

Promoting psychological capital interventions towards alleviating adjustment problems in adolescents perceiving inter-parental conflict

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Abstract: Adolescents' mental health and well-being are a major concern for their future as well as for society. The present study is a crux of the findings of several researches that have been conducted and published in renowned journals, books, and magazines across the world. Based on the analysis of available literature, the present study tries to analyze the maladjustments that occur due to the perceived inter-parental conflict among adolescents. It was found that the most effective way to deal with adolescents is through an authoritative parenting style, characterized by a high level of parental affection and behavioral control. The importance of adolescents' spontaneous disclosure to their parents in reducing maladjustment issues has also been highlighted. Further, the study proposes psychological capital interventions can influence adolescents' perceptions of inter-parental conflict and subsequent maladjustments. The present study has implications in educational settings, where psychological capital can be used as an intervention toward lowering maladjustment among adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescent adjustment, inter-parental conflict, psychological capital, interventions, well-being

The period of adolescence is crucial for development and growth because it involves self-exploration, identity formation, decision-making, and autonomy. At this point, adolescents begin to learn how to adapt to their surroundings. Research supports that adjustment during adolescence plays a vital role in their health and well-being (De La Barrera et al., 2019; Ordóñez et al., 2015; Pettit & Laird, 2002). An adjustment is a change in a person's behavior or thinking. It is a process by which individuals maintain a balance between their needs and the surroundings. Adolescents who are well-adjusted grow up to be fully functioning adults in contrast to adolescents who struggle with maladjustment.

For any society to produce well-adjusted adults, adolescent mental health is crucial. Adolescents need to be taught how to develop adequate emotional adjustment and to increase their willingness to learn to adapt to their surroundings. Notably, adolescents struggle with a variety of maladjustment issues, including emotional and behavioral problems, which can sometimes be easily noticed and other times go unnoticed until they have negative consequences. According to Birch and Ladd (1996), historically, school adjustment has been characterized in terms of

children's academic growth or achievement. However, later research found that additional factors that affect school adjustment include children's attitudes toward school, anxieties, loneliness, social support, and academic motivation (e.g., engagement, avoidance, and absences) (Curtona, 2007; Dwyer & Cummings, 2001). These factors also contribute to maladjustment issues in adolescents' other spheres of functioning, such as social adjustment or emotional and behavioral adjustment.

Further, adolescents may also struggle with adjustment for a number of reasons outside of the classroom, such as problems with their families, neighborhoods, and peers. The dysfunction of each of these subsystems will worsen adolescents' mental health and increase their maladaptive behaviors. This paper, therefore, particularly tries to focus on the adolescents' adjustment issues as a consequence of perceiving inter-parental conflict (IPC). Further, it assesses whether Psychological Capital (PsyCap) can intervene on such adjustment problems among adolescents.

Perceived Inter-parental Conflict and Adjustment Problems

Relations between inter-parental conflict and children's

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psychological adjustment are well established (e.g., Emery, 1982; Grych & Fincham, 1990). The inter-parental conflict was found to be associated with children's internalizing symptoms (Dadds et al., 1999; Harold et al., 1997); externalizing problems (Grych et al., 2000; Harold et al., 1997); and academic achievement (Forehand & Wierson, 1993).

Further, it was found that an increase in adjustment problems was caused by parental rejection or lack of acceptance, which came about as a result of an inter-parental conflict (Sturge-Apple et al., 2006). It was found that parental resources are depleted by emotional distress and distractions caused by inter-parental conflict, which decreases their propensity to care for their adolescent's mental health. O'Donnell et al. (2010) found that an increase in parent rejection, over the course of a year, mediated the relationship between an increase in inter-parental conflict and an increase in depressive symptoms. Moreover, studies speculated that differences in child gender may be related to adjustment issues when evaluating parent-child rejection. In contrast to father-child rejection, which was found to be associated with internalizing adjustment problems like withdrawal behavior and anxious-depressive symptoms, mother-child rejection was found to be associated with externalizing adjustment problems like hostility and aggression (Shelton & Harold, 2008). Grych and colleagues (2004) indicated that a close parent-child relationship has a "main effect" rather than a buffering or moderating effect on adolescent adjustment. Their study revealed that a positive parent-child relationship

could help manage adjustment issues.

