

Summary

The Relation between Interparental Conflict and Adolescent's Adjustment Problems: The Mediator Role of Parental Control Practices

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Interparental conflict characterized by emotional negativity, anger, and aggression is directly linked with adolescents' adjustment problems. Beside these direct effects, underlying processes in the relationship between interparental conflict and adolescent adjustment have been investigated from different perspectives. One of the very well known among these perspectives is family systems approach (Erel & Burman, 1995). In this approach, spillover hypothesis indicates the transmission of an affective or emotional state across sub-systems of the family. Studies testing the spillover hypothesis in understanding the possible mediators that may relate interparental conflict with adolescent adjustment problems have revealed that interparental conflict is related to low levels of parental support, warmth, monitoring, and high levels of harsh discipline, verbal criticism, and punitiveness (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000).

Despite some evidence, there is no clarity that family systems functions differently in Western and non-Western societies (Chang, Lansford, Schwartz, & Farver, 2004). One of the controversial issues in the literature is that whether interparental conflict is related to adolescent adjustment directly or indirectly via ineffective parenting. Although spillover hypothesis has been supported by many mediating processes in a variety of cultures (e.g., Bradford et al., 2003; Chang, Lansford, Schwartz, & Farver, 2004; Krishnakumar et al., 2003), mediating role of parental control versus direct influence of interparental conflict on adolescent adjustment problems has not been investigated widely in nonwestern societies.

This study aims to apply family systems approach to examine the direct and indirect relations among interparental conflict, parental control, and adolescent's adjustment problems in Turkish urban families. Specifically,

ly, the current study focuses on perceived maternal and paternal psychological control and monitoring as mediators investigating the link between perceived interparental conflict and adolescent's bullying and loneliness. The first two hypotheses of the study are about direct relations: Adolescents who perceived high interparental conflict would report (1) high levels of adjustment problems (i.e., loneliness and bullying) and (2) high levels of psychological control and low levels of behavioral control (monitoring). Mediation hypothesis predicted that decreased parental monitoring and increased parental psychological control would explain the relationships of interparental conflict with adolescent's loneliness and bullying. Since there is no consistency in the literature, the specific roles of parent and adolescent sexes haven't been hypothesized in the aforementioned relations in the present research.

Method

Participants

This study was a part of a research project that examines psychosocial aspects of adolescent socialization. Participants were 542 middle SES urban adolescents (316 females, 226 males) from 7th to 10th-grade ranged in age from 12 to 18 years ($M_{age} = 14.74$, $SD = 1.44$) and were recruited from 3 primary and 5 high schools in Ankara, Turkey. In terms of adolescent-reported parental education, 60% of the mothers and 70% of the fathers had high school and above diplomas and the rate of working mothers was 33%. Adolescents from intact families with parental consent form were included.

Measures

All scales were adapted into Turkish and tested psychometrically either in a separate sample of above

mentioned project or in other studies with a sample of Turkish adolescents. Cronbach's alpha of each scale was given below.

Interparental Conflict Scale-Conflict Properties Subscale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). Adolescents' perception of their parents' conflict was assessed by Conflict Properties Subscale. Participants were administered 17 items evaluated via 3-point scale ("I often see my parents arguing." $1 = \text{true}$, $2 = \text{sort of true}$, $3 = \text{false}$). The scale was adapted into Turkish by Öz (1999). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was found as .91 in the present study.

The Psychological Control – Disrespect Scale (PCDS). The scale was developed by Barber, Olsen, Hunter, Meneely, and Bose (2007) as 8 items to measure the psychological control perceived and reported by adolescents themselves. Cronbach's alphas were ranged from .83 to .90 across cultures. Original scale was adapted to Turkish by Sayıl and Kindap (2010). In our study participants responded the items (e.g., "My mom ridicules me or puts me down saying I am stupid, useless, etc.") on a 4-point Likert scale ($1 = \text{not like her}$, $4 = \text{a lot like her}$). The Cronbach's alphas for the scale were .85 and .89 for adolescent reports of maternal and paternal psychological control, respectively.

Adolescent Family Process Measure (Vazsonyi, Hibbert, & Snider, 2003). Monitoring subscale consisting of 4 items was used to measure behavioral control exerted by parents on adolescents. The participants rated the items for both mother and father separately. A sample item was "My mother wants me to tell her where I am if I don't come home right after school". Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (*strongly disagree*) to "5" (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach's alpha of the monitoring subscale was .80 and .83 for adolescent reports of maternal and paternal monitoring, respectively (Sayıl et al., 2012).

Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (LSDS). The Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire was designed by Asher, Hymel, and Renshaw (1984) and revised by Asher and Wheeler (1985) to measure social loneliness in school children. The questionnaire consists of 24 items (e.g. "I'm lonely") rated on a 5-point scale ($1 = \text{That's not at all true about me}$, $5 = \text{That's always true about me}$). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .89. LSDS was used for younger adolescents and their loneliness score was computed as a z score.

UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1980). Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale consists of 20 items (e.g. "How often do you feel you lack companionship?") rated on a 4-point scale ($1 = \text{never}$, $4 = \text{often}$). In the current study, Cronbach's

alpha of UCLA was .91. UCLA Loneliness Scale was used for older adolescents and their loneliness score was computed as a z score.

Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (Mynard & Joseph, 2000). In order to measure bullying instead of victimization, a converted and adapted version of the scale (Peer Bullying Scale; Pekel, 2004) was used. The scale consists of 36 items and is rated on a 3-point scale. The 11-item short form of this converted scale (consisted of aggression, relational aggression, and teasing items) was used and Cronbach's alpha was .82 in the current study.

Procedure

Before the administration of the measures, IRB approval and permission from Turkish Ministry of Education to conduct the study in schools were obtained. Participants were informed about the project and then they were instructed on how to fill the questionnaires. They were informed about the voluntary participation in the research. Informed consent was obtained from parents and informed assent form was taken from adolescents. As a part of the project's questionnaire booklet, the research scales were administered to the students during their class time.

Results

The Results of Mother and Father Models for Females

Estimation of the first model (full mediation model) showed a reasonably good fit with the maternal [$SBS_{\chi^2}(60, N = 316) = 91.88$, $RMSEA = .04$, $CFI = .97$] and paternal [$SBS_{\chi^2}(60, N = 316) = 77.70$, $RMSEA = .03$, $CFI = .98$] data for females. Results showed that conflict among parents positively predicted perceived psychological control from both mother and father, and negatively predicted perceived parental monitoring from both mother and father for females. It was also found that perceived psychological control from both mother and father positively predicted bullying and loneliness among females. Moreover, perceived parental monitoring from both mother and father negatively predicted bullying, but did not predict loneliness.

For mediation effects, when the path between conflict among parents and adolescents' bullying behavior was added to the mother-daughter model, it did not reduce χ^2 significantly [$\Delta SBS_{\chi^2}(1) = 3.44$, $p > .05$] and the path was not statistically significant ($\beta = .17$, $p > .05$). On the other hand, the path was significant for father-daughter model ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$) and it significantly reduced χ^2 ($\Delta SBS_{\chi^2}(1) = 5.53$, $p < .05$); however, the significant prediction of monitoring in bullying faded away ($\beta = -.16$, $p > .05$). Fit indices of the accepted mod-

el for father-daughter was as follows: [SBS_ χ^2 (59, $N = 316$) = 72.17, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .98]. The results of the Sobel Test (1982) showed that the indirect effect of interparental conflict on adolescents' bullying behavior was significant both for mother-daughter ($z_{\text{mother-daughter}} = 3.87, p < .05$) and father-daughter ($z_{\text{father-daughter}} = 2.54, p < .05$) models. Finally, it was found that psychological control and parental monitoring fully mediated the association between interparental conflict and adolescents' bullying behavior in mother-daughter model, and only psychological control partially mediated this association in the father-daughter model.

When the path between interparental conflict and adolescents' loneliness was added to the mother-daughter and father-daughter models, it was found that the path was significant ($\beta_{\text{mother-daughter}} = .22, p < .01$; $\beta_{\text{father-daughter}} = .26, p < .01$) and it reduced χ^2 significantly [ΔSBS_χ^2 (1) $_{\text{mother-daughter}} = 5.91, p < .01$; ΔSBS_χ^2 (1) $_{\text{father-daughter}} = 10.10, p < .001$]. However, in both models, the significant association between psychological control and loneliness faded away ($\beta_{\text{mother-daughter}} = .15, p > .05$; $\beta_{\text{father-daughter}} = .13, p > .05$). Fit indices of the accepted models were as [SBS_ χ^2 (59, $N = 316$) = 85.59, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .97] for mother-daughter model, and as [SBS_ χ^2 (59, $N = 316$) = 72.17, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .98] for father-daughter model. Lastly, the results demonstrated that interparental conflict predicted females' loneliness and perceived psychological control from mother and father did not mediate this association.

The Results of Mother and Father Models for Males

Estimation of the first model (full mediation model) showed a reasonably good fit with the maternal [SBS_ χ^2 (60, $N = 226$) = 80.34, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .96] and paternal [SBS_ χ^2 (60, $N = 226$) = 62.80, RMSEA = .01, CFI = .98] data for males. Results indicated that interparental conflict positively predicted perceived psychological control from both mother and father, and negatively predicted perceived parental monitoring from only mother for males. It was also found that perceived psychological control from both mother and father positively predicted males' bullying behavior and loneliness, while perceived parental monitoring negatively predicted only bullying.

