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Some solutions to resolve conflicts between parents and teenagers

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Abstract. Conflict is inevitable in every relationship, especially in the parent-child relationship. Conflicts can either foster closeness and understanding between the generations or create distance between parents and children. Research has identified six choices of responses when faced with conflicts, categorized based on coping strategies and attitudes towards parents. The specific responses include: 1) Silence; 2) Avoidance; 3) Expressing one's viewpoint gently to make parents understand; 4) Compliance with parents' wishes but without happiness; 5) Engaging in intense arguments; 6) Feeling wrong and expressing remorse. Based on this, the study measured two aspects: the satisfaction of adolescents with conflict resolution methods and adolescents' perception of the impact of conflict resolution on the parent-child relationship using a 4-point scale: 0-Not satisfied at all; 1-Not satisfied; 2-Satisfied; 3-Very satisfied. Additionally, factors influencing conflict resolution were identified, such as the living environment, gender of parents and children.

Keywords. conflict; parents; teenagers; conflict resolution

1. Introduction

Conflicts between parents and children are a common issue in families and need to be properly addressed to ensure the development and happiness of each family member. Family conflicts can arise from a lack of understanding, poor communication, and misconceptions. Parents and children often have different expectations regarding behavior, achievements, and personal development. Without understanding and flexibility, conflicts can escalate into arguments, discord, and further impact the relationships and harmony within the family.

To resolve family conflicts, it is essential to have listening, respect, and understanding from both sides. The most important aspect is to establish an open and sincere communication environment where both parents and children can express their viewpoints without fear of criticism or limitation. Empathy, willingness to listen, and seeking common solutions are crucial factors in resolving conflicts and ensuring the family's development and happiness.

This study identifies common types of conflicts between parents and teenagers in Vietnamese families. Based on recognizing the reactions of teenagers when conflicts arise with their parents and the factors influencing parental conflict resolution, the author has developed several conflict resolution strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Common areas of conflict between parents and children

The conflict between "adolescent children and parents during high school education" can be examined from the following perspectives: Firstly, the conflict between parents and children involves differences in thinking, behavior, and lifestyle between parents and children. Secondly, the conflict between parents and children can be viewed from various aspects: the frequency of conflicts, the severity of conflicts, conflict resolution strategies, and the consequences of conflicts. Thirdly, based on the findings in the literature review, the parent-child conflicts were categorized into 10 indicators: Use of leisure time, including device and internet usage; Content of device and internet usage; Socializing with friends; Academic performance, studying at home, extra tutoring, school selection; Financial matters, such as part-time jobs, ownership of money, and spending habits.

2.2. Conflict resolution strategies

According to Vulchirich (1990), there are five forms of conflict resolution: submission, compromise, separation, withdrawal, and the involvement of a third party. Regarding conflict resolution methods, the majority of teenagers perceive their parents as the decision-makers. However, when asked about their viewpoint on conflict resolution, most adolescents believe that they should also be allowed to participate in decision-making when handling conflicts. Yau's (1996) study, based on three groups of adolescents, showed that the proportion of early and late adolescents who perceived their parents' decisions as fair was higher than that of middle adolescents. When considering gender, this ratio was higher among males than females. Jenny Yau's (1996) study on parent-child conflicts among Chinese adolescents also indicated that cultural factors influence the parent-child relationship. Chinese culture emphasizes community and values harmony and connections in interpersonal relationships. Several studies by Chinese researchers have also shown that traditional Chinese family life is characterized by hierarchy, power, clearly assigned roles and responsibilities within the family, and the expectation that the family's goals and individual achievements should reflect the family's reputation. Chinese parents also demand obedience and compliance from their children towards the family. Those who dare to oppose their parents are seen as selfish, disrespectful, and unappreciative of what their parents have done for them, leading to disappointment. The research findings also indicate that conflicts mainly occur with mothers, with the proportion of conflicts with fathers being only 50% compared to mothers.

