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Adolescent Adjustment: The Hazards of Conflict Avoidance and the Benefits of Conflict Resolution

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ABSTRACT

Current literature provides strong support for the relationship between perceived family conflict (i.e., disagreements, expressed anger, and/or aggression) and adolescent maladjustment (i.e., internalizing, externalizing, and/or physiological symptoms). Moreover, research indicates that successful conflict resolution (i.e., " behaviors that regulate, reduce, or terminate conflicts," Davies & Cummings, 1994) decreases the adverse impact family conflict has on children. Many researchers have treated conflict resolution as a dichotomous variable (e.g., resolved or unresolved), but there may be different approaches to conflict resolution. Only one dimensional measure of conflict resolution has been developed in the literature, and it has only been used in a sample of young adults. Recent research has also underscored the importance of assessing conflict avoidance (i.e., indirect efforts to alter stressful situations). Unfortunately, there are limited studies on conflict avoidance and its impact on psychological adjustment, none of which use an adolescent sample. The primary purpose of the current study was to determine whether the relationship between conflict resolution, conflict avoidance, and adjustment would extend to adolescents using a dimensional measure of conflict resolution. Second, the current study aimed to develop and pilot a dimensional measure of conflict avoidance. One hundred two adolescents between the ages of 14 and 19 were recruited from four parochial high schools in a large Midwestern city. The participants completed self-report measures regarding perceived family conflict, conflict resolution, avoidant behaviors, and psychological adjustment. Results paralleled the findings of previous research in a young adult sample regarding the impact of conflict resolution on adjustment. In addition, after considering perceived family conflict, the presence of conflict avoidance added significantly to the prediction of adolescents' psychological symptoms. These findings suggest that assessing for conflict avoidance in addition to family conflict and conflict resolution may have important implications for the screening and assessment of adolescent psychological health.

KEYWORDS

Family Conflict; Conflict Resolution; Avoidance; Adolescent Adjustment; Assessment

Cite this paper

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