Method

To understand the contribution of psychological capital interventions towards alleviating adjustment problems in adolescents perceiving inter-parental conflict, the present study analyzed the findings of several researches that have been conducted and published in renowned journals, books, and magazines as well as an unpublished doctoral thesis. The review also used online databases like JSTOR, Directory of Open Access journals (DOAJ), Scopus, and Google Scholar.

Inclusion criteria

- Researches related to the inter-parental conflict that focused on adolescents' maladjustment, parenting styles, and psychological capital components (HERO): hope, efficacy, Resilience, Optimism, and Psychological Capital interventions.
- Published in a peer-reviewed journal, books, any article, or unpublished research work/dissertation in the English Language.

Exclusion criteria:

- Studies that largely addressed mental health with no focus on adolescents perceiving inter-parental conflict and psychological capital interventions were excluded.

Table 1

Empirical studies indicating the association between inter-parental conflict and adjustment issues

Author/s and year of publication	Methodology	Findings/ Results
Emery (1982)	Data collected from 132 elementary school students, teachers and their mothers.	Only indirect evidence that marital conflict is associated with children's adjustment.
Hetherington, Cox, & Cox (1982)	Six years follow up longitudinal	It was found that only the degree of conflict to which children were exposed was related to adjustment problems in children. It was termed as "Encapsulated conflict" or conflict of which children were not aware.

Rutter et al. (1975)	Data was collected from children with three psychiatric disorders: emotional disorders, conduct disorders and specific reading retardation.	Child problems were found to be more highly associated with unhappy marriages that were quarrelsome, tense, and hostile than unhappy marriages characterized by apathy and indifference.
Cummings et al. (1981)	Eleven boys and 13 girls from intact, white, middle-class families were studied for a 9-month period in a cross-sequential design.	Children exhibit more distress when observing naturally occurring anger between their parents that involves physical aggression.
Harold, Aitken & Shelton (2007)	It was a longitudinal study, analyzed via. Structural Equation Modeling method.	Inter-parental conflict was associated with academic outcomes

Note: Table 1 demonstrates the adverse effects of inter-parental conflict on children adjustment levels. These studies depicted that inter-parental conflict not always have direct effect. Most often, as indicated in the research studies, maladjustment arises due to hidden effects of inter-parental conflict.

Table 2

Researches showing association between trust beliefs and maladjustment

Author/s and year of publication	Methodology	Findings/ Results
Rotenberg et al. (2010)	Longitudinal study (data was collected early childhood, age 5 yrs to young adulthood, 21 yrs). Structural Equation Modeling was carried out for data analysis.	Low disclosure, withdrawal affect, and a lack of social connectedness with others are found to be signs of distrust cognition, which promotes a lack of social integration.
Malti et al. (2016)	Longitudinal study conducted on ethnically- diverse sample of children in Switzerland. Latent Growth Modeling was used for data analysis.	It was found that children who had low trustworthiness and low trust beliefs progressed toward becoming more aggressive.
Rotenberg, Boulton, & Fox (2005)	434 school students of age 5-6 years were administered in United Kingdom across an 8-month period. Regression Analysis was carried out for data analysis.	Children's internalized maladjustment was found to be more pronounced at both of the extremes of peer trust beliefs, i.e., very low and very high.
Rotenberg et al. (2014)	Data was collected from 149, 8-11 years children from UK. Latent growth Curve Modeling was used for data analysis.	It was found that compared to girls with a middle range of trust beliefs, those with very low and very high levels of trust demonstrated higher indirect aggression, lower peer group interaction, and distress.

Note. Table 2 demonstrates the association of trust beliefs with maladjustments. These studies suggest that the relationship between perceived inter-parental conflict and adolescent maladjustment may be moderated by trust beliefs.

