraisal of PC significantly and positively predicts their emotional insecurity [5].

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that PC undermines the emotional stability of teenagers, and it reveals the key mediating roles of mental evaluation and feelings of insecurity in this process. At the same time, by integrating the cognitive-contextual framework and the theory of emotional stability, the study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how PC affects adolescents' internalized problems. Despite this, the study has some limitation, such as the use of convenience sampling, which may lack representativeness and affect the universality of the results. In addition, the study mainly focuses on the internalizing effects of PC and does not address externalizing issues like some behavioral issues, such as aggression, disciplinary violations, and antisocial behaviors.

Next, the study explores the impact of PC on high school students' parent-child affinity and psychological resilience, the psychological resilience can prevent the excessive growth of NE. It's broadly acknowledged that the dynamics of the parental bond greatly influence children. Their living habits, daily communication, and interaction patterns subtly influence the child. However, inappropriate parental relationships can become potential stressors for children and even cause psychological harm.

Chinese researchers selected high school students as the research subjects, distributing a total of 500 questionnaires and receiving 481 valid responses. Among them, there were 529 students from the first year, 243 students from the second grade, and 364 students from the third. In this study, the following scales were used: including the CES-D Scale compiled by Radloff, the PC Scale with 34 items, the Parent-Child Affinity Scale with ten questions, and the Scale for Measuring Adolescent

Resilience by Hu Yueqin and Gan Yiqun with 27 items, divided into two aspects: individual resilience and supportive resources. Among them, the researchers used the Family Adaptation and Parent-Child Affinity Evaluation Questionnaire revised by Zhang Wenxin and colleagues in 2007, which consists of two parts: father and mother, each containing 10 questions. The scale uses a 5-level rating scale and the stronger the total score, the higher the parent-child affinity. The researchers used SPSS 22.0, the PROCESS macro, and AMOS 24.0 for data processing and statistical analysis. They employed meta-analysis methods to verify research hypotheses and explore the correlation between PC and NE in high school students. In addition, they used stepwise multiple regression analysis and structural equation modeling techniques to investigate the interconnections among the variables. The data analysis results showed a significant negative correlation between parent-child bond affinity and depressive symptoms among secondary school pupils, indicating that the bigger the parent-child affinity, the lower the level of depression in high school students. The relationship between PC and high school students' depressive emotions is partly facilitated through the variable of parent-child relationship affinity. Moreover, parent-child affinity and psychological resilience acts as both a mediator and a sequential intermediary in the relationship between PC and depression among high school students [6].

Compared to previous studies, this research provides a deeper understanding through a chained mediation model, emphasizing the complexity of how PC affects high school students' depressive emotions through parent-child affinity and psychological resilience. However, the study selected a sample from a county in Yunnan, which may have regional limitations, and the results may not be universally applicable. In the study, the urban and rural proportions of the sample were not well-balanced, with urban participants accounting for 27.59% and rural participants accounting for 72.23%. The proportion of males was 46.22%, and the proportion of females was 53.60%. The sampling method was not rigorous. In addition, the study did not fully consider other potential influencing factors, such as the social environment and peers, which may affect the results.

Both of these studies concentrate on the effects of PC on the NE of middle school students, indicating that the emergence of NE in middle school kids is shaped by PC. In addition, the above studies provide theoretical basis and reasonable intervention measures for understanding and preventing NE in adolescents, emphasizing the part of the domestic setting in the mental health of adolescents. It has been proven that students with relatively poor parent-child relationships are more likely to have NE such as depression, anxiety, and emotional insecurity. On the contrary, a good parent-child relationship can help students build psychological resilience to mental problems.

4.   The Impact of Parental Conflict on Aggressive Behavior in Middle School Students

The impact of PC on AB in middle school students is also one of the highly discussed topics in current society. PC frequently serves as a stressor in children's lives and correlates with the emergence of notable behavioral and emotional issues [7], which involves not only psychological but also physiological and social aspects on multiple levels. Children's exposure to domestic strife is linked to a range of psychological challenges, encompassing AB, externalizing and internalizing disorders, behavioral issues, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [8]. Therefore, this section will analyze and discuss the impact of the degree of PC on AB in middle school students.