For males, we tested whether adding a direct path from interparental conflict to loneliness and to bullying would improve the model fit (partial mediation model) compared to the full mediation model. When the path between interparental conflict and bullying was added to the both models, it was observed that the path was significant for the mother-son and father-son models ($\beta_{\text{mother-son}} = .21, p < .05$; $\beta_{\text{father-son}} = .21, p = .05$) and it reduced χ^2 significantly [ΔSBS_χ^2 (1) $_{\text{mother-son}} = 5.97, p <$

.01; ΔSBS_χ^2 (1) $_{\text{father-son}} = 5.51, p < .01$]. However, the previously significant effect of parental monitoring on bullying in the mother-son model ($\beta_{\text{mother-son}} = -.15, p > .05$); and the previously significant effect of psychological control on bullying in both models ($\beta_{\text{mother-son}} = .18, p > .05$, $\beta_{\text{father-son}} = .15, p > .05$) faded away. Fit indices for accepted models were as [SBS_ χ^2 (59, $N = 216$) = 74.37, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .96] for mother-son model; and [SBS_ χ^2 (59, $N = 216$) = 57.29, RMSEA = .01, CFI = .98] for father-son model. Lastly, the results showed that interparental conflict directly predicted males' bullying behavior, and perceived psychological control from mother and father and perceived parental monitoring from parents did not mediate this association.

When the path between interparental conflict and loneliness was added to the mother-son and father-son models, it was found that the path was not significant ($\beta_{\text{mother-son}} = .05, p > .05$; $\beta_{\text{father-son}} = .07, p > .05$) and it did not reduce χ^2 significantly [ΔSBS_χ^2 (1) $_{\text{mother-son}} = 1.03, p > .05$; ΔSBS_χ^2 (1) $_{\text{father-son}} = 1.31, p > .05$]. Furthermore, the indirect effect of interparental conflict on loneliness was found significant in both models ($z_{\text{mother-son}} = 2.54, p < .05$; $z_{\text{father-son}} = 2.53, p < .05$). Finally, it was found that perceived psychological control from mother and father fully mediated the relationship between interparental conflict and males' loneliness.

Discussion

Hypothesized direct relations between perceived interparental conflict and adolescents' adjustment problems (loneliness and bullying) were confirmed in this study. Social learning mechanisms, emotional security hypothesis, and cognitive contextual model have been suggested as possible explanations in order to grasp the direct influence of interparental conflict (Cummings & Davies, 2010; Grych & Fincham, 1990). The second hypothesized and confirmed direct effects of interparental conflict were on parental controls. Male and female adolescents who perceived higher conflict between their parents also perceived higher psychological control and lower parental monitoring from their parents. It seems that interparental conflict activated psychological control and interrupted parental monitoring both in mothers and fathers. However, increase in psychological control was more likely observed than decrease in parental monitoring. It might be asserted that parents who are in conflict with their partner can have negative feelings or feel higher stress and more likely reflect this negativity and pressure towards their children by behaving in a more psychologically controlling way and in turn interparental conflict becomes related to adolescent's adjustment problems. In addition, although spillover effect was observed

for both parents, it seems more factual for mothers rather than fathers as being compatible with the literature. Mothers have a primary responsibility in taking care of children even in the adolescence period (Phares, Fields, & Kamboukos, 2009) which probably increase stress and anger in interparental relations more likely consume mothers' energy and make them feel more pressured. Stressed mothers in such a family climate can try to control their children in a less effortful and more intrusive way (Margolin et al., 2001). Consequently, psychological control mediates loneliness in males and bullying in females, but maternal monitoring mediates bullying only in females. When a male adolescent perceived a conflict between his parents, his feeling of loneliness increases as a consequence of increased paternal and maternal psychological control. However contrary to male results, females reported an increase in their bullying behaviors as a consequence of increased paternal and maternal psychological control and decreased maternal monitoring. This sex specific finding confirms the relation between mother's monitoring and daughters' adjustment (Updegraff, Delgado, & Lorey, 2009). Moreover, it was shown that female adolescents perceive more parental monitoring and males perceive more psychological control than females (Sayıl & Kindap, 2010). Probably, these diverse perceptions of males and females in perceived parental control might play a role on sex difference in mediation analyses.

Overall, this study showed that when adolescents perceived an increase in interparental conflict, males reacted to this conflict with disturbed peer relations and females reacted to this conflict with the feeling of loneliness. However, while male adolescents' feeling of loneliness was totally explained by perceived paternal and maternal psychological control; female adolescents' bullying was fully explained by increase in paternal and maternal psychological control and decrease in maternal monitoring. It might be asserted that when adolescents perceive an increase in interparental conflict they perceive an increase in parental psychological control and a decrease in maternal monitoring. It seems that the roles of both parents' psychological control on adolescent adjustment are more similar than the role of paternal and maternal monitoring on adolescents.

The current study has some limitations about using cross-sectional design and adolescents' self-report. Also, generalizability of the results is limited because in the present study adolescents from middle SES urban families in Turkey are recruited and these families are more open to the effects of modernization.

In conclusion, the aim of the current study was to investigate parental control as a mediator for the association between perceived interparental conflict and adoles-

cents' psychosocial adjustment and there is very limited research examining these relations through the spillover hypothesis using the parental control in a non-Western context. In general, our results support the spillover effect and suggest that interparental conflict has both direct and indirect associations with adolescent adjustment problems and explain higher variance on parental control rather than on adolescent adjustment signifying some similarities both with Western and non-Western findings (Chang et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2012). Finally, the relations of interparental conflict with adolescents' adjustment problems through parental control practices differ in terms of the sex of adolescent rather than the sex of their parents.