Table 3

Researches showing association between adolescents' spontaneous disclosure and adjustment

Author/s and year of publication	Methodology	Findings/ Results
Keijsers et al. (2009)	Four wave study among 309 Dutch adolescents and their parents. Latent Growth Curve Analysis was used.	It was found that as adolescents' disclosure levels rose over time, delinquency among them was more likely to decline.
Cheung & Pomerantz (2011)	825 American and Chinese children (mean age= 12.74 yrs). Structural Equation Modeling was used.	It was found that the degree to which parents are involved in their children's education, particularly when it comes to autonomy support (vs. control), has been found to have little impact on how well their children adjust academically in terms of investment, engagement, and achievement.

Note. Table 3 demonstrated the association between adolescents' spontaneous disclosure and adjustment. Studies have shown the importance of adolescents' spontaneous disclosure to their parents in reducing maladjustment issues.

Table 4

Researches showing association between parenting styles and maladjustments

Author/s and year of publication	Methodology	Findings/ Results
Barber & Buehler (1996)	Data was collected from 471 Tennessee adolescents. Regression was carried out for data Analysis.	Parents' Psychological control has been found to be particularly associated with internalizing adjustment problems.
Maccoby & Martin (1983)	Clinical sample was collected from 113 mothers and adolescent dyads.	Adolescents, whose parents showed high level of parental affection and behavioral control, were found to be well adjusted.
Galambos et al. (2003)	Longitudinal study was carried out for 32 years (N= 109 families) Hierarchical Linear Modeling method was used for data analysis.	It was found that those adolescents whose parents uses high psychological control as well as behavioral control are more prone to substance abuse, antisocial behaviors and misconduct at school.
Pettit & Laird (2002)	An assessment of potential antecedents of parental psychological control was done.	It was found that parental involvement and affection decreased problem behavior in children and adolescents.

Note. Table 4 demonstrated the association between parenting styles and maladjustments.

Studies indicated that the most effective way to deal with adolescents is through an authoritative parenting style that is characterized by a high level of parental affection and behavioral control.

The above review suggests that there has been a decline in the level of adjustment among adolescents. Several studies have documented that inter-parental conflict has an adverse effect on adolescent emotional and behavioral maladjustment problems (Davies & Windle, 2001; Cummings & Davies, 2002). It depends upon how the child perceives the conflict between their parents (Grych et al., 2000; Jouriles et al., 2000). Studies also revealed that behavioral and emotional maladjustment problems arise due to spillover effects of inter-parental conflict e.g. maladjustment issues like depression, a feeling of helplessness, feeling threatened, and self-blaming tendencies grew worse as inter-parental conflict increased (Gerard et al., 2005; Grych et al., 2000; 2004; DuRant et al., 1995; Formoso et al., 2000). In this context, the present study proposes that PsyCap constructs can significantly contribute to alleviating adjustment problems in adolescents perceiving inter-parental conflict.

Psychological Capital Constructs (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism)

The Hope Resource in PsyCap

According to Snyder (1994, p. 2), hope is an "empowering way of thinking." Snyder's hope theory was based on the premise that people are typically goal-oriented, meaning they act in ways that indicate they are attempting to accomplish something. Inculcating high hopes through effective psychological capital interventions would be helpful for children witnessing inter-parental conflict. The research by Buehler, Franck, and Cook (2009) revealed that adolescent internalizing adjustment issues completely mediated the association between triangulation in marital conflict and peer rejection. Internalizing behavioral adjustment problems were found to be linked with peer rejection (Hay et al., 2004), whereas externalizing behavioral adjustment problems were found to be linked with peer rejection and impaired friendships (Bagwell & Coie, 2003). This indicates that adolescents experience difficulties with social adjustment. Therefore, incorporating psychological capital

interventions can contribute to modifying their adjustment patterns. Multiple clinical studies have demonstrated hope as being developable using a goals-based, contingency planning framework (Snyder, 2000).