Anat Moed (2014) explores conflict as a process in which there is an initiator and a terminator of the conflict. The author constructs four conflict patterns based on the initiator/terminator dynamics: Parent initiates - Child terminates; Parent initiates - Parent terminates; Child initiates - Child terminates; Child initiates - Parent terminates. These patterns are directly related to the duration of the conflict. In the case of the two patterns where the child terminates, conflicts tend to last longer. The research also indicates that the length of the conflict depends on the terminator rather than the initiator of the conflict. Line Christine Missotten (2017), the author analyzes adolescents' coping strategies with parental conflicts based on four models:

Problem-solving: Both parties actively listen to each other's opinions and engage in dialogue to find common ground.

Conflict engagement: Describes conflict resolution through aggressive verbal behavior, lacking cooperation or self-control.

Withdrawal: Describes avoidance of communication, unwillingness to talk, and becoming distant.

Compliance: Expressing no personal opinions and adhering to the other party's demands.

The research findings indicate that when parents resolve conflicts in a positive manner, it reflects effective communication and a strong parent-child relationship. Many researchers believe that this conflict resolution style is more prevalent in parent-child pairs with positive bonds. Adolescents growing up in environments with frequent conflicts are at risk of mishandling conflicts in the future. Adolescents who tend to use avoidance and withdrawal strategies when faced with conflicts are predicted to have less likelihood of resolving conflicts positively in the future.

Additionally, another grouping of conflict resolution strategies is presented in Ruchi Saxena's study (2011): 1) scolding, 2) avoidance, and 3) resolving with love and affection. In the study, when asked about their preferred conflict resolution methods, parents from both social classes did not consider avoidance as a favorable choice. However, in middle-class families, the percentage of parents choosing scolding and resolving with love and affection was nearly equal, whereas in lower-class families, the percentage of parents choosing scolding was higher. As for the adolescent group from both social classes, they all preferred conflict resolution through love and affection or avoidance, with almost no adolescents desiring conflict resolution through scolding.

Many studies have considered children's misbehavior as one of the causes of conflicts between parents and children. Nguyen Thi Nguyet (2007) investigated how parents react when their children misbehave, with options such as: Physical abuse causing injury; Punishment or making them work (or withholding food); Expelling them from the house; Confining them in a room; Ear-pulling or ear-twisting; Insulting and calling them stupid or lazy; Threatening to hit (but not actually hitting); Threatening to deny education; Stripping them of privileges; Threatening to kick them out of the house; Conducting evaluations; Advising and explaining; Allowing them to handle it themselves; Showing no reaction. Among these options, "advising and explaining" was the most commonly chosen approach by parents. Harsh punishments, violence, and extreme measures were less frequently employed by parents to correct their children's behavior. Among families that resorted to physical abuse causing injury or severe punishments, they tend to have multiple children, face financial difficulties, and have parents with low educational attainment. These families also experience more conflicts and arguments. In terms of children's reactions when being punished/hit/scolded by their parents, most girls feel sad, hurt, or humiliated, while boys tend to develop a sense of resentment towards their parents.

3. Research Methods

The research focuses on two aspects: the reactions of adolescents and parents when faced with conflicts, and the methods of resolving conflicts between adolescents and parents. Based on this, several research methods are identified.

Direct interviews with family members can be used to gather information about conflicts. The questions can focus on aspects such as the level of conflict, the causes of conflicts, the impact on the child, and how the family resolves conflicts.

Surveys can be conducted to gather broader data from a large number of study participants. The questions may pertain to the level of conflict, changes over time, emotions, and perspectives of family members. Six response options are presented based on coping strategies and attitudes towards parents. The specific reactions include: Silence; Avoidance;

Expressing their opinions gently to make parents understand; Compliance with parents but unhappily; Engaging in heated arguments; Feeling wrong and remorseful.

Among these reactions, responses (1) and (2) fall under the non-resolution category, indicating that the child does not seek a solution to achieve agreement between parents and children in the conflicting issue. It also reflects a certain level of distrust from the child towards the parents. Reactions (3) and (5) belong to the resolution group, with reaction (3) being the most autonomous and cooperative solution. Reaction (5) demonstrates the adolescent's resistance towards their parents. The group of reactions (4) and (6) represents passive reactions, where the child complies with the parents, and in the case of reaction (6), the child shows the highest level of adherence to the parents when feeling wrong and regretful about the conflict with them.

