

Mothers' and Fathers' Views of Parent-Youth Conflict in Youth with and without ADHD

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Background

- Limited parent-youth conflict is adaptive as it reflects adolescents' desire for independence from parents (Conger et al., 2002). However, intense parent-youth conflicts are associated with youth maladjustment, including problem behavior at school and academic performance (Forehand, Long, Brody, & Fauber, 1986).
- Intensive parent-adolescent conflicts are associated with parents', particularly mothers', sense of well-being. For example, the intensity of mother-adolescent conflict was found to be inversely related to mothers' self-esteem and life satisfaction (Silverberg & Steinberg, 1987).
- Parents of youth with ADHD rate their relationships with their youth as being more conflictual and indicate that they experience more anger during conflict discussions (Robin, 1990).
- Of the few studies conducted looking at attributions in the parent-youth subsystem, both observational (Mas, Alexander, & Turner, 1991) and self-report (Grace et al., 1993) studies have found an association between parent-youth conflict and blaming and global attributions about the other's behaviour.
- This study examined the degree of parent-youth conflict and the attributions for that conflict in mother-father dyads. It was expected that having youth with ADHD in the family would heighten conflict with parents with respect to general adolescent issues.

Method

Participants

- 34 to 65 year-old parents of 13 to 19-year-old youth with and without ADHD were recruited through schools and community sources.
- Parents' Marital Status: 74% married/common law, 20% separated/divorced: 20, 4% single, and 2% missing.

	of Youth with ADHD	of Control Youth	Total
Mothers	27	21	48
Fathers	24	21	45
Total	51	42	93

Measures

- Issues Checklist (IC;** Robin, 1975) is a 44-item list of the issues discussed with their adolescent in the last 4 weeks and the level of anger experienced. A 45th item "Internet/Computer use" was added to reflect changes in youth's habits.
- The **Parent-Adolescent Attribution Questionnaire (PAAQ)** modeled after the Mother-Adolescent Questionnaire (Grace et al., 1993) was developed by the first author of this study. The PAAQ was administered with the IC as a single measure and parents rated their beliefs (1 to 4 scale) about the causes of the identified conflict situations reflecting 7 attribution dimensions: internal, external, stability, globality, intentionality, blameworthy, and selfishly motivated, and how frequently this occurs.

Example of an item taken from the PAAQ -Mother Version.

Discussing Swearing with my son/daughter	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a) Is due to something about him/her				
b) Is due to something about me				
c) We are likely to continue having this conflict for a long time				
d) Affects other areas of our relationship				
e) S/he does this on purpose				
f) S/he only thinks of her own needs				
g) The fact that we argue about this is my son's/daughter's responsibility				
h) Arguing about this happens often				

Results

Conflict

- Do parents of adolescents with ADHD differ in the conflict with their youth in respect to parents of comparison adolescents?

Two 2 X 2 (ADHD status X gender) univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted.

As Figure 1 and 2 show, mothers and fathers of youth with ADHD reported experiencing more conflict and feeling angrier than mothers ($F(1, 46) = 20.79, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .33$) and fathers ($F(1, 42) = 13.71, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .26$) of comparison youth. No youth gender differences were found.

Figure 1. Mothers' of Youth with and without ADHD Views of Conflict

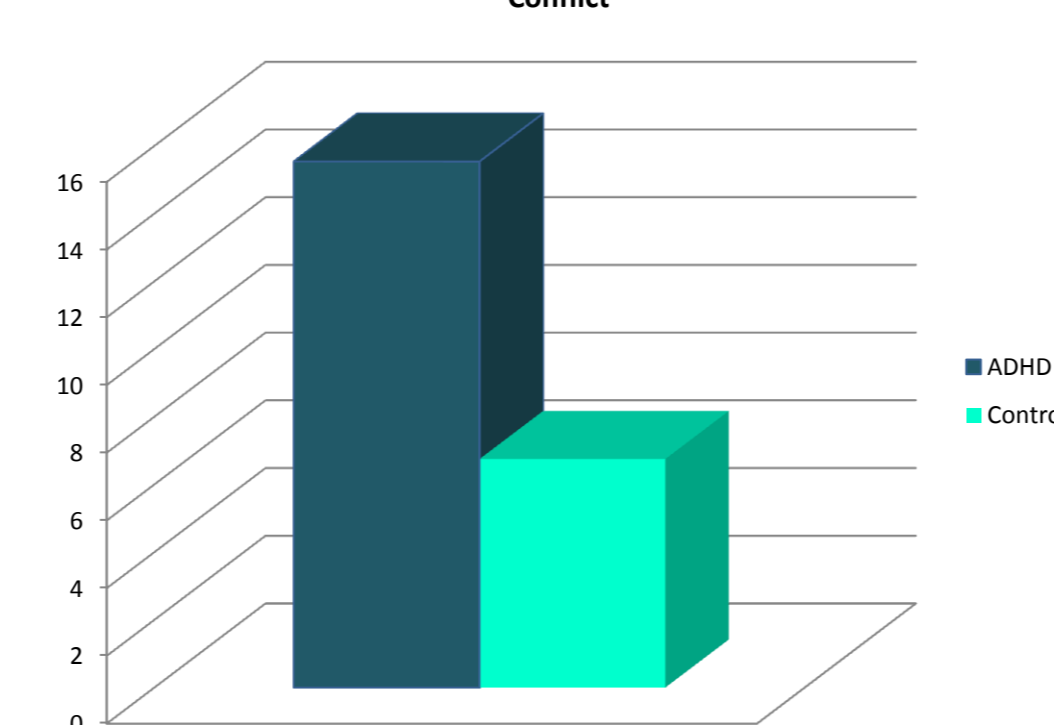
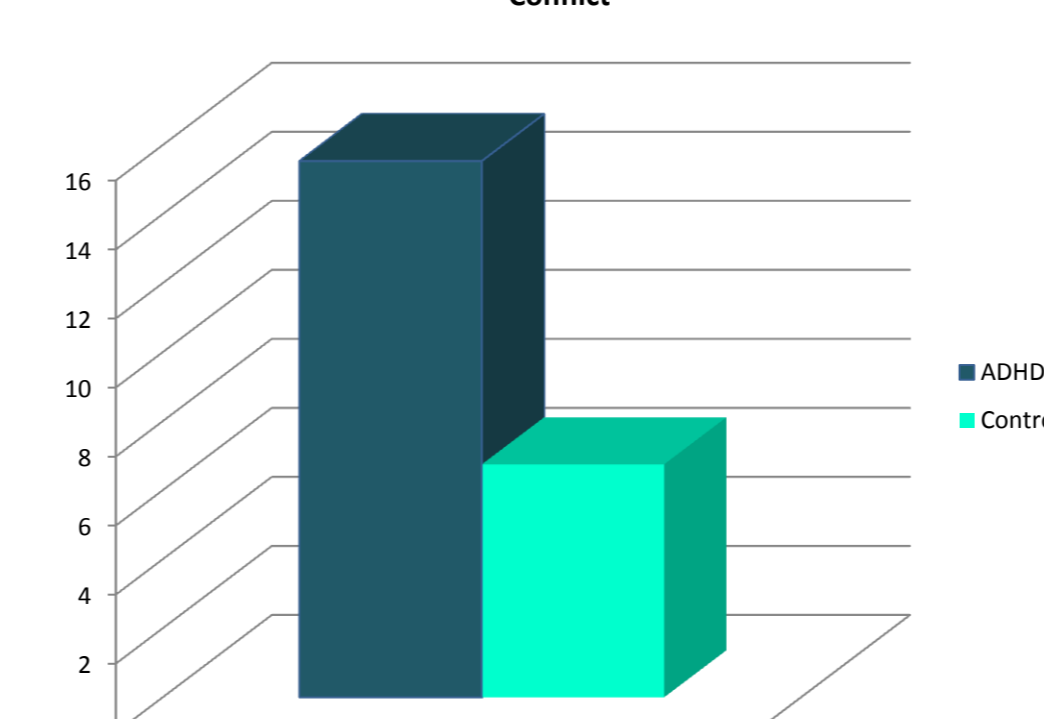