Further, studies have shown that hope has a beneficial effect on outcomes in education, health, psychological adjustment, and even higher work performance outcomes (e.g., Luthans et al., 2007; Peterson & Luthans, 2003).

The Efficacy Resource of PsyCap

Researches show that self-efficacy significantly affects performance outcomes (Sadri & Robertson, 1993; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Efficacy has been defined as "the individual's conviction or confidence about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources or courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context" (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p. 66).

Self-efficacy may be impacted by psychological, physiological, or emotional arousal and/or wellness. Additionally, few researchers have started to focus on PsyCap's mediating role in adolescents' individual development and the family environment (i.e., the parent-child relationship). For instance, adolescents who believe that they have good parental relationships are more likely to report high levels of PsyCap, which will help them achieve good social and academic outcomes such as prosocial behavior and academic performance (Carmona-Halty et al., 2020).

The Resilience Resource of PsyCap

Resilience "refers to a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk" (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75), which enables people to recover quickly and successfully from negative events. Richardson (2002) argues that those higher in resilience bounce back psychologically (including emotion and cognition) to levels at, or even beyond, previous levels of homeostasis or equilibrium.

The resilience component in psychological capital intervention would be helpful for children perceiving inter-parental conflict as research supports that

adolescents' emotional reactivity to their parents' arguments and triangulation leads to a variety of externalizing and internalizing emotional and behavioral adjustment issues (Buehler & Welsh, 2009). For alleviating such chronic and prolonged maladjustment issues, developing and enhancing resilience is very crucial for the betterment of adolescents' health and well-being. Further, according to a large body of research in clinical and positive psychology (Bonanno, 2005; Garmenzy, 1974), as well as human resource development (Luthans et al., 2006), it was found that resilience can be developed through training interventions.

The Optimism Resource in PsyCap

Optimists 'differ in how they approach problems and challenges and differ in the manner and success with which they cope with adversity', according to Carver and Scheier (2002, p. 231). Pessimists, on the other hand, 'expect bad things to happen to them'. According to Seligman (1998), optimists attribute internal, stable, and global causal explanations for positive events and external, unstable, and specific explanations for negative events.

Researchers have identified a number of characteristics in adolescents perceiving inter-parental conflict that influence both internalizing and externalizing behavioral adjustment problems. For instance, Kovacs and Devlin (1998) focus on disinhibited behaviors and other under-socialization expressions, whereas other researchers place more emphasis on negative emotions that are directed against others and manifest as hostility, aggression, and frustration (Roeser et al., 1998). Moreover, behavioral adjustment issues are externalized when self-regulation abilities are underdeveloped, resulting in under-controlled behavior (Cole et al., 1996). On the other hand, internalizing behavioral adjustment issues was associated with withdrawal, fearfulness, inhibition, and anxiety (Roeser et al., 1998). Studies have also demonstrated that internalizing adjustment behavior issues are caused by excessively rigid self-control (Block & Block, 1980; Cole et al., 1996). According to Roeser et al. (1998), negative emotions cause problems with internalizing adjustment when they are directed at oneself, and externalizing adjustment when they are

projected onto others. In general, studies have shown that both of these behavioral changes cause issues in a variety of spheres of life; including school, peer relationships, and mental health (Kitzrow, 2003). The effect of these maladjustments on adolescents' health and well-being worsens because they lack an optimistic outlook and develop self-blaming tendencies.

The optimistic component of the psychological capital intervention helps overcome such internalizing and externalizing maladjustment problems. Adolescents can be taught to develop an optimistic attitude. Seligman (1998) proposed that optimism can be learned, which he termed "learned optimism".

Studies have suggested that the key to the application of psychological capital interventions is that it has state-like properties and are open to development through relevant training programs (Luthans et al., 2007). PsyCap resources of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism are malleable and thus open to change and development.

