



Crisis of Parental Conflict: Impact on Children and Families

Wpływ długotrwałego konfliktu rodzicielskiego na dzieci i rodzinę

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: This article explores the impact of parental conflict crises on children and families, focusing on the traumatic situations caused by recurrent disagreements. These crises generate unease, worry, and perplexity, compromising emotional regulation and social abilities. They can lead to behavioural problems and academic underachievement, as they compromise emotional regulation and social abilities. The article aims to understand the complexities of these situations and their potential consequences for children and families.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHOD: The study investigates the impact of parental conflict on children's emotional, psychological, and relational well-being. It employs a detailed assessment of reference material, self-reporting, and direct observation methodologies to understand the negative effects on children's performance.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: After discussing the impact of domestic conflicts on children's self-esteem, the presentation moved on to cognitive and emotional dysregulation, the relationship between resilience, risk, and crisis, the need to develop persistence and the influence of cultural values in the development of such perseverance, gender concerns, and early intervention.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Conflicting parents have a substantial impact on a child's subjective well-being. Prolonged stress can lead to sleep disorders, reduced immune systems, and chronic health problems. Prolonged disagreements can impact relationships, boundaries, and emotional control well into adulthood.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: Parental disagreements require interventions at various levels, including counseling, therapy, mediation services, and a holistic approach. Counseling and therapy help children process feelings and strengthen coping skills, while mediation guides parents through separation or divorce processes, prioritizing their children's best interests and maintaining stable family dynamics and good childhoods.

→ **KEYWORDS:** CRISIS, PARENTAL CONFLICT, CHILD, FAMILY, CHILDHOOD

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest zrozumienie wpływu konfliktu rodzicielskiego na dzieci i rodzinę. Konflikty rodziców to traumatyczne sytuacje spowodowane powtarzającymi się nieporozumieniami, które dotyczą dzieci i rodziny. Generują niepokój, zmartwienia i zaniepokojenie, zaburzając regulację emocjonalną i zdolności społeczne dzieci, potencjalnie prowadząc do ich problemów behawioralnych i słabych wyników w nauce.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Problem badawczy niniejszego opracowania stanowi zagadnienie wpływu konfliktu rodziców na dzieci i zrozumienie jego negatywnego oddziaływania na ich dobrostan emocjonalny, psychologiczny i relacyjny. Do zbadania wpływu konfliktu rodziców na dzieci wykorzystano szczegółowo materiał referencyjny, zastosowano również metodologię samoopisu i bezpośredniej obserwacji.

PROCES WYWODU: Po omówieniu wpływu konfliktów domowych na samoocenę dzieci zaprezentowano kwestie poznawczych i emocjonalnych dysregulacji, związku pomiędzy odpornością, ryzykiem i kryzysem, potrzeby rozwijania wytrwałości oraz wpływu wartości kulturowych na jej rozwój, zagadnienia związane z płcią oraz wczesną interwencją.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Konflikty rodzicielskie mają znaczący wpływ na subiektywny dobrostan dziecka. Długotrwały stres może prowadzić do zaburzeń snu, osłabienia układu odpornościowego i chronicznych problemów zdrowotnych. Długotrwałe nieporozumienia mogą mieć wpływ na relacje, umiejętność stawiania granic i kontrolę emocjonalną i mogą utrzymywać się również w dorosłym życiu dziecka.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Aby rozwiązać problem długotrwałych konfliktów rodziców, konieczne są interwencje na różnych poziomach. Poradnictwo i terapia zapewniają dzieciom bezpieczne środowisko, w którym mogą przepracowywać swoje uczucia i wzmacniać umiejętności radzenia sobie. Mediacje wspierają rodziców w procesie separacji lub rozwodu, stawiając na pierwszym miejscu dobro ich dzieci. Holistyczne podejście, uwzględniające zarówno argumenty, jak i ich skutki, ma kluczowe znaczenie dla utrzymania stabilnej dynamiki rodziny i dobrego dzieciństwa.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: KRYZYS, KONFLIKT RODZIELSKI, DZIECKO, RODZINA, DZIECIŃSTWO**

Introduction

The modern family structure is constantly evolving, presenting new challenges and complications. Parental conflict is a pervasive issue that can have devastating effects on both adults and children. The article explores the impact of parental conflict on children and families, emphasizing the need for open discussions and resolution. It highlights the various forms of conflict, such as verbal disputes, emotional isolation, financial stress, and communication failures, which can escalate into domestic violence, posing

significant threats to children's safety. Addressing these conflicts is crucial for the well-being of all family members.

