

Gender Differences in Parent-Adolescent Conflict

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Abstract: This article aims to investigate gender differences in parent-adolescent conflict. Using survey data from research conducted by Institute for Family and Gender Studies in 2020 in Hanoi, study employs self-report data from a sample of adolescents in two high schools in Hanoi: one urban school and one rural school. The finding shows that adolescent has conflict with mother more than with father. Mothers take part in adolescents' daily life more than fathers but when facing conflicts, fathers have more negative reactions. Regarding adolescent gender, male adolescent, compared to female adolescents, reports more conflict with parents.

Keywords: Gender difference; Adolescent-parent conflict; High schools.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is considered as a period of heightened interpersonal conflict, particularly conflict with parents. A number of factors have been identified in association with parent-adolescent conflict. Among them, gender is considered as an important factor accounting for variance in conflict between parent-adolescent.

Gender of adolescents is determined to have an impact on the process of conflict between parents and adolescent. Considering the rate of encountering parental

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conflict, there are two lines of judgment about the relationship between the sex of adolescents and parent-adolescent conflict. Studies show that girls are more open to communicate with their parents, thus receiving more care, less punishment and more encouragement from their parents (Fitzpatric and Marshall, 1996, cited from Ashraf, 2011). Meanwhile, some author points out that parents prefer boys over girls, so they have conflict with boys less than with girls (Sivak, 2019).

Parent gender is also considered to affect the parent-adolescent conflict. Many studies have shown that, among conflicts between adolescent with family members (parents, siblings), the most common one is the conflict with the mother (Montemayor, 1985, Yau, 2003). In general, in the family, mother is the one who spends more time with children, the person who sets the family discipline, takes the role of caring and actively participates in activities and learning. Fathers, meanwhile, are less likely to participate in the socialization of their children (Collins and Russel, 1991). Therefore, when the adolescent makes mistakes, the mother often reminds and reprimands, so the rate of conflict with the mother will be higher than the father (Montemayor, 1985, Renk, 2005; Mastrotheodoros, 2020).

Thus, this article is intended to clarify gender differences in parent-adolescent conflict through two dimensions: frequency of conflict and reaction of parents and adolescents to conflict.

2. Method

Participants

Purpose of the study was explained to only adolescents. The sample consisted of 706 adolescents in both rural and urban areas (329 adolescents from rural, 377 ones from urban area), including 242 adolescents from 10th grade (34,3%), 249 adolescents from 11th grade (35,3%), 215 adolescents from 12th grade (30,4%).

Procedure

The study was conducted at two high schools in Hanoi: one school in urban area (Kim Lien high school, Dong Da, Ha noi), and one in rural area (Minh Khai high school, Quoc Oai, Ha noi) in 2020. After obtaining permission for the survey from school principals, pupils of both schools were invited to participate in the research and all participants enter research voluntarily with full information about the purpose, meaning of the research. Data collection took place at their classes. Adolescents filled in the questionnaire in their class during a regular lesson (45-50 mins). They were informed about the content and purpose of the study, and all of adolescents agreed in the participation of this survey. In most classes, there were 2-3 supervisors and one teacher who was available to distribute the questionnaire, keep order and answer the questions of adolescents. The adolescents were informed to fill in the questionnaire privately, so they were not allowed to talk about their/ their friends' answer in the questionnaires, and their information was guaranteed to be private from their teachers and parents.

3. Results

3.1. Gender of parents as a context for parent-adolescent conflict

In our study, adolescents experience more conflict with their mother as compared to their father. In all eleven activities which are sorted into three categories: education, finance, personal activities (see Table 1), the percentage of adolescents having conflict with mother is higher than with father. In the topic related study of adolescent, Table 1 shows that while only 52,5% of adolescents report conflict with father about academic chores, the percentage of adolescents having conflict with mother in this topic is up to 63%. Similarly, the percentage of adolescent reporting having conflict with father in extra-course, school choice or time spent studying at home is all lower than with mother. The fact that adolescent having conflicts with mothers more than with father can be explained

by the different role of father and mother as well as the participation of parents at different levels in the study of their adolescents.

