

Title	The Relationship between Marital Conflict and Children's Social Adjustment
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The Relationship between Marital Conflict and Children's Social Adjustment

Yu Yu Khaing*

Abstract

This study is to examine the relation between marital conflict and children's Asocial and Excluded behaviors as rated by teachers. The participants in this study were a group of 100 children and their mothers in Mandalay and Banmaw. To determine direct effects, marital conflict was assessed using a Myanmar version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales. Children's social behaviors were measured by two subscales in the Social Behavior Scale. As a result, marital conflict was significantly positive correlated with children's Asocial and Excluded behaviors in the classroom. In other words, marital conflict was significantly negative associated with children's social adjustment.

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between marital conflict and children's social adjustment. Spurred by the phenomenon of chronically high divorce rates and the coincident discord and disruption within families, a significant body of research has begun to examine the impact of marital conflict on children. Emerging from this examination is an appreciation that although parental divorce is associated with increased behavior problems in children, the conflict between divorcing parents and indeed, among intact couples with troubled marriages may be the most silent and enduring feature in distressed families that impacts child social and emotional adjustment.

Rossmann (1998) specifically addressed potential processes by which exposure to violent marital conflict may potentiate generalized stress reactions. She suggested that important of cognitive schemes children in violent families develop to understand their environment. Although these schemes might be of immediate use in coping with unpredictable violent events in the family, they ultimately may prove maladaptive in the larger social world.

Developmental theory suggests that parents provide needed skills and support for children to expend and explore their social world. Indeed, relationships formed with parents can provide the template for subsequent interaction with other adults and peers

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(Burnstein, 1995) and form what we termed "inner working models" of interpersonal interactions (Rubin et al, 1995). Disturbance in parent- child relationships can disrupt children's social development by creating interpersonal security or by reducing opportunities for interaction by restricting exploration.

In this study, to measure marital conflict and child's social adjustment, the researcher used two scales: Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2), to assess the severity of marital conflict developed by Straus (1996) and Social Behavior Scale (SBS), to measure children's social adjustment. The Verbal Aggression sub- scale on the CTS2 is comprised of tactics that include verbal and non- verbal efforts to symbolically hurt the partner and includes threats, insults, spiteful comments, and breaking objects. The physical aggression sub- scale assesses forceful tactics to resolve conflicts. These tactics included assaults on the partner such as slapping and kicking, up to and including the administration of beatings and the use of weapons.

The Social Behavior Scale (SBS) includes seven sub- scales: (a) prosocial, (b) Relational Aggression, (c) Overt Aggression, (d) Asocial, (e) Excluded, (f) Depressed and (g) Victimized. The two scales or the SBS used in this study are Asocial with peers and excluded by peers. These scales were constructed by Robinson to assess socially withdrawn behaviors. The Asocial with peers sub- scale was intended to measure self-imposed social disengagement suggesting the propensity of children to isolate themselves from peers by involvement in solitary behaviors. The Excluded by peers sub- scale was constructed to assess social isolation that was the result of peer driven behaviors.

Methods

Participants

Participants were a group of 100 children and their mothers, and teachers. Of the 100 children participants, 54 (54%) were male and 46 (46%) were female ranging in age from 8 to 11 years from No. (3) and No. (4) Basic Education High School in Banmaw and No. (30) and No. (16) Basic Education Primary School in Mandalay.

Table 1 Characteristics of Children

Age	n	%
8	22	22%
9	34	34%
10	25	25%
11	19	19%
Gender		
Male	54	54%
Female	46	46%

Measures

The Myanmar version of CTS2 includes 20 items for the two subscales of psychological aggression and physical assault. The Conflict Tactics Scale (1979, 1996) is the most widely used measure of partner aggression. It identifies specific tactics used in conflict between intimate partners. The instrument used to assess marital conflict was a Myanmar version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale developed by Nilar Kyu & Kanni (2005) based on the original CTS2 devised by Straus (1996). Psychological aggression refers to the use of verbal and/or non-verbal acts that symbolically hurt the other or to the use of threats to hurt the other. Physical assault refers to an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person (Straus, 1979). Each item was rated on the frequency of occurrence during the past year: never, once, twice, 3-5, 6-10, 11-20, and more than 20 times. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for psychological aggression and physical assault were .79 and .72, respectively.

The children's social adjustment was measured with Social Behavior Scale developed by Robison, (2003). It is a 39 item teacher-report questionnaire. The scale includes seven sub-scales: (a) Prosocial, (b) Relational Aggression, (c) Overt Aggression, (d) Asocial, (e) Excluded, (f) Depressed, and (g) Victimized. The only two scales on the SBS were used in this study, Asocial with Peers and Excluded by Peers. The Asocial with Peers sub-scale (6 items) was intended to measure self-imposed social disengagement suggesting the propensity of children to isolate sub-scale (7 items) was constructed to

assess social isolation that was the result of peer driven behaviors. The reliability coefficient for Asocial with Peers and Excluded by Peers were .87 and .96, respectively. This scale used five-point likert-type items ranging from “Never true” (1) to “Almost always true” (5).

Procedure

Permission for the participant to take part voluntarily in the study during School time was obtained from Headmasters of No (16) and No (30) Basic Education Primary School in Mandalay and No (3) and No (4) Basic Education High School in Banmaw. Parental permission was also obtained for school visits to assess students and their mothers. During these visits the children’s mother was asked to complete the Social Behavior Scale (SBS) and the children’s mother was asked to complete the approached by the researcher going to their houses and schools, asking participants in a questionnaire study of marital conflict and child social adjustment. Mother permission was also obtained for school visits, to be conducted. During these visit the child’s teacher was asked to complete the SBS and observation of the child’s social adjustment was conducted in the classroom.

