ERPA 2014

The relationship between perceived inter-parental conflict and academic adjustment in first year students’ Hamadan, Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between perceived inter-parental conflict and students’ academic adjustment among first year students at Hamadan University of Medical Sciences, Iran. 395 first year students aged below 19 years old were selected through a convenience producer in year 2012. Data were collected by a structured questionnaire including socio-demography, inter-parental conflict and academic adjustment. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. Students with lower perceived inter-parental conflict had higher level of academic adjustment (p<0.01). There was no significant difference on perceived inter-parental conflict and academic adjustment between males and females. The results revealed the role of the quality of parent-child relationship on their students’ academic adjustment. Therefore, the important role of family could be considered by higher education administration policies for achieving higher students’ academic adjustment.

Keywords: academic adjustments; students; inter-parental conflicts.

1. Introduction

Inter-parental conflicts affect children coping efforts in environment (Grych and Fincham, 1990). Based on cognitive-contextual theory, children’s efforts to know the conflict and its implications for themselves is called...
Appraisals and it is important in coping efforts and quality of the parent-child relationships (Grych and Cardoza-Fernandes 2001).

Adolescent constructs their personal models of what she or he can imagine and about self is based on their interactions with parents (Bowlby, 1982) this initiate relationships affects adolescent’s functioning in peer relationships (Engels, Finkenauer, Meeus, & Dekovic, 2001). Research has shown that parental conflict is linked to difficulties in the functioning of the children and adolescents involved in their parental conflict (Turner & Kopiec, 2006; Banyard & Cross, 2008). Davies and Cummings (1994) described inter-parental conflict by the appearance of negative affect between parental figures. In this study, inter-parental conflict is defined by the adolescent's perceptions of the dimensions of (conflict properties), responses to (threat to self), and interpretations of (self-blame) the conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Inter-parental conflict is related to parents’ removal of psychological or physical availability and negative answer of their children needs (Cummings & Davies, 1994).

According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), children learn behaviors and attitude through both vicarious and mastery experience. Adolescents within these social contexts have explicit experience with parental conflict through their parent’s relationship. In social modelling, usually adolescent copy their parents’ behavior to make a pattern of conflictive behavior (Bandura, 1997; Pryor & Pattison, 2007). Inter-parental conflict is related to low self-efficacy, higher levels of personal and social problem (Canary & Canary, 2013; Kolb & Griffith, 2009; Rynn et al., 2012). As argued by Bandura and Shunk (1981) Self-efficacy influencing on the processes of expectancy, self-perception, self-regulation, and motivation of student and it also known as a reliable predictor of academic achievement.

Golan (1981) indicates that young adults entering college must learn the developmental tasks including separating from their family and adapting to the conditions of the adult world. This process of adaptation consists of establishing a social support system to change the support system from the family (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002). Therefore this study was conducted in late adolescent university students to assess the relationship between inter-parental conflict and students’ academic adjustment in Hamadan, Iran.

2. Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted among 395 first year students of University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran who were between 17 to 19 years old were selected randomly. A validated structured questionnaire including information on background characteristics, the Children’s Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale (CPIC) and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) were used. SPSS version 19 was utilized for data analysis. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis were utilized to determine the relations between inter-parental conflict and students’ academic adjustment.

The Children’s Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale (CPIC) developed by Grych et al. (1992). The CPIC measure adolescent’s perceptions, interpretations and responses to inter-parental conflict. The final version of self-report CPIC used within the present study was a 44-item, three factor scale: 17 items for conflict properties, 14 items for threat to self, and 13 items for self-blame. For each item, student indicate how true each statement was on three-point Likert type scale (1 =False, 2= Sort of true, 3 = True). . The total score of the perceived inter-parental conflict ranged from 44 to 132. Higher scores reflected higher inter-parental conflict. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of reliability of the total CPIC was .851. The reliability coefficient alphas for subscales were .72 for threat to self, .88 for conflict properties and .75 for self-blame, indicating desirable level of internal consistency of the scale.