Household conflict hurts children and families, resulting in traumatic occurrences such as assault, violence, and destruction of several aspects of family life. Children's physical, emotional, and social well-being, as well as their financial stability and security, can all suffer as a result of household conflict. Constant confrontation can result in physical injuries, emotional stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly in children who lack emotional development. It can also strain relationships, resulting in failures in communication and property destruction. Ongoing conflict can hurt financial stability, making it difficult for families to meet their fundamental necessities. Children thrive in secure homes, but conflict can erode this and have long-term psychological consequences. Conflict can also impair effective parenting, making it difficult for parents to provide emotional support. This disturbance undermines relationships, exposes children to increased stress levels, and has a detrimental influence on their self-esteem and mental health, resulting in a decline in their well-being (Doh Fia, 2020).

The case study of Nitin, a 10-year-old with a learning handicap, highlights the impact of inter-parental conflict on a child's well-being. Nitin's parents, who had a history of marital violence, were separated and in the process of being divorced. This caused him depression and withdrawal from social activities. His older brother had disagreements with his mother, and the family had minimal contact with her. Nitin's behavior, including rage, seclusion, and attempts to flee, was exacerbated by the financial burden of the divorce. School-based treatment for Nitin was limited due to lack of specialized training, resource limits, limited coordination with external agencies, low parental engagement, and time constraints. He frequently displayed suicidal thoughts and despair, anguish, and dejection, which remained undiagnosed. Inadequate money and staffing also hindered the provision of essential services, and collaboration with external authorities like counseling and law enforcement was also limited.

Parental conflict significantly impacts children's psychological well-being, with emotions from the couple's relationship spilling into their interactions. Understanding this conflict is crucial. Marital dissolution has become a major societal issue in India, affecting children's mental health, emotional, social, and academic performance. Children often reject and denigrate one parent after separation.

Parental alienation and triangulation are common issues in domestic disputes, especially when parents are divorced or separated. Parental alienation occurs when one parent intentionally or inadvertently damages the child's bond with the other parent, causing emotional pain and strained relationships. Triangulation involves a child becoming embroiled in a conflict, causing shame, worry, and uncertainty. To resolve these challenges, parents and carers should talk freely, keep disagreements away from the child, encourage the child's bond, and seek professional treatment.

According to theorists Grych and Fincham, in their cognitive-contextual framework (1990) emphasize that children's understanding and interpretation of arguments affect their well-being. As per Harold and Congers family-wide model (1997) the crisis of

parental conflict affects children not only through conflict exposure but also through how the conflict is internalized and understood by the child. According to Davies and Cummings (1994), children seek safety and security in their home environment, but apathetic behavior by parents, such as lack of restraint and unsolved issues, jeopardizes their aim. According to the spillover and compensating hypotheses, negative interactions between parents, including their mood, affect, and behaviors, have a direct impact on child outcomes (Engfer, 1988; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000).

Although marital conflict is associated with problematic child functioning (Cummings & Davies, 1994) not all children from high-conflict homes develop issues. Conflicting encounters with adults disturb children, hence they learn coping techniques to deal with them. Children's proclivity to act aggressively in reaction to parental arguments is explained by social interactional (Patterson, 1982) and modeling (Bandura, 1977) models. Negative reinforcement increases the likelihood of angry behavior in repressive homes, leading to a more typical response in other circumstances. According to modeling, when a child experiences conflictual behavior, it may lessen their inhibition to express negative behavior.

Methodology

The paper uses an in-situ research method, collecting data in a school in New Delhi's urban upper middleclass area. The researcher, a full-time practicing counselor, worked with children in their natural and actual event setting to resolve their challenges. The article is a systematic summation of learnings from the researcher's professional practice, focusing on the crisis of children from homes with parental conflict and its impact. The case reference in the article is a real case with a fictitious name, bringing forth the learnings from over 240 students, approximately 30 per year for over 8 years. The paper focuses on applying findings from case studies to real-world situations and the practical implications of the research work at the ground level.

This methodology is unique in that practice comes before theory development, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical experience. The information gathered is based on everyday interactions in classrooms and homes. Findings address a wide range of variables concerning the counselee, including emotional and psychological state, personal history, life circumstances, parental conflict, parental alienation and triangulation, and delivered interventions.

