

EFFECTS OF MARITAL DISCORD OF PARENTS ON ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Human beings are different from each other in looks, thoughts and abilities. Even like minded and similar thinking couples tend to differ with each other at some time or the other which may result in discord if not resolved amicably. This discord may manifest in to aggressive behaviour and adversely impact their children. Thus Marital Discord has brought about certain predictable adverse manifestations in the personalities of the children. This research paper aims to understand the Marital Discord of parents and its influence on the adolescents. 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 and Anxiety. These adolescents were further assessed for Gender Difference in the variables Self Esteem and Anxiety.

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



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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 and Anxiety were the variables 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 and Anxiety.

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.

Objectives of the Study

- a. To assess marital discord among the parents of adolescent.
- b. To identify the effects of marital discord on adolescents' self-esteem.
- c. To identify the effects of marital discord on adolescents' anxiety.

Hypotheses

- a. There will be no significant gender difference in Self-Esteem among adolescents whose parents have high marital discord.
- b. There will be no significant gender difference in Anxiety among adolescents whose parents have high marital discord.

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.

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.

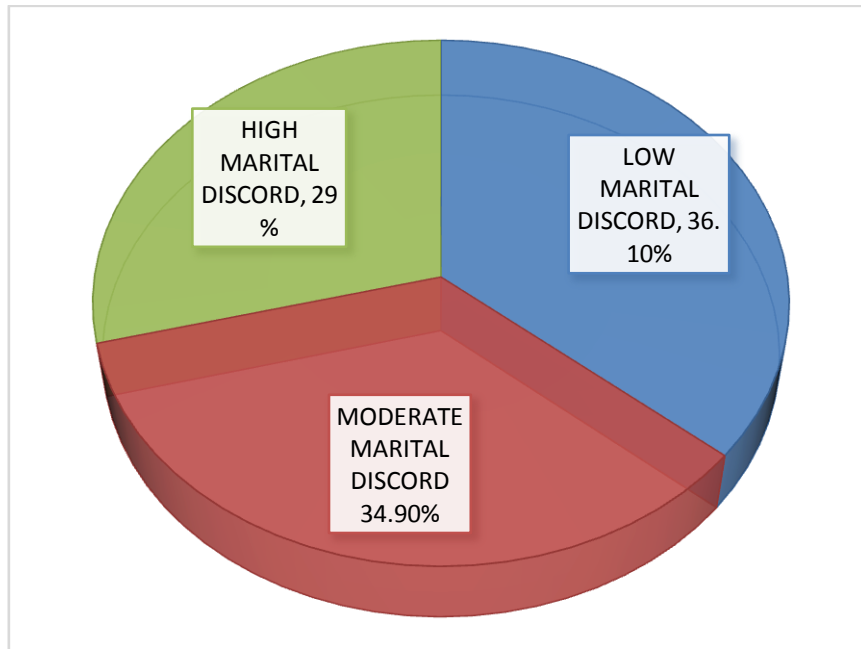


Chart 1

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

VARIABLE	GENDER	TOTAL (N)	MEAN	SD	Df	t	SIG
SELF ESTEEM	BOYS	51	72.39	15.636	103	1.612	0.110
	GIRLS	53	77.21	14.834			
	TOTAL	104					

Hypothesis1: There will be no significant gender difference among adolescents’ Self- Esteem

Table No.4

Findings: From Table No.4, the gender difference of the adolescents is assessed and the calculated ‘t’ value is 1.612 which is less than the table value of 1.98 and conclude that there is no significant mean difference between the boys’ and girls’ self esteem. Both have high self esteem. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant gender difference in Anxiety among Adolescents.

VARIABLES	GENDER	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	t	df	SIG. (2-TAILED)	TABLE VALUE
GUILT PRONENESS	BOYS	9.02	4.760	0.607	102	.545	1.98
	GIRLS	8.49	4.121				
MATURITY	BOYS	4.88	2.597	0.563	102	.575	
	GIRLS	4.62	2.087				
SELF CONTROL	BOYS	6.25	3.242	1.088	102	.279	
	GIRLS	5.64	2.466				
SUSPICIOUS	BOYS	1.76	1.226	0.818	102	.415	
	GIRLS	1.57	1.248				
TENSION	BOYS	7.55	4.220	0.855	102	.395	
	GIRLS	8.25	4.085				
ANXIETY	BOYS	29.55	14.243	0.270	102	.788	
	GIRLS	28.85	12.195				

Table No.5

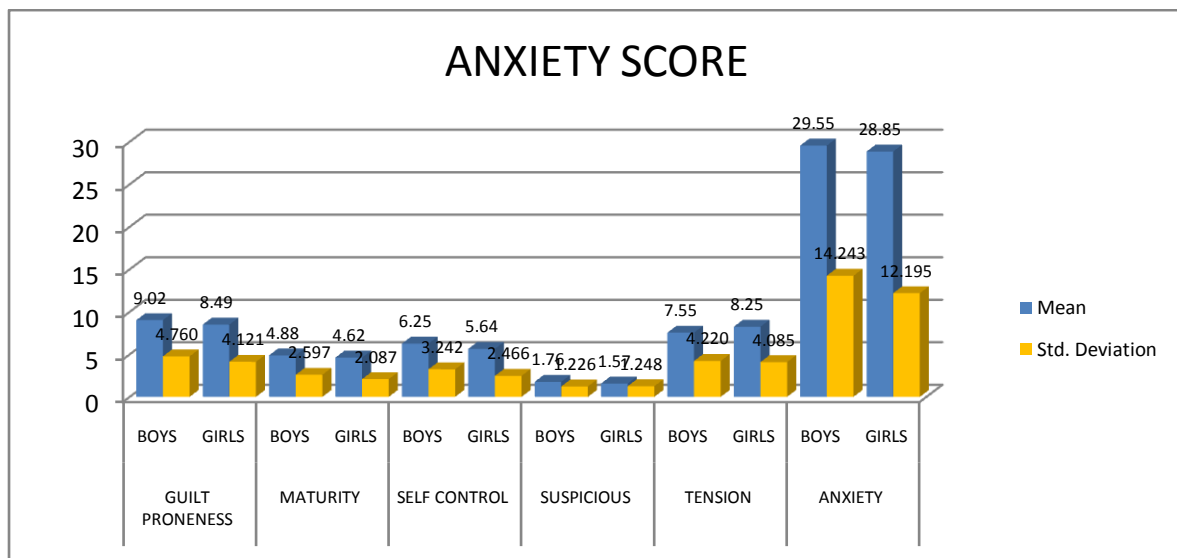


Chart No.2

Findings: In Table No.5, for the dimension guilt proneness boys mean is 9.02 which is more than girls mean of 8.49. In the dimension maturity boys mean is 4.88 and for girls it is 4.62. In self control boys score is 6.25 and for girls it is 5.64. For the sub scale suspicious, it is 1.76 and 1.57 for boys and girls respectively. For the sub scale, tension it is 7.55 for boys and 8.25

for girls. For the sub scale Tension girls mean is higher than boys. In the overall dimension anxiety, the mean score for boys is 29.55 and 28.85 for girls and both have low anxiety. The calculated t value of 0.270 is less than the table value of 1.984 and hence there is no statistical significance and the hypothesis is accepted.

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 and high anxiety 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. From this research it can be concluded that effects of parental discord influence both boys and girls equally. They are affected both physically and emotionally by various internalising and externalising factors. Hence 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.

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