And then, the responses of the participant were scored in each scale between the two participants groups were examined by using Pearson product-moment correlation procedure.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 - 4 present the result of an item analyses conducted for the 6-items Asocial with Peer sub-scale, the 7-items Excluded by Peer sub-scale and the 13-itmes social adjustment instrument. According to the result, all of the items on each scale and total scale were significant at either .05 level or .01 level or .001 level.

Table 5 reports Cronbach’s alpha coefficients calculated for the social adjustment scales and the revised conflict tactics scales. The alphas for all scales indicated considerable internal consistency.

Table 2 Showing significant differences between high-scoring group and low-scoring group (item analysis for SBS)

Scale Item	χ^2 value	Significance Level
This child is ignored by peers.	43.68	.001
This child is a solitary child.	30.46	.001
This child is not chosen as a playmate.	28.72	.001
This child likes to play alone.	11.50	.05
Peers avoid this child.	42.58	.001
This child prefers to play alone.	25.86	.001
This child is ridiculed or picked on by peers.	33.38	.001
This child keeps peer at a distance.	35.76	.001
Peers refuse to let this child play.	41.64	.001
This child avoids peers.	50.50	.001
This child is not liked much.	33.04	.001
This child withdraws from peer activities.	15.48	.01
This child is excluded from peer's activities.	29.98	.001

Table 3 Showing significant differences between high-scoring group and low-scoring group (item analysis for Asocial)

Scale Item	χ^2 value	Significance Level
This child is a solitary child.	30.46	.001
This child likes to play alone.	11.50	.05
This child prefers to play alone.	25.86	.001
This child keeps peers at a distance.	35.76	.001
This child avoids peers.	50.50	.001
This child withdraws from peer activities.	15.48	.01

Table 4 Showing significant differences between high-scoring group and low-scoring group (item analysis for Excluded)

Scale Item	χ^2 value	Significance Level
This child is ignored by peers.	43.68	.001
This child is not chosen as a playmate.	28.72	.001
Peers avoid this child.	42.58	.001
This child is ridiculed or picked on by peers.	33.38	.001
Peers refuse to let this child play.	41.64	.001
This child is not liked much.	33.04	.001
This child is excluded from peer's activities.	29.98	.001

Table 5 Internal consistency reliability of the Social Adjustment Scales and the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale

Serial No.	Tests	Reliability Coefficient
1	Asocial with peers	.83
2	Excluded by peers	.84
3	SBS	.90
4	Psychological aggression	.83
5	Physical assault	.92
6	CTS2	.92

Table 6 Correlation between measures used for the study (N= 100)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Psychological Aggression	-					
2 Physical assault	.79**					
3 CTS	.95**	.94**				
4 Asocial	.79**	.71**	.79**			
5 Excluded	.87**	.67**	.82**	.71**		
6 SBS	.90**	.75**	.88**	.89**	.94**	-

**p<.01

The correlation matrix calculated between measures is shown in Table 6. Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation indicated that the two sub-scales from the SBS (i.e. Asocial and Excluded) were positively related. The two subscales from the CTS2 (i.e., Psychological aggression and Physical assault) were also positively related. Additionally, there was a significant positive correlation between marital conflict (CTS-total) and the Asocial sub-scales on the SBS ($r = .79, p < .01$) and a trend toward significant between the CTS-Total Severe and the Excluded sub-scale of the SBS ($r = .82, p < .01$)

Results of correlational analyses also indicated that psychological aggression and physical assault were significantly and positively related to Asocial with peer and Excluded by peer.

In examining the linkage between exposure to marital conflict and children's social disengagement, it was predicted that children exposed to marital conflict involving psychological and/or physical aggression would be rated by their teachers as less interested in social interaction than non-exposed peers and manifest a preference for solitary play. This prediction was supported in this study. Indeed, children with a greater exposure to marital conflict tended to appear, to their teachers as less interested in social interactions than peers appeared to be.

Moreover, there was a significant relationship between exposure to marital conflict and teacher's rating of peer exclusionary behavior. Exclusion is somewhat different construct than asocial behaviors and is more akin to active social rejection by peers than is a measure of solitary play by a child.

The association between marital conflict and child's emotional and behavioral adjustment has also been well documented (e.g., Emery, 1982, Davies & Cunnig, 1994). Children's immediate responses to marital conflict might include anger, fear, sadness, and efforts to intervene or withdrawal. Findings of this study seem to support the impact of marital conflict on child's social development; specifically, that some children who are exposed to marital conflict exhibit a desire to withdraw from social interactions.

Although these results are highly suggestive, a number of important issues remain unexplored in the present study. Firstly, potential explanations of this finding cannot be explored as the researcher included in the hypothesis that exposure to destructive marital conflict may influence children's social behavior as they model avoidant problem solving behaviors witnessed in the home. This need should be explored in further examination.

Secondly, the relation between marital conflict and parenting was further examined with the potential moderators of parent psychopathology and stress. Finally, this study was essentially cross-sectional in nature and thus causal inferences about marital conflict were difficult to make.

Conclusion

This study is to examine the relation between marital conflict and children's social and excluded behaviors as rated by teachers and mothers. The participants in this study were a group of 100 children and their mothers and teachers. The result showed that marital conflict was significantly positive correlated with children's asocial and excluded behaviors in the classroom. In other words, marital conflict was significantly negative associated with children's social adjustment.

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