

MARITAL DISCORD OF PARENTS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENTS' SELF ESTEEM, ANXIETY AND COPING STRATEGIES-AN INTERVENTION STUDY

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Abstract

We are aware that human beings are different from each other in more ways than one. Even like minded and similar thinking personalities tend to differ with each other at some time or the other and the same is true in the case of married couples which may result in discord if not resolved amicably. This discord may manifest in to aggressive behaviour and adversely impact their children who are shaping their personalities as they grow up. Thus parental discord has brought about certain predictable adverse manifestations in the personalities of the siblings. The broad objective of the study was to understand the Marital Discord of parents and understand its influence on the adolescents' Self Esteem, Anxiety and Coping. For this study, data was collected from various Family Counselling Centres in and around Hyderabad. Using a definite methodology, Marital Discord of parents was assessed. The study further examined adolescents of these parents. A total of 104 adolescents were filtered and assessed for Self Esteem, Anxiety and Coping Strategies. The results indicated that a total of 23 were identified with low Self Esteem, 19 with high Anxiety and 22 for low Coping Strategies. These adolescents were subjected to an Intervention Programme and the impact was assessed to be positive.

Keywords: *Marital Discord, Adolescent, Self Esteem, Anxiety and Coping Strategy*



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Introduction

As most researchers agree, no two human beings are alike and even if they look alike, seldom think alike. Even like minded personalities tend to differ with each other at some time or the other. This may manifest itself into discord if not settled amicably in a reasonable time frame. The same is true in the case of couples in a marriage. Family is an important building block of the society and children learn and are impacted by the atmosphere at home. Inter parental discord may manifest in aggressive and violent behaviour adversely impacting the personality development of the children. This discord may impact the adolescents more easily as they are passing through the peak of the learning curve. Thus parental discord has brought about certain predictable adverse manifestations in the siblings. One should understand that both

marital conflict and child behaviour are multidimensional and are interlinked. The status or the level of marital conflict can vary in frequency, intensity, content, and so is resolution which can take many forms. Marital conflict can impact a child in many ways and thus it becomes important to identify which dimensions of the child have been shaped by marital conflict. In the current study, Self Esteem, Anxiety and Coping Strategies were the dimensions that were assessed. The broad objective of the study was to understand the Marital Discord of parents and understand its influence on the adolescents' Self Esteem, Anxiety and Coping Strategies.

Marital Discord

An unsatisfactory marital relationship places the individual at greater risk and may itself be a source of stress to both the partners. Marital discord is characterised by emotional deficiency in the level of intimacy. There are many causes for discord such as financial sharing, lack of proper communication, household responsibilities, children and dissatisfaction in the relationship. Marital relationship of the parents is a key aspect of family functioning, affecting a number of other dimensions of family functioning, including adolescent adjustment.

Adolescence

Adolescence is a transitory period (12 to 19 years) between childhood and adulthood and it involves biological, cognitive and socio-emotional changes (Santorck, 2001). During this period an individual is seen neither as a child nor as an adult. Hall (1904) claimed that adolescents are characterized by emotional instabilities and hyper-activities, which cause them to experience storms and stress. Erickson as cited in Diane (2007) opines that identity formation creates tension in adolescents to the extent that some of them become confused about their personality. It is the time during which individuals must make commitments to certain specific goals and pathways that will potentially have long-term implications for their future life course (Marcial,1980). It is also a time when adolescents' images of various future possible selves take shape and begin to influence their occupational and family planning (Markus and Nurius,1986;Markus&Wulf,1987).

Self Esteem

Self Esteem is a term in psychology to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of own worth. Self Esteem encompasses beliefs and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride and shame. 'The self-concept is what people think about the self, self esteem and the positive

or person's self-concept consists of the beliefs one has about oneself, one's self-perception, or, as Hamlyn(1983), express it, " the picture of oneself". Baumeister (1997) described self-concept as total perception which people hold about themselves. It is not the "facts" about one-self but rather what one believes to be true about one-self(S Mereer,2008). According to N. Branden(1930), "Self Esteem is the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness. Positive Self Esteem is the immune system helping an individual face life problems and bounce back from adversity. Therefore high Self Esteem is crucial during the turbulence of teenage years.