This practitioner research focused on examining practitioner's insights. A thorough literature review was conducted to identify gaps and limitations, and practitioners' experience provided valuable insights. Data was collected through interactions with the child, home environment influencers, classroom teachers, principals, consulting psychiatrists, and psychotherapists. The goal was to improve students' emotional health, social adjustment, and learning and achievement through qualitative (interviews, case studies) and quantitative (observations) methods. The collected data directly addressed the research question.

Impact and Effect on Self-Esteem of the Child

Nitin begins to mistrust the strength of his emotional connection with his parents due to unresolved parent-child conflict. To minimize emotional challenges due to witnessing the conflict, he frequently acted out to stop the fight or was withdrawn from his feelings. As a result, the mother pressured Nitin to provide her comfort to compensate for the loss of an unfulfilling connection with her husband.

The impact of violence and trauma on a child's development is highlighted in Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory of human development, which emphasizes parental engagement and cultural values. The eco-bio developmental viewpoint considers family surroundings, cultural ideas, and features as discussed by Huang, Vikse, Lu, and Yi (2015). Early, mental trauma can hinder development, and chronic stress has been related to undesirable outcomes. Due to contact stresses, developing one's learning curve to self-regulate can be delayed, and eventually, the children begin to mimic their caregiver's emotions leading to their impaired progress).

Children's well-being is dependent on positive group functioning and successful peer behavior (Dou et al., 2019; Lavy, 2020; Shek & Chai, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). Antipathy-driven parental arguments, on the other hand, can have an adverse effect on children's home life and standard of life (Brock & Kochanska, 2016; Brummert Lennings & Bussey, 2017; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017; Troxel and Matthews, 2004; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). These arguments can have an impact on one's mental health, behavior, and social interactions. Inter-parental conflict undermines children's confidence and security inside the home, hence eroding the child-parent bond. This can have an impact on parental practices, producing additional obstacles for children and harming their development. Addressing these challenges is critical to maintaining a healthy family environment and establishing a good child-parent relationship.

Marital squabbles can have immediate, short-term, and long-term consequences for children in the household. The severity and duration of the disagreement, as well as how it is handled, can all have consequences. Emotional anguish, bodily/physical problems, and sleep disruptions are some of the short-term impacts. Emotional turbulence, cognitive impact, attachment and trust concerns, and feelings of guilt are all immediate impacts. Parental discord can cause children to get distracted from their duties, impairing their concentration, memory, developmental risks, and academic achievement. High tension and bickering between parents can influence a child's sense of security, prompting some to seek refuge with friends or siblings.

Parental disagreement can have long-term consequences for children, resulting in emotional and psychological concerns such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and mood disorders. Children may experience difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships, misconduct, and substance abuse. Parental emotional distress can hinder effective parenting strategies and disrupt children's mental health. High conflict exposure can alter children's behaviors as well as family environments, potentially resulting in unsatisfactory academic performance. Responses to crisis vary based on age. The preschool and

kindergarten children experience trauma. Elementary school-aged students are more irritable, aggressive, quiet, or clingy, and middle and high school children experience disturbances in sleep, eating, and concentration.

Externalizing issues, such as violence and disobedience, have an impact on the children's external surroundings, whereas internalizing issues, such as depression and anxiety, have an impact on their emotional and psychological well-being. Low self-esteem can contribute to mental health concerns, whereas high self-esteem is essential for constructive development. Both of these factors have a substantial impact on a child's general well-being and children's cognitive and emotional processes.

Emotional and Behavior System Dysregulation

Frequent and violent conflicts between his parents proved to be destructive to Nitin's immature growing persona, impacting his self-formation and leaving him with attachment issues and feelings of insecurity. He exhibited temper tantrums and fought with his siblings and schoolmates, becoming more violent after witnessing conflict and domestic abuse.

The impact of exposure varies from child to child, with some excelling academically and perceiving school as an area of their lives where they can control variables of the day or have an outlet. For others, it can lead to being overprotective and exhibiting negative behaviors, causing difficulties in relationships and bullying (Dutton, 2000). This was evident in Nitin's school adjustment and school alertness. Depression, anxiety, changes in eating patterns, bathroom regressions, and posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms are all common markers of abuse. Prolonged exposure to violence and greater victimization among mothers often result in undesirable outcomes such as aggression, substance misuse, and delinquency. Inter-parental conflict vulnerability may be a better predictor of child misbehavior than physical abuse. Weak attachment bonds influence children's interactions from infancy forward, contributing to undesirable relationships and friendships in school.