Table 1. The percentage of adolescent having conflict with parents (%)

Topics of conflict	Conflict with father	Conflict with mother
	Frequency	Frequency
Education		
Academic chores	52,5	63
Extra course	34,8	42,1
School choice	31,9	37,4
Time spent studying at home	54,6	66,7
Finance		
Earning money	23,7	24,4
Money possession	31,8	36,8
Using money	40,9	49,9
Personal activities		
Technology equipment/Internet use	75	81,8
Purpose of Internet usage	30,2	33,3
Friend choosing	28,2	33,6
Time going out with friends	43,1	48,5

Table 2. The percentage of father and mother caring about their children’s study

	Father	Mother
Parents remind you to study		
No	13	6,8
Quite seldom	19,1	14,3
Quite often	38,6	32,8
Always	29,3	46
Parents force you to study		
No	59	44,1
Quite seldom	22,9	24,6
Quite often	16,4	22,8
Always	1,7	8,6
Sharing difficulties in study with parents		
No	26,2	16,1
Quite seldom	34,2	27,4
Quite often	28,8	38,7
Always	10,8	19,8

Data survey also points out that mothers play a principal role in adolescents' education. Their care is expressed through two dimensions which are care and pressure. On the one hand, they are the ones who care the most for their children's study, and on the other hand, the adolescents face the pressure in study mostly from their mothers. The table 2 shows that the percentage of mothers that always remind their adolescents to study is up to 46%. The percentage of mothers who put pressure on their children to study is approximately 56%. In contrary, adolescents say that their fathers don't always remind them to study. 13% of adolescents say that their fathers don't remind them to study. The percentage of father who always remind children to study is only 1/3 of mothers who always do this work. Due to the differentiation in the participation of parents in their study, the adolescents tend to share their difficulties in study with their mother more than with their parents. The percentage of adolescents often or always share difficulties with mother is alternately 38,7% and 19,8%.

In the point of view of adolescents, they perceive clearly the different educational role of their parents in the family. In-depth interviews also reinforce the results of quantitative analysis. Mothers involved in their education more than fathers. Not only the area related directly to study, mothers engage more in activities at school, supporting extracurricular activities, converse with teacher, communication between school and home. One adolescent said:

"I don't know why my mother participates in my education more than my father. Sometimes I feel it's a little unfair for my mom. In the past, women stay at home to raise children and do housework. But nowadays, women earn money too. My mom is a banker, she's very busy. But she has attended to parent-teacher conference at my school since I was in elementary school. She finds extra classes for me, and discusses a lot with me about my teachers, my friends. I don't say that my father hasn't any role in my life, but in comparison with my mother, what he has done is insignificant" (Female, 12th grade, urban).

“I think that time is not a problem because my mother is as busy as my father. Maybe the personality. My father is hot-tempered, my mom is patient. Mom knows more about us” (Female, 11th grade, urban).

This above sharing suggests about the gender inequality in the division of child care between father and mother. Although that both parents have to go to work, women have to earn money as man, but when they come back home, the responsibility of educating and caring for children presses on women more than men.