Anxiety

Everyone experiences anxiety. It is a natural and important emotion, signaling through stirrings of worry, fearfulness, and alarm that danger or a sudden, threatening change is near. Yet sometimes anxiety becomes an exaggerated, unhealthy response. Given the array of changes and uncertainties facing a normal teenager, anxiety often hums along like background noise. For some teenagers, anxiety becomes a chronic, high pitched state, interfering with their ability to attend school and to perform up to their academic potential. Participating in extra-curricular activities, making and keeping friends, and maintaining a supportive, flexible relationship within the family becomes difficult. Sometimes anxiety is limited to generalized, free-floating feelings of uneasiness. At other times, it develops into panic attacks and phobias.

Coping

Folkman and Lazarus (1985) state that 'Coping refers to cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage, master, reduce or tolerate a troubled person environment relationship'. Thus coping responses are distinguished from other adaptation responses only in that they are inextricably linked to stress. Coping is a multifaceted construct and the analysis of coping generally includes three identifiable components: behaviours, motivations, and attitudes. Lazarus and Folkman (1987): Coping is described as the constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/ or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Coping traditionally has been defined as a sense of response that is designed to help the organism to adjust to an ongoing stress. Coping is defined as "the cognitive and emotion efforts made to overcome stress"(Lazarus and Launier, 1978) states that coping consists of efforts, both action oriented, and intra psychic, to manage environmental and internal demands and conflicts within them.

Objectives of the Study

- a. To assess marital discord among the parents of adolescent.
- b. To identify the effects of marital discord on adolescent's self-esteem.
- c. To identify the effects of marital discord on adolescent's anxiety.
- d. To determine adolescent's coping strategies.

Hypotheses

- a. Adolescents whose parents have high marital discord will have low self-esteem.
- b. Adolescents whose parents have high marital discord will have high anxiety.
- c. Adolescents whose parents have marital discord will have low coping strategies.
- d. Marital discord has negative influence on adolescents' Self-Esteem, Anxiety and Coping strategies.

Tools Used

The following tools were used to assess the subjects in the above study.

- a. Three Couple Scales (PREPARE/ENRICH) inventory designed by Olson, Olson-Sigg & Larson (2008). This scale has three dimensions which include:
 - i) Couple Satisfaction Scale (CSS)
 - ii) Couple Communication Scale (CCS)
 - iii) Couple Conflict Resolution (CCR)
- b. Self-Esteem Inventories by Stanley Coopersmith, Ph.D.
- c. State-Trait Anxiety Test Designed and Developed by Sanjay Vohra.
- d. Coping Check List by Rao, Subbakrishna and Prabhe (1989).

The collected data was collated, analysed and the results tabulated. The analysis was based on self-reported data by respondents (N=104). Social-demography of respondents were analysed with descriptive statistics (tables, frequency tables, pie charts, bar graphs etc.). A prior-hypothesis was tested with parametric statistical tools (Pearson correlation, Regression, Anova etc.). Partially qualitative analysis were utilised for analysis and interpretation.

Findings

For the present study, data was collected from the sample that has socio-demographic characteristics of the couple and the adolescents that were relevant to the study included their sex, ages and type of family they came from. Therefore, these characteristics of the respondents were examined and compared. The responses obtained were presented in the tabular form along with frequency and percentages.

In the first stage data pertaining to a total of 1050 couples who had registered for marital counselling in various Professional Counselling Centres in and around the cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad was collected. The couples were undergoing counselling activities during the period of study. In the Second Stage a careful segregation of couples who had adolescent children within the age range of 15-19 were identified and selected for further study. Those couples who were forthcoming to participate in the study were selected and the finally a total of 318 couples were short listed for research work. In the Third Stage these 318 couples were administered the Three Couples Scale (Prepare/Enrich) inventory designed by Olson, Olson- Sigg & Larson (2008) to establish and segregate the couples with high Marital Discord. Thus a total of 92 couples were short listed and their adolescents totalling to 104 children were filtered for the study. These couples were administered the following Inventories.