Observing the behavior of family members to monitor the interaction between parents and children in a natural environment. Researchers conduct observations and record the behaviors, body language, and emotions of family members to assess the level of conflict, social interaction, and positive outcomes after implementing conflict resolution measures.

The survey results were conducted on 706 adolescents, and the synthesized data was evaluated to assess the effectiveness level in percentage terms.

4. Research results

4.1. The most common reactions of adolescents when facing conflicts with parents

The survey results indicate that among the six options for reactions when facing conflicts with parents, the most common choice is "remaining silent and saying nothing." The options of "avoidance," "engaging in heated arguments," and "feeling wrong and remorseful" are all fluctuating around 10%. Therefore, nearly 45% of adolescents choose the options of avoidance and silence. It is noteworthy that the survey asks about the "most frequent reaction," so although the 10% figures may seem small, they are quite significant as they reflect the dominant trend in how adolescents cope with conflicts with their parents. The qualitative survey reveals various reasons for the choice of silence and avoidance when facing conflicts with parents. The adolescents remain silent because they do not want to "complicate the issue." Around 26.5% of adolescents choose the option of gentle dialogue with their parents when facing conflicts. This is considered the most positive option as it allows both parties to express their thoughts while maintaining a harmonious relationship between parents and children. However, this option also requires proactive involvement from both sides

Reactions of Parents when Facing Conflicts with Adolescent Children

In general, according to the assessment of adolescents, when facing conflicts, the majority of parents choose the option of "having gentle conversations." This is also considered the most positive reaction to minimize the risk of escalating conflicts and create opportunities for listening and sharing between parents and children. Very few parents choose the option of contacting teachers or the school when facing conflicts with their children. Although this is only the perspective from adolescents and it cannot be denied that there may be cases where parents communicate with teachers without the knowledge of their children, the mentioned figures somewhat hint at the role of consultation from a third party, especially the school, in resolving conflicts between parents and children. The survey data also shows that while the percentage of mothers choosing gentle reactions when facing conflicts with their children is higher compared to fathers, the percentage of fathers is higher in options such as "harsh scolding" (14.3% vs. 14.1%); "applying punishment" (4.7% vs. 4.3%); "hitting the child" (3.9% vs. 1.7%); and "imposing strict penalties" (12.2% vs. 8.6%). Although the difference is not significant, it

can still be observed that to some extent, even though mothers often experience more conflicts with their children, they still maintain a "mediating" role in the family with more gentle behavior.

In summary, the survey shows that the reactions of adolescents when encountering conflicts with their parents tend to be inclined towards avoidance, resistance, or passivity. The proportion of adolescents with proactive reactions (aiming to resolve the issue based on better understanding between parents and children) is relatively low. Comparing with the reactions of parents as reflected by the adolescents themselves, it is found that parents tend to have more positive reactions. The percentage of parents with constructive and respectful reactions towards their children is quite high, much higher than that of children towards their parents. However, the qualitative survey also reveals a prominent issue that some parents, especially fathers, still resort to violent and oppressive methods in dealing with their children. The percentage of parents with such reactions, as reported by the adolescents, is not excessively high, but the qualitative data indicates the severity of these behaviors. The methods of resolving conflicts between parents and children and the influencing factors are also highlighted. Because if parents react too harshly, it would be difficult for adolescents to share openly and positively. More than 10% of adolescents have the reaction of engaging in heated arguments with their parents, and another 10% choose to comply with their parents but harbor dissatisfaction. The percentage of adolescents feeling "remorseful towards their parents" accounts for 10%. Feeling "remorseful" may stem from a sense of "wrongness" when causing "harm" to their parents.

If the previous section has analyzed in detail the behavior reactions and attitudes of adolescent children and parents when they have conflicts independently from each other, the following section of the thesis will further analyze the specific ways of resolving conflicts between parent-child pairs in their relationship with each other. The forms of conflict resolution between parents and children implemented in the specific survey are as follows: The child and parents avoid the issue and do not mention it anymore; The child follows the parents' instructions; The parents go along with the child's wishes; The child and parents agree to resolve the conflict together; The child and parents seek the intervention of a third party for mediation.