Firstly, the study explores the impact of the multifaceted nature of interparental relationships concerning teenage hostility and mental well-being. Olabimpe and his colleagues in their research consider PC as a contributing element to suboptimal psychological health and AB in adolescents [9]. They selected 394 adolescents aged 12 to 19 in Ekiti State, Nigeria, including 227 males and 167 females. These adolescents came from public and private schools, covering different family backgrounds, including two-parent families and separated families. In addition, the religious beliefs of the selected subjects were diverse, hence its representativeness is also high, mainly Christians,

followed by Muslims and traditional believers. The study used various measurement tools, including the CPIC, which assesses adolescents' perception of interparental conflict, including three dimensions: the characteristics of disputes, perceived threats, and feelings of self-reproach. There was also the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) employed to evaluate the psychological well-being of teenagers, as well as the Aggression Scale for measuring self-reported AB in adolescents. The study employed multiple regression techniques and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA/ANOVA) statistical methods to analyze the data. Correlation analysis revealed that each facet of parental discord was linked to increased aggression in a direct relationship, meaning the greater the adolescents' experience with conflicts between their parents, the higher their tendency towards aggression. Additionally, all aspects of interparental conflict between parents showed an inverse relationship with psychological health, indicating that the less adolescents perceived PC, the higher their sense of mental well-being. The examination indicated that every aspect of disputes between parents had a marked positive correlation with aggressive tendencies in teens and a pronounced negative correlation with mental health. The aspects of how often and how intensely conflicts occurred were each corrected to AB, while the aspects of conflict intensity, the strategies used to resolve disputes, the effectiveness of coping mechanisms, and feelings of self-reproach were each associated with mental health independently. Rising levels of conflict between parents correspond with heightened aggression in teenagers and a deterioration in their mental health.

From the above results, it can be concluded that interparental conflict has significantly influence the aggressiveness and psychological welfare of adolescents. However, the study has several limitations, such as a comparatively limited number of participants, which could restrict the broader applicability of the research results. The sample is only from a specific area of Nigeria and may not represent adolescents from other cultural and geographical backgrounds. The study relies on self-reported data from adolescents, which may be subject to reporting bias. The study also did not consider other potential variables that may affect adolescent mental health and aggressiveness, such as socioeconomic status and school environment.

Next, the discussion will focus on another examples.

Chinese researchers selected 1,918 middle school students as research subjects, including 879 males and 1,019 females, with an average age of 14.62 years. These students come from eight ordinary middle schools in Shandong Province, covering students from the initial year of middle school through to the subsequent year of senior high. The study used the Scale for Assessing Perception of Marital Discord Between Parents to assess middle school students' perception of verbal or physical disputes between parents. And two self-report scales the Positive Psychological Capital Scale, the Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scale. The aggression Questionnaire, which includes four aspects: physical assault, verbal hostility, rage, and antagonism, utilized for evaluating the AB of middle school students. The study used SPSS 21.0 and Amos 24.0 software for data processing, employed the Harman's single-factor technique to assess potential common method bias. and used the Bootstrap method to test the mediating effects. Data analysis revealed significant correlations between perceived parental marital conflict, positive psychological capital, basic psychological needs satisfaction, and AB. Perceived parental marital conflict predicts AB in middle school students through the intermediary functions of positive psychological capital and elementary psychological needs satisfaction, as well as their chained mediating effects [10]. Compared to other studies, this study focuses on exploring the relationship between perceived PC and AB in middle school students, particularly through the intermediary effects of positive psychological resources and satisfaction of basic psychological needs. This focus may differ from other studies that may focus more on the impact of other factors on AB. In addition, the study further explores the psychological mechanisms underlying the disruption of secure attachment states. The results emphasize the impact of the family environment on the mental health and behavioral problems of middle school students.