(a) Three Couples Scale (Prepare/Enrich) inventory designed by Olson, Olson-Sigg & Larson (2008). The dimensions are as follows:

- i) Couple Satisfaction Scale (CSS), ii) Couple Communication Scale (CCS) and iii) Couple Conflict Resolution Scale. The results are plotted in the form of a Pie Chart (Chart1) as placed below.

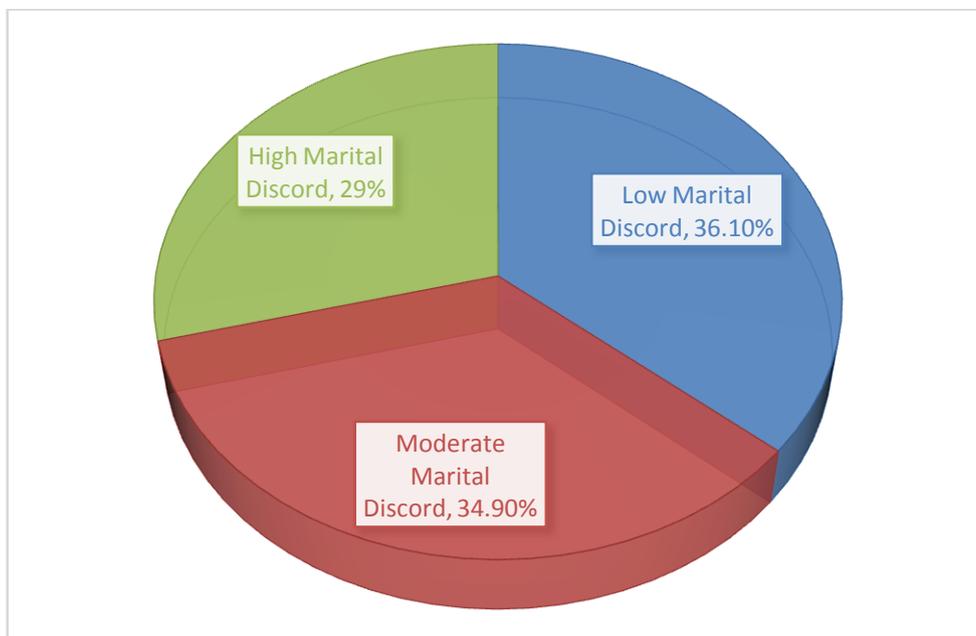


Chart 1

The pie chart reveals that out of a total of 318 couples (100%), 115 couples (36.1%) scored high on couple satisfaction scale. In the case of 111 couples (34.9%) the moderate scores

indicated that either the husband or wife was dissatisfied by their marital relationship. And a total of 92 couples (29%) scored low on all the three scales and thus indicating dissatisfaction in their marital relationship.

Objective1: To assess marital discord among the parents of adolescents.

	CCR%	CCS%	CSS%
N	184	184	184
Mean	25.88	25.83	25.30
Std. Deviation	5.352	5.119	5.813
Minimum	10	12	10
Maximum	40	42	54

Table No.1

According to Table No.1, when the questionnaire of Three Couple Scale by Olson and Olson Sigg was administered, it was observed that on the Scale of Couple Conflict Resolution, the couple Mean and Standard Deviation 25.88 and 5.352 respectively. They fall under the range (20-35), which is considered as low in their Conflict Resolution. The Couple have difficulty in discussing and resolving difference with their partners. On the dimension Couple Communication Scale (CCS) the Mean and Standard Deviation of the couple is 25.83 and 5.119. This interprets that their marital status has several concerns about the quality of their communication. Under the dimension of Couple Satisfaction Scale (CSS) the Mean and Standard Deviation of the couple is 25.30 and 5.813. The couples are somewhat dissatisfied and have some concerns about their relationship.