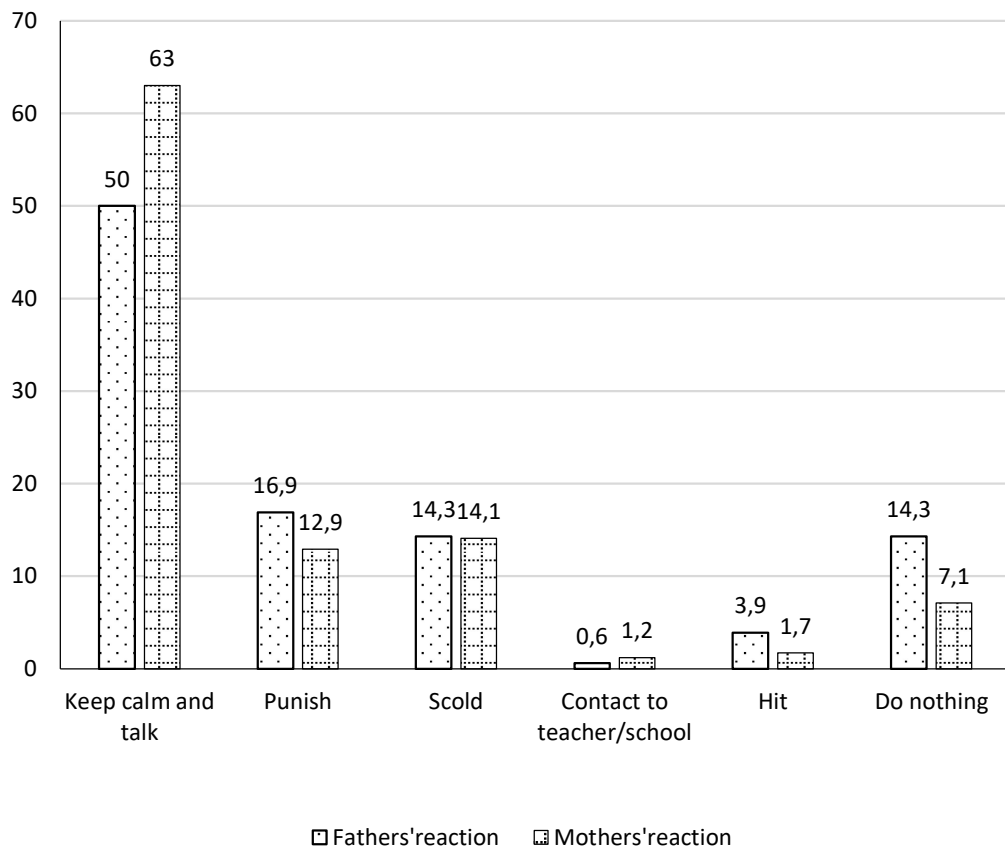
Not only in education, but father-mother differences also arise in other dimensions. Adolescents conflict with mother about technology/internet usage more than with father. Approximately 82% of adolescents reported conflict with mother about time use of technology/Internet, but the percentage having conflict with father is only 75%.

It's suggested that the reason comes from the gendered parental roles of fathers and mothers in children education at home. Answering for the question “At home, between father and mother, who takes care for you more?”. Up to 86% of adolescents reply that it is their mother. This result suggests that the adolescent-father relations are more distant than adolescent-mother relations. Actually, mothers spend more time with their adolescents and are more likely to be involved with caretaking activities, household matters as well as education. This greater has both positive and negative effects. Adolescents can feel clearly the love, care that mothers give them, but it also can be said that these issues are likely sources of mother-adolescent conflict.

Furthermore, father and mother react in different ways when facing conflict with children. The survey data also reveals that mothers tend to resolve conflict more peacefully. The percentage of fathers choosing to “Punish”, “Scold”, “Hit” is higher than the one of mothers. It is considered that the difference is not significant, but it still suggests that although mother engage in conflict with

adolescent more than the fathers, mothers play a regulatory role in family. Adolescents share that, discussion with mothers tend to be calmer than discussion with father.

Figure 1. Reaction of parents when facing conflict



“You know how angry the father can be, right? He scolds, critic me, says something like: “How lazy you are. I don’t know why I have a son like you”. In this circumstance, my mother only keeps silent. What else can she do? After that, she tries to justify for my father and encourage me...” (Male, 11th grade, urban).

Adolescence is a period that recognizes great fluctuations and changes, they need someone who is knowledgeable about their difficulties and ready to share

anything with them. One important task of parents is to set rules, supervise and provide behavioral guidelines, but one other one is providing a safe and affectionate environment for children. In spite of the difference between father and mother, they both play an important role in this context by having discussions with adolescents over their problem in their daily life as well as in the family relationship.

3.2. Gender of adolescent differs in engaging conflict with parents

It's suggested that adolescents' perceptions of parent-adolescent relationships change over time. With respect to gender differences, some researches show that no gender differences for boys and girls regarding mean level of conflict during adolescence, but from middle to late adolescence, mix findings have been found with regard to conflict. Some studies show that female adolescents have less conflict with their parents (Fitzpatric and Marshall, 1996, cited from Ashraf, 2011), but other studies show that female adolescents experience more disagreements and conflicts with their parents than male adolescents (De Goede et al. 2009; McGue et al. 2005).

And in this study, quantitative data points out that the percentage of having conflict with father and mother is higher for male adolescents than for female adolescents. The percentage of adolescent boys who have conflicts with their fathers about academic scores is 59,2%, and 67,6% having conflict with mother, meanwhile this figure for adolescent girls is lower, relatively 48% and 59,9%. 35,8% of adolescents conflict over school choice with father, and this percentage of female adolescents is 29,8%. In all areas of conflict that this study researches, the percentage of male adolescents engage in conflict with parents is higher than female ones.