Figure 2. Fathers' of Youth with and without ADHD Views of Conflict



Attributions

- Do parents of adolescents with and without ADHD and mothers and fathers differ in their attributions for the conflicts they have?

Independent Samples *t*-tests showed no group significant differences and Paired Sample *t*-tests showed no differences between mothers and fathers. between the attributions of mothers and fathers by group.

- Are mothers' and fathers' attributions for conflicts with youth associated with the number of conflicts reported with their youth, respectively?

Pearson product correlations results showed that mothers' attributions are not associated with mother reported conflict with youth. However, as Table 1 shows, fathers' attributions are positively correlated with conflict with youth.

Table 1. Significant Correlations between Father-youth Conflict and Father Attributions for Conflict.

Father Attributions	Father-youth conflict (all sample)
External	.36
Stable	.35
Global	.54
Intentional	.43
Selfishly Motivated	.53

All $p < .05$

Results Cont.

What portion of the variance in fathers' views of number of conflicts they have with their adolescents is predicted by youth inattentive and hyperactive – impulsive symptoms and father attributions for that conflict?

Two Hierarchical Regression analyses with the total sample were conducted to predict fathers' perceptions of father-youth conflict.

- Step 1: ADHD (hyperactive-impulsive and Inattentive) symptoms
- Step 2: Composite of stable, global, and intent (inter-correlations range from .52 to .71, $p < .01$), external and selfish attributions.
- ADHD symptoms predicted 30% of the variance ($R^2 = .30, F(2,35) = 6.93, p = .003$) with inattention being the significant predictor ($\beta = .23, p = .026$). When added to the model, attributions predicted 33% of the variance. Thus, the entire model predicted 63% of the variance ($R^2 = .63, F(5,35) = 10.31, p < .001$) in number of issues that fathers and youth had conflict. The same results were obtained when the steps of the analysis were reversed.

Discussion

- In line with our predictions, mothers and father of youth with ADHD experience more conflict with their youth than parents of comparison youth.
- Contrary to our expectations, parents of youth with ADHD do not seem to differ from parents of comparison youth in their attributions for conflict.
- We are unsure of how to interpret the non-significant correlations between mothers' attributions for conflict and mother-youth conflict as the finding is contrary to previous studies findings.
- Scant research has explored father attributions about father-youth conflict. Nevertheless, and as previous research with mother attributions for mother-youth conflict would suggest (e.g., Grace et al., 1993), fathers' external, stable, global, intentional and selfishly motivated attributions predicted father-adolescent conflict. The finding that this pattern appears also in fathers with adolescents with ADHD is new.
- It is interesting that among the ADHD symptoms that youth have, the most predictive of father conflict are the inattentive symptoms. According to the literature (e.g., Barkley, 2004) ADHD manifests in youth as more inattentive than hyperactive symptoms. These results may mean that fathers view this inattention as bothersome. Problems such as disorganization, and poor attention to task may explain why parents of youth with ADHD report experiencing more conflict than parents of comparison youth.
- The fact that this study did not find differences between the attributions of parents of youth with and without ADHD may be due to insufficient power.
- The results that father attributions predict father-youth conflict over and above ADHD symptoms is important in that it suggest that reduction of maladaptive conflict might occur if fathers' responsibility attributions are addressed.

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