However, the study still has its shortcomings. The research uses a cross-sectional design, which cannot determine the causal relationships between variables. The data source is too singular, mainly from students' self-reports, which may have reporting bias. Moreover, the sample has geographical limitations, mainly from middle school students in Shandong Province, and may not represent middle school students from other regions or cultural backgrounds. In terms of data collection, the method chosen only uses questionnaires and does not combine various methods such as interviews to enhance the depth and breadth of the research, this kind of method may lack of the depth and detail of qualitative data.

5.　Discussion and Suggestion

5.1.　Summary

In summary, this study arrives at conclusions in two parts.

Firstly, regarding the impact of PC on the NE of students in grades six to eight, it can be concluded from the above studies indicating a notable direct relationship between PC and NE such as sadness, social anxiety, also the emotional insecurity in middle school students. In the relationship of variable influence, there are also mediating or moderating variables, hence the mechanism of influence is complex. Secondly, regarding the impact of PC on AB in middle school students, it can be concluded that PC is positively correlated with AB and negatively correlated with mental health in middle school students. Positive psychological capital and the fulfillment of primary psychological needs acts as an intermediary factor between PC and AB in middle school students.

5.2.　Suggestions

Based on the above conclusions, it can be deduced that there is a need to enhance family harmony education in family relationships. Parents need to recognize how their contentious actions adversely affect their children, learn how to communicate more effectively, and resolve and reduce family conflicts. In addition, schools and communities should take appropriate intervention measures, such as providing mental health education and counseling services to help middle school students identify and manage NE and enhance psychological resilience. Communication between parents and children is also crucial; parents need to strengthen their communication and affinity with their children on a daily basis to reduce the injurious effect of PC on the mental health of middle-level education attendees. In addition to changes in parental behavior, it is also necessary to enhance children's psychological capital. This can be achieved through education and training to cultivate students' self-efficacy, resilience, hope, and optimism, which can be used to counteract NE and AB.

5.3.　Future Directions

In future research, longitudinal studies can be conducted to understand the lasting impact of PC on the psychological condition and behavioral problems of middle school students. Additionally, multi-method data collection should be employed: combining questionnaire surveys, interviews, observations, and other methods to enhance the depth and breadth of the research. Intervention studies can also be designed and evaluated to assess interventions for family conflicts to reduce the NE and AB of middle school students. It is hoped that through these studies, a more detailed awareness of the impact of PC on the emotional balance and behavior of middle school students can be achieved, and more effective prevention and intervention measures can be developed.

6.   Conclusion

The research topic of this article focuses on the impact of PC on the NE and AB of middle school students. In exploring this topic, the article conducts a detailed analysis of how PC affects the emotional states and behavioral expressions of adolescents through different psychological mechanisms, with particular attention to the bridging effect of positive psychological states and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. The following conclusions can be drawn from the study: PC Is intimately and positively tied to depression, social anxiety, and emotional insecurity in middle school students. PC can positively predict AB in middle school students. Positive psychological capital and the gratification of essential psychological desires functions as a mediator in the relationship between conflicts among PC and the incidence of AB in adolescents attending middle school, including chain mediating effects. The home atmosphere contributes to an important role in the mental health of middle school students; poor parent-child relationships may lead to more NE, while good parent-child relationships can help students build psychological resilience. Based on the research conclusions, several suggestions can be made: family members can enhance family harmony education, parents can raise their insight into the negative implications of disputatious actions on the youth, and children can learn more effective communication and conflict resolution methods. Schools and communities should provide mental health education and counseling services to help middle school students identify and manage NE and enhance psychological resilience. In addition, it is also necessary to strengthen daily communication between parents and children to reduce the negative impact of PC on the mental health of middle school students.

The significance of this article lies in providing a new perspective for understanding the influencing mechanism of the impact of PC on the psychology and behavior of adolescents, especially in revealing the adjustment function of positive motivational state and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. In addition, in practical terms, this study provides evidence-based guidance for family education and school intervention, helping to develop more effective strategies to support the mental health and emotional regulation of adolescents. It can also raise social attention, enhance public awareness of mental health issues among adolescents, especially the significance of the family surroundings in adolescent evolution and promote social concern and discussion on this issue.

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