



<https://doi.org/10.36475/9.2.7>

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This research [PHDF-22-1043] has been supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSFG)

MARITAL CONFLICT AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING OF ADOLESCENTS, PROTECTIVE AND RISK FACTORS

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received	17.05.2023
Accepted	31.05.2023
Published	30.06.2023

Keywords:

Adolescent, Well-being,
Family support programs

ABSTRACT

The family is the source of socialisation for the adolescent, whose main duty is to take care of the child and promote its development. When there is a conflict in the family that the parents cannot handle with their own resources, the well-being of the child is significantly affected. In order to protect the child's interests and ensure his well-being, the state should create family support programs that will help the child cope with psychosocial problems in the family. Currently, family support programs are very small and inaccessible. In addition, the existing programs do not have a preventive purpose and do not mean understanding the family as a unified system, thereby questioning the effectiveness of the existing record in the law of the state's obligation to care for the welfare of adolescents. The study considered it significant to determine in what cases the magnitude of the reflection of marital conflict on children increases or decreases and aimed to identify variables that interfere with the psychosocial well-being of adolescents and marital conflict. As a result of the research, the factors supporting the well-being of the adolescent in the process of marital conflict were identified. It is recommended to create a family support program focusing on the identified factors.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the most important link in society, which reflects the connection between the changing and developing processes of humanity and plays a decisive role in the processes of human education, value transmission, influencing interests, and socialisation. The family, in turn, determines the level of satisfaction of its members, and marital conflict poses a threat to the psychosocial well-being of family members.¹

The conflict between husband and wife, in turn, is related to the number of stressful situations in the family: the stress of family members; the child's aggression; with stress caused by the financial situation; a lack of care and attention; with the role of children as victims; with their intellectual, academic, and social life; with psychosocial changes and antisocial tendencies; with premature sexual relations; and with the decline of children's academic performance.²

According to scientists,³ community – and state-level family support services play a major role in reducing the risk of marital conflict and its negative consequences. Services designed to sup-

port couples in marital conflict offer a variety of counselling or therapy services to the conflicted couple and their family members and care for their well-being.⁴ The higher the level of marital conflict, the greater the risk that the adolescent will develop psychological and behavioural difficulties, in which case the presence of family support programs significantly reduces this risk.⁵

According to Article 24 of the Code of Children's Rights of Georgia, the parent is obliged to take care of the child and, as necessary, participate in child support measures offered by the state. For this, the state, according to the law, must create family support programs, taking into account the individual needs of the child.⁶

It was determined, as a result of research conducted in 2021⁷, that there are few and/or unavailable family support programs in Georgia, and most of them only apply to cases of legal disputes between husband and wife over children. The research revealed the need to develop a program to deal with the conflict between the parents of the child, which will significantly reduce the negative reflection of the conflict on the child and find support for the parties. According to family welfare researchers⁸, in order to create an effective family support program that will prevent the negative reflection of marital conflict on children, it is necessary to consider the mediating variables of marital conflict and children's well-being, which change the relationship between these two variables.

- 1 Gunindi, Y., Tazel Sahin F., Demiracioghlu H., (2012) Functions of the Family: family Structure and Place of residence. Energy Education Science and Technology, Part B: Social and Education Studies, Vol. 4(1), p. 549: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236620003>
- 2 Pruett M., K., and Barker R. (2009), Children of Divorce: New Trends and Ongoing Dilemmas, Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Family Psychology, Ed. By Bray, J., H., and Stanton, M., Wiley-Blackwell, (Chapter 31) A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Publications, p.463, DOI: [10.1002/9781444310238.ch31](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444310238.ch31)
- 3 Agnew, R., White H., R., (1992). "An Empirical Test of General Strain Theory." *Criminology* 30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1992.tb01113.x> Family Justice Review (2011) Final Report, Published on behalf of the Family Justice Review Panel by The Ministry of Justice the Department for Education and the Welsh Government. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/217343/family-justice-review-final-report.pdf