Domestic conflicts can have a substantial impact on children's emotional well-being, with reactions ranging according to personality, temperament, and genetic predispositions. Conflict at home can improve children's conflict resolution abilities, emotional resilience, empathy, family bonds, emotional intelligence, and appreciation for tranquil situations. These advantages, however, may not be ubiquitous and may not apply to all children in all circumstances. Some children have resilience features, such as adaptability, optimism, problem-solving abilities, and strong social support networks, which aid in their ability to deal with adversity. Access to caring adults and a safe environment outside of conflict-torn homes also aids youngsters in dealing with stress and trauma. Age and developmental stages also influence how children react to family arguments, with younger children not completely comprehending the situation and older children and teenagers better absorbing and comprehending their experiences.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to deal with and manage stressors and challenging life experiences, such as loss, domestic violence, parental discord, or displacement due to divorce, separation, or natural disasters. It is a dynamic process that involves confronting and navigating difficulties and at the same time fostering personal growth and development. Studies have demonstrated that children with higher resilience are more likely to thrive in crises, adjusting to challenges and using them as growth opportunities (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020).

Nitin was dependent and relied on his parents for protection and to regulate his behaviors and reactions. The risk of family degradation impeded his development. He needed consistent and continuous caregiving in a non-threatening environment for his growth, as the carer-child bond is conventionally based on love, support, and nurturance (Howell et al., 2016). Domestic upheaval and crisis disrupted this bond and damaged his attachment and emotional security.

Understanding the crisis-resilience connection is crucial for knowing how children adapt and develop coping strategies. Faith, love, mutual support, and a positive outlook all promote resilience, which has its roots in the cultural context. In Indian culture, for example, the emphasis on family relationships, communal solidarity, spiritual practices, and concepts such as acceptance and detachment all play important roles in promoting resilience. During adversity, strong familial and social networks provide emotional and practical assistance. Spirituality and religion are important in Indian culture, with beliefs based on concepts such as karma, destiny, and divine assistance. The relationship between culture and resilience, on the other hand, is complex and varies depending on individual experiences, circumstances, and interpretations of cultural norms and beliefs.

Nitin's parents had been married for more than 22 years. However, the sacred nature of marriage in Indian culture made their divorce acrimonious. His mother's and siblings' social conditioning, as well as his own, limited his mother's ability to speak out about victimization and conflict. She was expected, in keeping with Indian customs, to merge her sense of self with that of Nitin's father. All this contributed to Nitin's mental health. When triggers like inter-parental quarrels, disregard for carers' mental health, and disruption of family functioning are added, cultural impact can be rendered ineffective, potentially resulting in adverse child adjustment outcomes (Prime et al., 2020).

Gender and Adjustment

Gender differences in marital strife are unclear, but there are reports of gender variations in vulnerability and sensitivity to interparental conflict (Hetherington et al., 1985; Zaslow, 1989). Girls are more sensitive to interpersonal discomfort and are more likely to internalize problems in adolescence. Maladaptive interparental conflict affects girls' sense of security with their parents, leading to greater chances of internalizing

difficulties. Parental handling of marital problems significantly impacts children's emotional adjustment and security (Cummings et al., 2006). Frequent disagreements have a greater negative impact on children's behavior than separation and divorce. Children whose parents remain married despite quarrels have the biggest influence on their behavior. Post-marital conflict, negative emotional tone is linked to more internalizing difficulties in both genders. The aftermath of conflict may have persistent consequences on the family structure, contributing to both gender's internalizing difficulties. (Morrison & Coiro, 1999).

Inter-parental conflict is a significant issue that affects children's well-being and family dynamics. It involves the frequency and expression of disputes between parents, and understanding and controlling these aspects is crucial for maintaining good family dynamics. Couples must practice effective communication and conflict-resolution skills to foster a peaceful and supportive environment. Children react differently to verbal and physical hostility, with physical violence being more stressful. Marital conflict is disturbing when it contains resentment or aggression, and can cause sadness, anxiety, and socio-emotional difficulties in children (Buehler et al., 1998). Both genders are highly vulnerable to conflicted families, but the risk is increased by the verbally or physically violent behaviors of the opposite sex's parent. Boys are more vulnerable due to their mother's verbal aggressiveness and physical violence, while girls are more vulnerable due to their father's violent and aggressive behavior. Early exposure to parental conflicts has a greater impact on boys' externalizing behaviors and girls' total behavioral expression.