Objective 2: To identify the influence of marital discord on adolescent’s self -esteem

Dimension	Level	F	Percentage
Self esteem	High	81	77.90%
	Low	23	22.10%
Total		104	100%

Table No.2

Table No.2 explicitly reveals that a good majority of the sample 77.90% fall under high self-esteem followed by 22.10% are reported to have low level of self-esteem. Thus, approximately a quarter of the sample size exhibited low level of self-esteem. Hence these 23 adolescents (22.1%) of the sample are considered for the study.

Objective 3: To identify the influence of marital discord an adolescent’s anxiety.

Table No.3 showing the anxiety levels among adolescents.

From Table No.3 it can be observed that a majority (70.5%) of the sample have low level of anxiety, whereas, just (11.5%) show moderate level of anxiety and (18.3%) show high level of anxiety. Thus these 19 adolescents on the whole are considered for the study.

Dimension	Level	F	Percentage
ANXIETY LEVEL	High	19	18.30%
	Medium	12	11.50%
	Low	73	70.50%
Total		104	100%

Table No.3

Objective 4: To determine Coping Strategies of adolescents.

Dimension	Level	F	Percentage
Coping Strategies	High	82	78.20%
	Low	22	21.20%
Total		104	100%

Table No.4 (a)

The objective of the study is to determine coping strategies of adolescents with respect to their parental marital discord. Table No.4 (a) portrays the frequency and percentage of the sample considered for the study. It is revealed that out of 104 sample 82(78.2%) were reported high for coping strategies and 22(21.2%) reported low on coping strategies. Further study on the coping subscales on the 22 sample reveals through the Table No.4 (b) which portrays Mean and Standard Deviation of different experiences of sample with respect to various dimensions of coping strategies.

From Table No. 4 (b) it is observed that the sample Mean and Standard Deviation is high on the dimension Positive Distraction Coping with Mean 6.227 and Standard Deviation 1.688 and followed by the dimension Acceptance and Redefinition Coping with Mean 5.227 and Standard Deviation 1.411. Next higher mean was observed to be on the dimension of Problem Solving Coping with mean 4.409 and standard deviation 1.623 and followed by the dimension Denial/Blame with Mean 4.409 and Standard Deviation 1.368. Next dimension sub scale Negative distraction with Mean 3.545 and Standard Deviation 1.01 and on the dimension sub scale Religion and Faith the Mean is 3.727 and Standard Deviation 1.279 is observed to be low. The dimension Sub Scale Social Support is observed to be the lowest

with Mean 2.500 and Standard Deviation 0.9636. The overall coping is reported with a Mean of 29.86 and Standard deviation 2.55.

Dimension of Coping	N	Mean	SD
Problem Solving	22	4.409	1.623
Positive Distraction	22	6.227	1.688
Negative Distraction	22	3.545	1.010
Acceptance/Redefinition	22	5.227	1.411
Religion and Faith	22	3.727	1.279
Denial/Blame	22	4.409	1.368
Social Support	22	2.500	0.964
Total Coping	22	29.86	2.550

Table No. 4 (b)

Hypothesis 1: Adolescents whose parents have high marital discord will have low Self-Esteem.

Findings: The study showed that out of 104 adolescents of the highly marital conflict parents 77.9% showed high self-esteem and 22.1% showed low self-esteem hence the hypothesis is accepted. Further the study is supported by previous research conducted by Salma Nazir, Sidra Saeed, M.M.Sohail, Falak Sher, Zarqua Azhars, Muhammad Rizwan Safdars 2012 on Parental Conflict and its Effects on Youth Self-Esteem(A Study At University of Punjab). The sample size was of 200 young adults who were studied, the findings revealed that 56% of respondents feel negative impact of parental conflict on their self-esteem. The parental conflict has chronic effect on youth self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2: Adolescents whose parents have high marital discord will have high Anxiety.