The academic adjustment scale was adapted from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryuk, 1984). This was a 24-item self-report that assesses a student's success in coping with various educational demands in the college environment. Participants rate the extent to which a particular statement applies to them based on a 9-point scale that ranges from 1 {doesn’t apply to me at all} to 9 {applies very close to me}. Total scores were summed across all items and averaged with high scores indicating better adjustment to the academic environment. In this study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.803 was calculated for this scale.
3. Results

In present study mean age of respondents was 18.75 (SD = 0.44) year. About 70% were female and 30% were male. A total of 97.9% of participants were from intact families and live with both biological parents. The mean score for respondent’s birth order was 2.63 (SD = 1.88). In current research 86% of students life on campus while 14% life off campus and mostly with their parents. The mean score for inter-parental conflict (mean = 98.9, SD = 13.6) within family. Based on the total score, majority (79.7%) of the respondents indicated low Inter-parental conflict at home. The mean score for academic adjustment was 132.5 (SD=22.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>r value</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children's Perception of Inter-parental conflict</td>
<td>-.300**</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict properties</td>
<td>-.279**</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to self</td>
<td>-.269**</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>-.146**</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01 (one-tailed)

The Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted between personal and family backgrounds (fathers’ age, mothers’ age, birth order of respondents, marital status and degree of study) and subscales of inter-parental conflict in predicting respondents’ academic adjustment. The standardized beta coefficient (B) was utilized to assess the contribution of each independent variable to prediction of academic adjustment. Standardized beta coefficient (B) means the value of each independent variable have been converted to the same scale. Therefore, using (B) the comparison between independent variables can be made. Thus, because the common unit of measurement, it is possible to determine which predictor is most effective. Each (B) value can vary from -1.00 to +1.00 and it is calculated for each predictor variable.

Table 2 show the result of hierarchical regression analyses for academic adjustment. In first step, five background variables (fathers’ age, mothers’ age, birth order of respondents, marital status and degree of study) were entered into the regression model. At first step, the selected background variables explained only 8% of the variance in respondents’ academic adjustment. At this step, marital status and degree of study were significant predictors of respondents’ academic adjustment. F (5, 368) = 6.729, p<0.001, indicate the regression model was significantly fit the data.

At step 2, other variables consist of three subscales of inter-parental conflict were added into the regression model. At step 2, F (8, 365) =9.649, p<0.001, indicating the regression model was significantly fit the data. The R2change at step 2 equals to 0.091 meaning that inter-parental conflict variables add 9% of variances in academic adjustment (p<0.001) over and beyond the parent and individual variables in the first step. At step 2, five variables were statistically significant. Degree of study (Beta=.218, p<0.001) showed a strongest predictor, followed by, marital status (Beta=.146, p<0.05), conflict properties (Beta=-.246, p<0.05), threat to self (Beta=-.186, p<0.05), self-blame (Beta=-.182, p<0.05), and parents’ marital status (Beta=.146, p<0.05) were added into the regression model. At step 2, F (8, 365) =9.649, p<0.001, indicating the regression model was significantly fit the data. The R2change at step 2 equals to 0.091 meaning that inter-parental conflict variables add 9% of variances in academic adjustment (p<0.001) over and beyond the parent and individual variables in the first step. At step 2, five variables were statistically significant. Degree of study (Beta=.218, p<0.001) showed a strongest predictor, followed by, marital status (Beta=.146, p<0.05), conflict properties (Beta=-.246, p<0.05), threat to self (Beta=-.186, p<0.05), self-blame (Beta=-.182, p<0.05), and parents’ marital status (Beta=.146, p<0.05)

Table 2 depicts that at the final model (step 2) coefficients for constant (b0 = 122.04, p<0.05), degree (b1 = 23.02, p<0.05), marital status (b2 = 22.77, p<0.05), conflict properties (b3 =-1.04, p<0.05), threat to self (b4=-.773, p<0.05), self-blame (b5= -1.10, p<0.05) are significant. Therefore, the estimated equation for the linear model of prediction of respondents' academic adjustment is:

\[ Y = b_0 + b_1 (x_1) + b_2 (x_2) + b_3 (x_3) + b_4 (x_4) + b_5 (x_5) + e \]

Academic adjustment (Y) = 122.04+ 23.02 (x1) + 22.77 (x2) -1.04 (x3) -.773 (x4) -1.10 (x5) + e