Early Intervention with Sustainable Practices

The most upsetting trigger for Nitin was when his parents fought about him and his siblings or anything related to them. This increased Nitin's tendency to blame himself for issues in his parents' relationship. His older siblings were able to rationalize some of these uncomfortable emotions and establish their coping methods because they were older. Misbehavior and discipline approaches, academic work, and obligation to carry out chores, rules for curfew, screen time, time spent with friends and participation of children in activities like sports and music lessons were some of the regular topics of the altercation. Nitin frequently sought to avoid conflict by remaining silent, avoiding eye contact, and remaining under the radar. He would sometimes disrupt parent-child disagreements by acting out, misbehaving, interrupting, yelling, or physically interfering. Other days when he felt confident, he would try to mediate. Most of the time, Nitin would try to run away, leave, hide, or cover both of his ears and eyes to avoid being overwhelmed by his parents' dispute, preventing him from seeing or hearing it. He had also sought to flee his home to escape being a witness to the violence and abuse.

Early intervention and sustainable practices are crucial for parents' and children's well-being, as excessive conflict can harm emotional, social, and cognitive development. Strategies include parenting programs, mediation, counseling, co-parenting education,

child advocacy services, therapy, community support groups, school involvement, and long-term assistance to mitigate the negative effects of parental conflict on children.

The article highlights the importance of resilience-based early treatments for children, focusing on changing attitudes towards violence and family behavior and developing interpersonal problem-solving abilities. These therapies aim to promote rehabilitation after family violence, considering each child's developmental level and individual needs. Early identification and services reduce traumatic exposure and emphasize resilience over negative responses.

Children's opinions and thought processes on well-being and the home environment can differ significantly from those of major adults in their lives, such as parents and teachers. Because these adults' reports may differ from children's, it is critical to examine children's self-reports when investigating the impact of inter-parental conflict on their mental and social well-being (Seiffge-Krenke & Kollmar, 1998; White-Koning et al., 2007).

Understanding the connection between a child's crisis, the danger involved, and their need for resilience is crucial for handling challenging situations. Risk refers to potential harm, while resilience focuses on a system's ability to absorb shocks, adapt, and recover from disruptions. Addressing threats through planning, preparation, and adaptive measures is essential for individual well-being, family stability, and community resilience. By minimizing vulnerabilities and enhancing tolerance and recovery, resilience improves long-term sustainability. Sustainable practices can address both short-term and long-term hazards.

Therapy is a constructive approach that promotes emotional expression and exploration of difficult feelings in a controlled environment, guided by professionals. Art Therapy, a form of therapy, can teach coping skills by providing an expressive outlet and tangible means to externalize and recognize feelings. Children can use art projection to externalize their emotions and deal with their feelings, while transitional objects like old toys can help navigate their feelings and promote assertiveness and decision-making. This approach helps children navigate their struggles and repair their emotions. It can also bring about assertiveness and decision-making.

Schools play a crucial role in recognizing and referring children who have experienced domestic violence, ensuring their safety and well-being while adhering to legal and ethical constraints. Teachers play a vital role in their student's mental and emotional well-being by observing behavioral changes and creating opportunities for connection. Trust and connection are essential for effective teaching and learning. Teachers can help students overcome academic problems and promote inclusivity by providing different communication channels and addressing individual learning preferences. They should avoid pressuring children for information, plan regular check-ins, listen more, and allow them to express their thoughts. To minimize surprises, teachers should provide different performance formats and help students remain calm under pressure.

Social support can reduce stress, build trust, and improve understanding of problems. Interventions should focus on improving parenting skills and sensitivity, while counseling and therapy can reduce negative impacts on thinking, self-esteem, and social abilities.

Mediation services can help parents navigate separation or divorce proceedings while considering their children's best interests. Nonviolent conflict resolution techniques, rational emotive behavior therapy, and role-playing can improve attitude and conflict resolution skills in children exposed to family violence. A safe environment fosters positive attitudes and emotional support, helping children make better choices.

Conclusion

Parental conflict is a growing issue that can cause emotional distress, behavioral issues, and long-term psychological scarring in children. It can lead to marital breakdown and financial strain. To mitigate its negative effects, open communication, stress management, and a child-centered approach are crucial. Children are emotionally sensitive to their parent's emotions, which can cause distress and negatively impact their mental and emotional well-being. Prolonged stress can result in sleep disturbances, weakened immune systems, and chronic health issues. Destructive conflict methods and unresolved emotional tension harm children's emotional security. Constructive tactics, cooperative problem-solving, and well-resolved disputes contribute to adaptive reactions and coping abilities. Understanding the impact of family violence on children and identifying prevention and intervention programs is essential for minimizing its harmful effects.

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