The survey results show that the two most common options for resolving conflicts between parents and adolescent children are "the child and parents agree to resolve" accounting for 36.1% and "the child and parents avoid the issue and do not mention it anymore" accounting for 33%. However, these are two options with significantly different meanings. If the "agreement to resolve" option is considered a positive solution for the relationship between parents and children in general as well as for the individual adolescent, the "avoidance" option is a disadvantageous approach as it does not cause immediate conflicts but hinders the resolution of the issue and makes the individuals involved feel neglected. Furthermore, the survey data also shows that approximately 27% of adolescents resolve conflicts with their parents by "following the parents' instructions". This partly reflects the "power" position of parents in their relationship with their children. However, this approach can also leave negative emotions for adolescents as they are at an age where they desire independence and the right to make their own decisions, yet they have not found their "place and voice within their parents' hearts".

Parallel to the approach of children following their parents' instructions, the data also shows that there is still a small percentage of parents who have to step back and listen to their children. Approximately 4% of respondents stated that conflicts were resolved by parents listening to their children. Could this stem from the "indulgence" and "submission" of a portion of parents to their children?

Another characteristic is that almost no adolescent children use the method of "seeking intervention from a third party" in dealing with conflicts with their parents. Resources such as family members (grandparents, relatives, etc.) or schools and communities do not participate in the process of resolving conflicts between parents and children. On one hand, according to the children, there is "nothing worth mentioning" so it is unnecessary to seek the involvement of a third party. Some other opinions believe that "there is nothing good about the conflict to tell others". There are children who live in three-generation families, but they also do not seek help from grandparents when facing conflicts with parents because "if parents themselves don't understand me, how can grandparents?" This partly raises questions about the support provided by the family and schools for the psychological well-being of adolescent children.

Factors influencing the resolution of conflicts between parents and children can be observed. Firstly, there is a distinct difference in conflict resolution based on the living area. In rural areas, the main trend in resolving conflicts is for children to listen to their parents, while in urban areas, the majority of adolescents believe that conflicts are resolved through agreement between parents and children. Furthermore, the data indicates that the percentage of adolescents resolving conflicts by listening to their parents is significantly lower in urban areas compared to rural areas (19.4% versus 35.3%), whereas the percentage of parents accommodating their children's wishes is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas (4.2% versus 3.3%). This suggests a hypothesis that in rural areas, parental authority still holds more dominance, while in urban areas, influenced by Western culture and modern lifestyle, the position and voice of adolescent children in the family are reinforced.

When considering the gender of adolescents, it can be observed that while male adolescents tend to resolve conflicts through agreement with their parents, female adolescents choose the option of avoidance. Interestingly, the proportion of male adolescents choosing to listen to their parents is significantly higher than that of female adolescents (30.9% versus 24%), and the proportion of male adolescents who are accommodated by their parents is also higher than that of female adolescents. This suggests that the relationship between parents and sons is often more harmonious, and sons tend to be indulged more.

While previous data indicated that high-achieving adolescents often experience more conflicts with their parents compared to the low-achieving group, the data here shows that among the four conflict resolution methods, the most common approach among high-achieving students is to agree with their parents. This indicates that despite encountering conflicts with their parents, these students have adopted relatively positive ways of resolving them. Additionally, it can be observed that in the non-high-achieving group, the percentage of adolescents listening to their parents is significantly higher compared to the high-achieving group (33.9% versus 23.2%), and the high-achieving group is more often accommodated by their parents compared to the non-high-achieving group.

Evaluation of children's perception of conflict resolution methods: The study measured two aspects: the satisfaction of adolescent children with conflict resolution methods and their perception of the impact of conflict resolution methods on the parent-child relationship.

To measure the satisfaction of adolescent children with conflict resolution, we used a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 3 (very satisfied).

