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 (adolescent’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.

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=.48, 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.

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 the correlations between 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 often than adolescents without ADHD and their parents (Table 1: only results attain p ≤.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.

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.
- Parent’s 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 directionalitiy of the relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and academics in youth with ADHD.

References