Suggestions of the Present Study

This study showed that the perception of inter-parental conflict has negative effects on adolescents' well-being. Furthermore, studies have shown that parental distress affects their relationship with their children in one way or another. As a result, it is proposed, that strengthening parent-child relationships can mitigate the detrimental effects of the inter-parental conflict that result in maladjustment issues. In order to enhance the mental health and adjustment of adolescents, the constructs of positive psychology can be significantly used. Psychological capital (PsyCap) can lead to successful outcomes both at individual and organizational levels. It was found through a review of the literature that psychological capital has primarily been used in organizational settings and has had a positive impact on raising job-related affective well-being (for example, Kaplan et al., 2014). Furthermore, Luthans et al. (2007) noted that psychological capital (PsyCap) emphasizes a person's "best self." In the developmental sense, "who you are becoming" is discussed rather than just "who you are" (i.e., human capital) (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 20).

PsyCap interventions need to be implemented in educational settings to improve adolescent well-being and academic performance. Luthans et al. (2010) found that PsyCap interventions for students produced encouraging findings. The present study suggests that developing more PsyCap interventions can enhance mental health as well as adjustment levels of adolescents.

Although the effects of the individual components have been thoroughly researched, the integration of various PsyCap components may hold special value. PsyCap's overall impact may be greater than the sum of its parts (Hobfoll, 2011). Therefore, the present study recommends that interventions should be developed using all of PsyCap's components for adolescents' well-being.

Research studies showed that PsyCap components have a favorable effect on adolescents' adjustment. For instance, a significant relationship has been found between hope and school adjustment (Cedeno et al., 2010), and between optimism and college adjustment (Pritchard et al., 2007). Therefore, it is suggested that PsyCap interventions can contribute to improving parent-child relationships.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that PsyCap components can enhance cognitive abilities. For instance, Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) broaden-and-build theory of positivity showed that people's combined psychological resources can be strengthened in addition to their combined intellectual, physical, and social resources when they are in positive emotional states. Additionally, PsyCap can cause positive emotions while also having a negative impact on emotional labor (Avey et al., 2011). Therefore, it is suggested that the PsyCap intervention might help influence adolescents' perceptions of their parents' conflict and facilitate better adjustments.

Implications

Programs that encourage particular attitudes, behaviors, and interests can have significant and enduring effects on psychological health. For example, Marques, Lopez, and Pais-Ribeiro (2011) planned a Hope-based intervention on middle-school students to enhance hope, self-worth, life satisfaction, academic

achievements, and mental health. Further the intervention program of Noble and McGrath (2008) on resilience called 'Bounce Back' is considered significant towards improving resiliency among adolescents. Some researchers have also designed interventions in the Indian context such as Vranda (2015), who designed school promotive mental health programs to reduce risks and enhance the psychosocial competencies and resiliency of adolescents in schools. Buragohain and Mandal (2015) also found that positive emotions like resilience, self-efficacy, hope, satisfaction, forgiveness, savor, etc., could be taught and learned at school levels. Our review therefore suggests that self-guided, positive psychology interventions hold the potential for enhancing an individual's well-being.

Research studies also indicate that high-quality relationships with parents might promote higher levels of PsyCap (Carmona-Halty et al., 2020) which in turn might influence their perception of their parents' conflicts. As described above, PsyCap can be learned and developed. Therefore, PsyCap interventions designed to enhance parent-child relationships might be useful in alleviating maladjustment issues.

Thus, based on the literature review, it is suggested that psychological capital intervention can be developed in school, clinical, and organizational settings, particularly for educational settings considering the requirements of adolescents' adjustment.

Conclusion

Perceived inter-parental conflict has been identified as one of the causes of adjustment issues of adolescents, both internally and externally. Studies have shown evidence of adjustment issues due to the perception of inter-parental conflict since the early nineties among adolescents. Studies have also shown that adolescents struggle with adjustment issues on the emotional, psychosocial, and academic fronts. The present study showed that positive psychological interventions can help adolescents to combat the worsening effects of maladjustment issues. Further, it can be suggested that future interventions need to be modeled after the psychological capital intervention for adolescents. In conclusion, it can be said that more interventions need to be designed which should utilize PsyCap.

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