- 4 Homrich A., Glover M., M., White A., B., (2005), Program Profile: The Court Care Center For Divorcing Families, *Family Court Review*, 42(1), p. 145-151, DOI: [10.1111/j.174-1617.2004.tb00639.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.174-1617.2004.tb00639.x)
- 5 Nurse A., R., and Thompson P., (2009) Collaborative Divorce: A family-Centred Process, Blackwell Handbook of Family Psychology, Ed. By Bray, J., H., and Stanton, M., Wiley-Blackwell, (Chapter 32) A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Publications, p. 477-482, ISBN: 978-1-405-16994-3.
- 6 Code of Rights of the Child, (2019), <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4613854?publication=2>
- 7 Kitoshvili, N, (2021) The role of psychosocial services in the divorce process, *Кезж* 02(59), ISSN 1512-1801; Kitoshvili, N, (2021) Access to psychosocial services in David's divorce process, *Erovnu* Defense Academy, conference collection; Kitoshvili, N, (2021) Studying the role of the judge in reducing the stress caused by David's divorce, *Intellect* 01 (68).
- 8 Miner, J., Schofield, Th., S., (2016) Mediation and Moderation of Divorce Effects on Children's Behavior Problems, *Journal of Family Psychology*, *J Fam Psychol*, p.1, DOI: [10.1037/fam0000043](https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000043)

The aim of this study was to identify the mediating factors of marital conflict and adolescent psychosocial well-being. The mentioned variables will form the basis for the flexible program needed to improve the psycho-emotional condition of the children of the conflicted husband and wife, based on scientific research and the practical experience of experts, and will be a kind of basis that will effectively support the psychosocial well-being of the adolescent in the process of marital conflict and will be able to prevent the reflection of harm.

MARITAL CONFLICT

Parental disagreement affects the psycho-emotional state of children. It is difficult to pinpoint one specific cause of marital conflict⁹; however, according to Mosman and Falke¹⁰, Conflict occurs when parents cannot agree on parenting approaches, time spent together, finances, and family roles. Conflict arising from any reason reduces harmony in the family, increases discomfort between family members, and manifests itself in a significant deterioration in the quality of cohesiveness, adaptability, and communication between husband and wife. Deteriorated communication, adaptability, and cohesiveness have a negative impact on the functioning of the family and the well-being of its members, in particular the children.¹¹

- 9 Kerig, P., K., (1998). Moderators and Mediators of the Effect of Inter – parental Conflict on Children’s adjustment, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, Vol.26, No.3, p.208, doi: [10.1023/a:1022672201957](https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1022672201957).
- 10 Mosmann, C., & Falcke, D., (2011). Marital conflicts: causes and frequency. *Rev. SPAGESP* [online]. 2011, vol.12, n.2, p.5-8, ISSN 1677-2970.
- 11 Emery R., E., (1982). Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce. *Psychological Bulletin*, 92(2), p. 311, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.92.2.310>; Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent-Child Interaction. In P. H. Mussen, & E. M. Hetherington (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, Personality, and Social Development*, pp. 85. New York: Wiley, DOI: [10.4236/psych.2015.66066](https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2015.66066); Olson, D., H., (2000) Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems, *Journal of Family Therapy*, The Association for Family Therapy 2000. Published by Blackwell Publishers, pp. 163-164.

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING OF ADOLESCENTS

Raising and developing a child is a multi-faceted process that involves care so that the child takes place in society and has a high level of well-being. An adolescent's well-being is related to psychosocial and socio-pedagogical factors, which help him identify difficulties and develop the ability to develop solution strategies. It aids in the satisfaction of needs and self-realisation.¹² The assimilation process of norms, certain systems, and values in society is a prerequisite for the well-being of the adolescent.¹³

At the age of adolescence, the adolescent becomes a person, and at this time, the family acquires special importance. At this age, the well-being of the teenager should be considered, taking into account family relationships. The family represents a standard of behaviour for the adolescent that ensures the satisfaction of his psycho-emotional and economic needs.¹⁴ Adolescent well-being is expressed in bio-psychosocial dimensions, including material well-being, living conditions, level of education, social relationships, and self-esteem. All this poses a significant threat when there is a conflict between husband and wife, which they do not have the resources to overcome.¹⁵

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

In 2021, we were interested in the existence of psychosocial support services in the process of marital disputes in Georgia, their content, their

- 12 Platonov, JU. P., (2006). *Social Psychology of Behavior*, Study Guide, Piter, p. 66.
- 13 Salia M., (2008) *The Role of School and Family in Adolescent Socialization*, Intercultural Communications, Iliia Chavchavadze National Library of the Parliament of Georgia 2008 #5, Tbilisi, ISSN 1512-4363.
- 14 Shatberashvili, N., (2011). *The Politics of Social Welfare: A Social Work Perspective*, for Masters of Social Work, Intellect Press, pp. 46-47, https://digitallibrary.tsu.ge/book/2022/Jun/readers/shatberashvili_socialuri_ketild-geobis_rideri.pdf
- 15 OECD (2009), *Compare Child Wellbeing across the OECD, Doing Better for Children*, OECD, ISBN 978-92-64-05933-7.

availability, and the degree of involvement of experts working in this field in this service. According to studies conducted,¹⁶ the following questions were answered: what psychosocial services exist for family members in the process of marital dispute; how accessible they are; what difficulties do the parties face; and what changes does the mentioned process require?