Where:
Y = Academic adjustment
B = Constant
X1 = Respondents’ degree of study (associate degree)
X2 = Parents marital status (married)
X3 = Conflict properties
X4 = Threat to self
X5 = Self-blame
e = Error
Table 2. Results of multiple regression analysis for predicting respondents’ academic adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Multiple Regression Analysis Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Individual Variables</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father’s age</td>
<td>164.58*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother’s age</td>
<td>-.017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree (associate)</td>
<td>-.025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status (married)</td>
<td>24.330*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-parental conflict</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict properties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to self</td>
<td>-.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>-.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.110*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.05
Step 1: F (5, 368) =6.729, R=.289, R²=.084, Adjusted R²=.071, p<0.001
Step 2: F (8, 365) =9.649, R=.418, R²=.175, Adjusted R²=.156, R²-change=.091, F-change (3, 365) = 13.385, p<0.001

In the equation, the positive values show that there is a positive relationship between the variable and the outcome. It shows as associate degree and married status increase the respondents’ academic adjustment will increase. For example, one unit increase in the married status (x2) will increases 23.02 unit increase in the respondents’ academic adjustment (Y). However, the negative value shows a negative relationship between inter-parental subscales and academic adjustment. That means if inter-parental conflict increases the academic adjustment will decreases.

The ANOVA results show that the F-value was large [F (8, 365) =9.649] and the corresponding p-value was small (p < 0.01). This concluded that the slope for the estimated linear regression line was not equal to zero confirming that there was linear relationship between academic adjustment and the five significant variables.

4. Discussion

The results showed past students inter-parental had a indirect relationship with academic adjustment. That indicates participants who felt a inter-parental conflict as an late adolescent reported lower levels of efficacious feelings in dealing with academic issues and adjusting to the academic environment in the university. Researchers have noted the direct association between being highly efficacious in academic settings and adjusting well to the stress and demands in the academic environment (Chemers et al, 2001; Phinney & Haas, 2003). The way adolescents observe their personal relationships and the existence of conflict communications in the family is based on their age, stage of development, cultural and cognitive maturity (Jouriles et al., 2000). Age of the children is important element to cope effectively with conflict. Older children felt less threatened and have more ability to manage successfully the effect of inter-parental conflict (Grych et al., 2003). Adolescent’s understanding and coping with inter-parental conflict is an important factor for adjusting in academic tasks.

In the present study inter-parental conflict was related to student who have studied in lower degree and those their parents live together more likely to have better academic adjustment. However students who had high perceived inter-parental conflict more likely to had lower academic adjustment. That means adolescent within inter-parental conflict family confront with high anxiety to perform social skills and it has also negative effect on adolescents’ adjustment in university. This may be partially accounted by late adolescent's appraisal of marital conflict. Also, if conflict do not get in certain level to account as threat family it may not view as parental conflict in adolescent’s appraisal of marital conflict between their parents. Adolescent’s appraisal of stability to inter-parental conflict may cause hopelessness, anger, sadness, and anxiety. Therefore, if family experiences frequent of inter-parental conflict it will reduce coping adjustment and develop anxiety in adolescent. Self-blame may damage self-esteem and cause depression (Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Previous studies in Iran have shown that leaving home to university is the one of the stressful situation for student (Jahani-Hashemi et al., 2004; Sadeghian & Heidarian-Pour, 2009; Shariati et al., 2002). Medical student have shown more problems compared to other student because of their training, material of study, work with patients and job.
insecurity. Increasing number of students admitted to counseling center in Hamadan medical University, indicates their social and cultural development (ask for help is the sign of maturity). On the other hand, indicates increase the number of problems which will effects on adolescent self-efficacy and their academic performance. In Compared to other medical Universities in Iran, Hamadan Medical University has the second largest amount related to student mental and psychological health (Jahani-Hashemi et al., 2004; Sadeghian & Heidarian-Pour, 2009). Anxiety, depression and stress are few factors that effects on student’s performance and psychological well being which may cause maladjustment in University. Parents and educators can help adolescent with training in goal setting and planning can enhance their self-confidence levels to do specific duties in academic environment.

Acknowledgements

Authors are grateful to Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Hamadan University of Medical Sciences for their cooperation and supports to carry out this work.

References