Table 3. Percentage of male and female adolescents having conflicts with parents

Topics of conflict	Conflict with father		Conflict with mother	
	Male adolescents	Female adolescent	Male adolescents	Female adolescent
Education				
Academic chores	59,2	48	67,6	59,9
Extra course	38,7	32,1	43,3	41,3
School choice	35,8	29,8	38,4	36,8
Time spent studying at home	60,6	50,3	66,9	60,8
Individual activities				
Technology equipment/Internet use	78,7	72	82,3	33,8
Purpose of Internet usage	31,2	29,5	33,8	36
Friend choosing	30,5	26,6	33,1	34
Time going out with friends	46,8	40,5	46,8	49,6

Due to data limitations, quantitative data cannot explain this difference. However, qualitative interviews point to two suggestions. Firstly, adolescent boy

is a mixture of a boy and a man. At period of middle adolescence, adolescent boys have not enjoyed spending time with parents yet, they focus increasingly on peers and other private activities (playing games, listening to music...). In contrary, girls are more open to communicate with parents, they still participate actively in housework activities (cleaning rooms, cooking, going shopping with mothers, caring for little brothers/sisters...), thus receiving more care, less punishment and more encouragement from their parents. Moreover, parents' differential treatment of daughters and sons make male adolescents having more risks of conflicts with parents more than female adolescents. Two stories of two male adolescents who have younger sisters might illustrate for this opinion. The first case, the brother, compared with his younger sister, has a quite distant relationship with parents. He usually refuses to go to cinema, travel or go visiting relatives with his parents. He always argues with his parents about school choice and Internet use, he feels that his parents don't understand him. In his opinion, he has more conflict with parents than his younger sister does.

“My sister joins more in familial activities. She talks a lot with my parents. My parents are very happy when she gets into math honors class. You are right, my relationship with my parents is relatively distant. I don't know why but each person has their own space... My sister quarrels a lot with my parents, but after some hours, they laugh and talk as if nothing happened. But when I have conflicts with my parents, it lasts longer..., I know my parents love me but we are so different” (Male, 12th grade, rural).

In the second case, this male adolescent feels himself under a lot of pressure. He is responsible for picking up his younger sister after school, he helps her to fulfill math exercises three days a week. He must be strong because he is male, he must behave as an adult because he is a big brother in family. The pressures his parents put on them make him unpleasant and increase conflict frequency between his parents and him.

“Of course, I am the person who have the most conflict with parents. My friends don’t have to do housework as much as I do. I have to pick her up (younger sister), tutor her and cook her a breakfast. She is in 10th grade, why can’t she cook noodle? Because she is lazy and my parents say that “You are her brother, cooking a meal is not a big problem”. When she quarrels with her friends, my mother comforts her and buy her new clothes. But when I do it with my girlfriend, my mother says that “Focus on your study and stop going out with your girlfriend.” Sometimes I feel difficult to be closed to my parents, so the conflicts increase gradually...” (Male, 12th grade, rural).

Male adolescents report that they have more conflict with parents than female ones, and this result should be understood with reference to characteristics of adolescent period. Male teenagers seek more for the freedom, independence. Moreover, they are also more likely to engage in deviant behaviors than female ones. This finding partly suggests that in family education, especially when children enter adolescent, parents should pay more attention in the gender characteristics of their children.

4. Conclusions

Within the scope of the study, it can be said that adolescents experience more conflict with mothers than with fathers. This finding is in clash with this of earlier research which has revealed mothers being more supportive and taking active participation in children’s life therefore mothers take more risk of conflict than father. But in spite of the fact that adolescents report more conflict with their mother as compared to their father, the data shows that the relationship between adolescent and mother is more attached. Regarding to adolescent gender, male adolescents engage in conflict with parents more than female adolescents. Qualitative data indicates that the pressure parents putting on boys and different respond of parents to sons and daughters are two main reasons increase conflict

between parents and sons. These above findings raise questions about gender parental role in family and the fathers' active participation in children care activities. Moreover, future studies could continue to examine whether parents treat sons and daughters in different way. Learning about gender difference in parent-adolescent conflict contributes to understand parent-adolescent dynamics and clarify the position, the role of parents and children in family.

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