



How do school-related issues impact parent-adolescent relationships among youth with ADHD?

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Background

Youth with ADHD symptoms score lower than comparison youth on measures of academic achievement (Birchwood & Daley, 2010). Youth with ADHD have a higher rate of parent-adolescent conflict compared to peers without ADHD (Edwards et al., 2001). Adolescents' school performance can help shape the quality of parent-adolescent relationships. Research has shown a negative association between parent-adolescent conflict and adolescent academic achievement (Dotterer et al., 2008), however the nature of this relationship in adolescents with ADHD is unknown.

Research Objectives

- 1) Confirm the relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and academics (youth's academic achievement and parent's perceptions of learning problems).
- 2) Determine if this relationship differs for adolescents with and without ADHD.
- 3) Determine if adolescents with ADHD and their parents agree about the extent to which they argue about school related issues.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 51 families of 13 to 17-year-old adolescents ($M = 15.58$, $SD = 1.59$) and both parents (51 mothers and 43 fathers). Twenty-nine adolescents had a previous diagnosis of ADHD (17 males; 12 females), and 22 (12 males; 10 females) did not have an ADHD diagnosis or significant symptomatology. All participants with ADHD received a diagnosis of ADHD based on DSM-IV criteria and this was verified using the *Conners' Rating Scale-3rd Edition*.

Measures

The *Issues Checklist (IC; Robin, 1975)* is a 44-item list of issues consisting of both adolescent and parent reports of issues that might lead to conflicts. This allows for the comparison of mother, father, and adolescent perceptions of the various issues discussed in the last 4 weeks and the level of associated anger experienced. An issue was considered a *conflict* when the participant felt at least a little angry during the discussion (2 and above). A 45th item "Internet/Computer use" was added to reflect changes in adolescent's habits.

		How did you feel when you discussed this topic?			
Have you discussed?	Telephone Calls	Calm	A little angry	Very angry	
yes/no		1	2	3	4 5

The *Conners' Rating Scale-Third Edition (Conners, 2008)* is a standardized questionnaire used to assess parents' perceptions of their adolescents' DSM-IV inattentive and hyperactive symptoms, and learning problems. Parents rated the adolescents on behaviours using a 4-point scale.

The *Woodcock-Johnson Test of Academic Achievement - Third Edition (WJ-III; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001)* assessed adolescents' academic achievement.

Procedure

Data was collected as part of a larger program of research conducted by Dr. Judith Wiener at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. Questionnaires were administered to adolescents in individual sessions with a graduate student.

Results

1) Association between Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Academics

In the overall sample, correlations were conducted to determine if parent-adolescent conflict (as reported by adolescent, mother and father independently) were correlated with adolescents' academic achievement or parents' perceptions of learning problems.

- Adolescents academic achievement was negatively correlated with parent-adolescent conflict as reported by mother ($r = -.46$, $p < .01$) and father ($r = -.30$, $p = .05$).
- Parent's perceptions of learning problems is positively correlated with parent-adolescent conflict as reported by mother ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) and father ($r = .37$, $p = .02$).
- Neither academic achievement ($r = .20$, $p = .15$) nor parent's perceptions of learning problems ($r = .12$, $p = .41$) were associated with adolescent report parent-adolescent conflict.