The results showed that the proportion of adolescents who felt dissatisfied or very dissatisfied was almost equivalent to the proportion of satisfied/very satisfied. Specifically, the proportion of very satisfied was only 10%, the proportion of satisfied was 46%, while the proportion of dissatisfied was 38% and 6% reported being completely dissatisfied. For convenience in data analysis, the thesis recoded the variable measuring the level of satisfaction

of adolescent children with conflict resolution into a new variable with two values: 1- Dissatisfied (interpreted as dissatisfied and very dissatisfied); 2- Satisfied (interpreted as satisfied and very satisfied).

It can be seen that when considering the living area, the proportion of adolescents in rural areas feeling "dissatisfied" with conflict resolution methods with their parents is higher than the group of children in urban areas (51.1% versus 37.4%). The survey data showed no difference between males and females or between different grade levels in terms of satisfaction with conflict resolution. However, when considering the academic performance of children, the group of non-high-achieving children had a higher proportion of feeling "dissatisfied" compared to the high-achieving group.

However, when looking at the characteristics of the conflicts, the analysis of the data revealed a statistically significant relationship between the severity of the conflicts and the satisfaction level of adolescent children. Specifically, when the conflicts were not serious or mildly serious, the proportion of satisfaction was significantly higher. Approximately 60% of adolescent children felt satisfied with the conflict resolution method when the conflicts were not serious or mildly serious. On the other hand, when the conflicts were serious or very serious, the proportion of dissatisfaction with the resolution method was higher (52.4% versus 47.6%). This raises the issue that as conflicts become more severe, it becomes more difficult to find appropriate solutions and to achieve a sense of "satisfaction" with the resolution method. Agreement as a conflict resolution method is common and receives widespread satisfaction from adolescents. In contrast, in the "avoidance" option, the proportions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are relatively equal (54.9% and 45.1% respectively).

In summary, conflict between parents and children is a common issue in families. However, resolving these conflicts requires patience, active listening, and mutual respect. To address conflicts between parents and children, we have identified several approaches that can be applied:

- + Create a space for conversation: Establish a safe and comfortable space where both parties can engage in open and honest dialogue. Both parents and children should have time to express their perspectives and genuinely listen to each other.

- + Listen and respect each other's opinions: Both parents and children need to listen to and respect each other's opinions. This requires openness and a willingness to change perspectives if necessary. Avoid judging or criticizing others' opinions and instead try to understand and empathize with each other.

- + Understand the root causes and seek shared solutions: Through conversations, try to understand the underlying causes of conflicts and find ways to reach shared solutions. Both parents and children should demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to change behaviors if necessary to create a harmonious family environment.

- + Show love and care: Despite conflicts, love and care should still be expressed. Parents and children should express their emotions and demonstrate acceptance and support for each other.

- + Seek mediation: In some cases, seeking mediation from a third party can help resolve conflicts. This could be a trusted relative, friends, or an experienced professional in family conflict resolution.

- + Establish rules and boundaries: Sometimes, establishing clear rules and boundaries can help resolve conflicts between parents and children. These rules and boundaries should be discussed and agreed upon, ensuring fairness and consensus from both sides.

+ Understand and empathize with each other: An important factor in resolving conflicts is understanding and empathy. Parents should make an effort to understand the emotions, needs, and difficulties of their children, while children should also understand the perspectives, pressures, and responsibilities of their parents. Empathy and understanding help create a harmonious environment and reduce conflicts.

+ Seek support from external sources: If family conflicts cannot be resolved through the above methods, consider seeking support from external sources. This could include mental health professionals, family support groups, or family counseling courses. Sometimes, a different perspective and advice from a third party can help provide new insights and resolve conflicts.

Conclusion

Conflict between parents and children is an inevitable challenge. However, no conflict is insurmountable with patience, love, and mutual respect. Depending on perspectives, awareness, and living environment, parents and children will have different ways of resolving conflicts. However, through listening, understanding, and showing care, parents and children can build a harmonious family environment. Resolving conflicts requires acceptance, willingness to change, and seeking shared solutions. By creating a safe space for conversation and establishing clear rules and boundaries, families can demonstrate flexibility and create conditions for everyone to express their opinions. In some situations, family conflicts may require mediation from a third party. However, the most important aspect is for the family to cultivate understanding and empathy among each other. By creating a loving and supportive environment, parents and children can overcome conflicts and build stronger, resilient relationships.

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