Findings: This study showed that out of 104 adolescents of the 92 couples with high marital discord, 18.3% showed high anxiety, hence the hypothesis is accepted. Further on the sub scales Guiltprone and Tension where Mean score was high, which indicates the core cause of anxiety and followed by Self-control mean was high. This study How Parental Conflicts Hurts Kids| Family Studies' supported by the previous research, Mechanic & Hansell 1989, states that higher level of conflict amongst parents, increases depression and anxiety in adolescents.

Hypothesis 3: Adolescents whose parents have marital discord will have low Coping Strategies.

Findings: The present study revealed that of the 104 adolescents of the effected parents 21.2% have expressed low coping strategies. Hence the hypothesis is accepted. The scoring on the subscales reveal that the subjects expressed lowest mean on social support, due to parental marital conflict, the adolescent avoided social support followed by negative distraction and finally on religion and faith, the adolescents coping strategies means were very low. Previous studies which support this result were conducted by Katherine H. Shelton and Gordon T. Harold, Cardiff University, Wales, Marcie C. Goeke-Morey, Catholic University of America, and E. Mark Cummings, University of Notre Dame on Children’s Coping with Marital Conflict: The Role of Conflict Expression and Gender(2003) reveals that, the participants included 398 children (208 boys, 190 girls) between 12 and 13 years old were part of a larger, longitudinal study of children and families living in Wales. The findings of the study highlight instances of interparental conflict likely to elicit coping behaviours in children characterized by involvement in parents’ problems or a wish to escape a negative exchange.

Hypothesis 4: Marital discord has negative influence on adolescent’s Self-Esteem, Anxiety and Coping Strategies.

		Anxiety Pre	Self Esteem Pre	Coping Pre
ANXIETY PRE	Pearson Correlation	1	-.035	-.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.722	.266
	N	104	104	104
SELF ESTEEM PRE	Pearson Correlation	-.035	1	.245*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.722		.012
	N	104	104	104
COPING PRE	Pearson Correlation	-.110	.245*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.266	.012	
	N	104	104	104

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table No.5

Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient Matrix

From Table No.5, the Pre- test Correlation coefficient between Anxiety and Self-Esteem is -0.035 (significant at 1% level) and the p-value is 0.722, which is greater than 0.05. The

relation is not significant, and the relation is negative at 3.5%. The result indicates that Anxiety and Self-Esteem are negatively correlated. The more the incidence of Anxiety, the lower is Self-Esteem. The relation between Anxiety and coping is -0.110 and the p-value is 0.266, which is greater than 0.05. The relation is not significant, and the relation is negative at 1.1%. The result indicates that Anxiety and Coping are negatively correlated. The more the incidence of Anxiety, the lower is Coping. The Pre-test Correlation coefficient between Self-Esteem and Coping is 0.245 (significant at 1%) and the p-value is 0.012, which is greater than 0.05. The relation is not significant, and the relation is positive at 2.4%. The result indicates that Self-esteem and coping are positively correlated. The more the incidence of self-esteem, higher is the coping. From the correlation matrix it is evident that marital conflict has negative influence of the adolescents who are affected by their parental marital discord. Due to conflict their self-esteem is low, hence their anxiety level is high and both combine to impact negatively on their coping strategies.

Conclusion

Parental relationships with each other and with their children play an important role in the formation of self-esteem. If one has an opinion of own self, growing in with this kind of mind set which is based on self-humiliation subjected by parental conflict, leads to low self-esteem. It can adversely affect both the individual and society. As mentioned above, the research carried out in this area proves that people with low self-esteem, high anxiety and weak coping strategies are more likely to have risky behavior and delinquency. As the results and case studies indicate, parents who conflict with each other have children with low self-esteem and high anxiety. Parents and concerned adolescents should seek help from counseling centers and support groups so as to minimise the damage to holistic psychological growth of the adolescent. Through this research it was deduced that timely intervention has a positive effect on overall personality growth of the adolescent. They have improved upon their self-esteem, reduced their anxiety and enhanced their coping strategies. Parents too with a positive frame of mind had cooperated and had done a through introspection with the help of the counselors and made amendments to resolve their conflict for their welfare and wellbeing of the family.

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