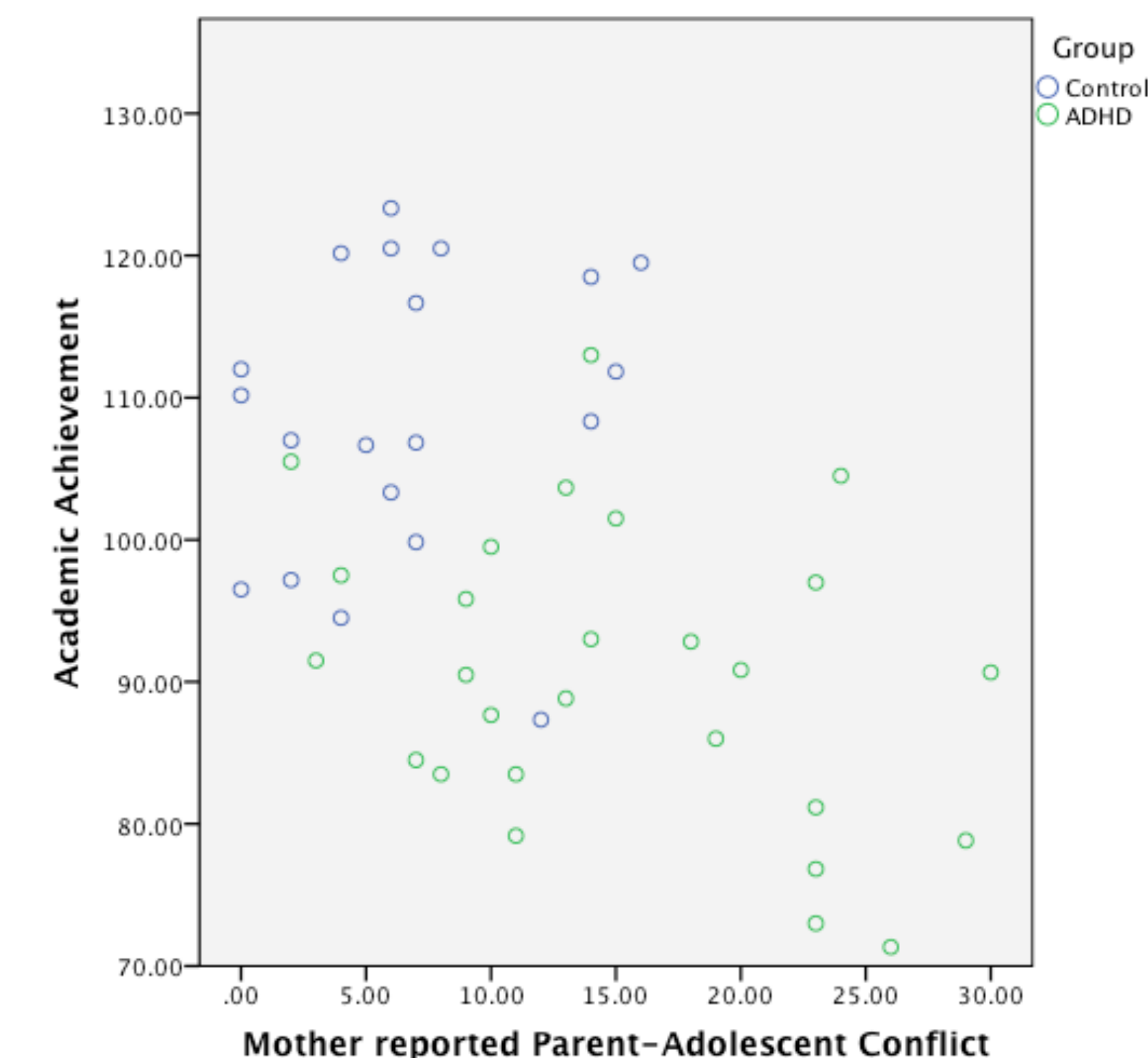
	Adolescent academic achievement	Parent perceptions' of learning problems
Father reported parent-adolescent conflict	NEGATIVELY CORRELATED	NEGATIVELY CORRELATED
Mother reported parent-adolescent conflict	NEGATIVELY CORRELATED	NEGATIVELY CORRELATED
Adolescent reported parent-adolescent conflict	NO RELATIONSHIP	NO RELATIONSHIP

2) Differences in relationships for adolescents with and without ADHD

The above correlations were conducted in the ADHD and comparison group separately.

- The strength of the relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and academic achievement and parent perceptions of learning problems significantly decreases or disappears when examined in the ADHD and comparison groups separately.
- The only correlation that approaches significance is between academic achievement and mother-reported parent-adolescent conflict ($r = -.35$, $p = .07$) in the ADHD group.
- While this may be due to small sample size, another possible explanation is that adolescents with ADHD demonstrate low academic achievement and high levels of parent-adolescent conflict, while comparison youth demonstrate higher levels of achievement and lower levels of parent-adolescent conflict.

- For example, a scatter plot of mother reported parent-adolescent conflict and academic achievement shows that **adolescents with ADHD (green)** tend to be higher in parent-adolescent conflict and lower in academic achievement. **Adolescents in the control group (blue)** tend to be lower in parent-adolescent conflict and higher in academic achievement.



Results continued

3) Agreement about discussion of school-related issues

For each of the four school-related issues on the Issues Checklist, a chi-square test explored whether adolescents with ADHD and their parents endorsed discussing school-related issues more frequently than adolescents without ADHD and their parents (Table 1; only results attaining $p \leq .01$ were reported).

• While parents of youth with ADHD were significantly more likely to report conflict about school-related issues than parents of comparison youth, adolescents with ADHD did not differ from their comparison peers in their reports.

Variable	ADHD		Comparison		χ^2	p	V
	n	%	n	%			
Getting to school on time (mother report)	18/27	66.7	1/20	5.0	18.14	.001	.62**
Getting low grades in school (mother report)	12/27	44.4	1/20	5.0	8.93	.003	.44*
Getting in trouble at school (mother report)	10/27	37.0	0/20	0.0	9.41	.002	.45*
Getting on school on time (father report)	11/21	52.4	2/20	10.0	8.50	.004	.45*
Getting in trouble at school (father report)	7/21	33.3	0/20	0.0	8.04	.005	.44*

Table 1. Differences in the Type of Conflicts Reported by Adolescents, Mothers, and Fathers by ADHD Status.

Discussion

- The present study confirmed a relationship between mother- and father-reported parent-adolescent conflict and academics in the overall sample. The relationship was not found between adolescent-reported conflict and academics.
- The strength of this relationship decreased when it was examined in the groups separately. This may be due to the fact that adolescents with ADHD typically present with lower academic achievement and higher parent-adolescent conflict. An awareness of these academic and relationship difficulties is important for professionals working with adolescents with ADHD.
- Parents of adolescents with ADHD reported having discussed school-related issues with their teens more frequently than parents of adolescents without ADHD. However, teens with and without ADHD did not differ in the extent to which they reported having discussed school-related issues with their parents.
- Future research is needed to examine the directionality of the relationship between parent-adolescents conflict and academics in youth with ADHD.

References

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