In the first stage, the legal details of the dispute process between the spouses in Georgia and the importance of psychosocial services for the parties were analysed in the framework of the desk research. Subsequently, publicly requested documents from various institutions were analysed, and finally, expert interviews were conducted with experts working in the family, judicial, legal, and psychosocial spheres. As a result of the research, we determined:

1. During a legal conflict between husband and wife:

1.1. *The prerequisites for the use of court mediation are not established in court; the judge decides on the use of services subjectively.*

1.2. *There is no recording data on the involvement of a social worker and a psychologist in declared family disputes, as well as the deadlines are given to the couple for settlement;*

1.3. *The court does not collect or process statistical data on which service or activity has what result or whether the court contributed to existing settlement cases.*

The main difficulty of the process was identified as the lack of the number and scope of services available to the parties in the process of marital conflict; also that the existing services are focused only on intervention and not prevention of the difficulties of families involved in legal disputes, and thus neglecting the child's rights to well-being and his real psychosocial needs.

According to family, court, legal, and psychosocial practitioners, it was necessary to create family psycho-education and effective services in the court and community. Increasing the number and

qualifications of personnel involved in the process of marital conflict will significantly decrease the difficulties in the process.

MARITAL CONFLICT AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

There are mediating variables that play a mediating and moderating role between marital conflict and adolescent psychosocial well-being.¹⁷ Different authors emphasise different mediating variables, and all of them agree on the need to consider these variables in reducing or preventing the harm of marital conflict. Among them are:

Parenting style, which means ensuring that children's needs are met and being able to promote their development. The difference between parenting styles and how strict, lazy, and/or loyal a parent is affects a child's discipline, emotional state, and behavioural tendencies.¹⁸ In the family, the child learns behavioural models, and in this case, the parent's attitude becomes an example for him. The parenting style, in turn, is affected by the relationship between the couple. The more tense the relationship between parents, the more likely it is that the parent will change his attitude towards the child, which in turn affects the child's well-being.¹⁹

Family functioning is considered a family's ability to solve problems, have healthy communication between members, distribute roles, and have emotional involvement and responsibilities.²⁰ Of the functions of the family, the ability to solve problems and overcome conflicts is of special importance.²¹ This means that if, despite the marital

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18 *Ibid.*, p.316.

19 Patchin, I., W., (2006). The Family Context of Childhood, Delinquency, Criminal Justice, *Recent Scholarship*. A Series from LFB Scholarly Publishing, New York, p.16-17; <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0615/2006019393.html>

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21 Gunindi, Y., Tazel Sahin F., Demircioglu H., (2012) Functions of the Family: family Structure and Place of resi-

conflict, the current distribution of roles is satisfactory and the couple tries to find ways to resolve the conflict, then their disagreement will have less impact on the child's well-being.²²

Perception of finances refers to the availability of the family to meet all material needs as well as the perception of the family members about these needs and the ways to meet them. This implies that people who perceive their income as low have less psychosocial well-being than those whose perception of material resources is more positive.²³ Access to certain resources, including financial resources, becomes relevant during the parental conflict. It was found that the higher the perception of the family's financial situation, the less negative the impact of marital conflict on the children.²⁴

Psychosocial support refers to the safety of family members and the belief that they will be supported and accepted. Adults who feel supported feel better about themselves, even when there is conflict and disagreement between husband and wife.²⁵ In the case when the husband and wife cannot deal with the existing conflict, and there is no access to psychosocial services, there is a high probability that the parents will close in on themselves and ignore the child's need for support.²⁶

Gender, age, education, and other factors in-

fluence whether the impact of marital conflict on children is intensified or reduced, as well as the children's gender, age, education, ethnicity, and the relationship between parent and child.²⁷

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The conclusion of the research is the need to develop a program supporting children in the process of marital conflict, which, according to relevant literature and empirical studies, will significantly reduce the negative reflection of the conflict on the child and make the process less stressful for the parties.

Based on this, we can conclude that the following factors support the psychosocial well-being of adolescents in marital conflict: unchanged parenting style, family functioning, financial situation, and feeling of support.

Taking into account the results of the research, it is necessary to create a family support program that is focused on the research and modification of parenting styles, supporting and promoting healthy family functioning, promoting financial health, and providing psychosocial support.

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