

“The impact of Post-Divorce Parental Conflict on Adolescents’ Self-Esteem: An Examination of the Role of Parent-Child Relationship Quality”

Master’s thesis Utrecht University

Master’s Programme in Clinical Child, Family and Education Studies

Sènamì Houndayi (7262027)

UU-ser #23-0247

Supervising lecturer: Rianne van Dijk

Second assessor: Rogier Verhoef

09/06/2023

Abstract

Background: A large body of research shows that post-divorce parental conflict can have major consequences for children's well-being, including lower self-esteem. A positive parent-child relationship has in addition shown to positively affect children's self-esteem and serve as a buffer. However, the longitudinal effects of post-divorce parental conflict on adolescents' self-esteem and the role of the parent-child relationship, have received less attention. Adolescent self-esteem post-divorce is important to examine, because suffering from low self-esteem can have a detrimental impact on one's life. **Aim:** The current study investigated the relationship between post-divorce parental conflict and adolescents' self-esteem, and examined the possible moderating role of parent-child relationship quality. Could the parent-child relationship serve as a buffer for the negative consequences of post-divorce parental conflict on adolescents' self-esteem. **Method:** 132 children completed questionnaires to examine the associations between post-divorce parental conflict (CBQ), self-esteem (CBSK-A) and parent-child relationship quality (CBQ), and to examine parent-child relationship quality as a potential moderator. Two multiple regression analyses were conducted to answer the research questions. **Results:** Post-divorce parental conflict was positively associated with a relative change in adolescents' self-esteem. Moreover, parent-child relationship quality was not significantly associated with adolescents' self-esteem and did not moderate the association between parental conflict and self-esteem. **Discussion:** The importance of examining the development of children's self-esteem post-divorce was confirmed by previous research. Further research is needed to assess possible explanations for the unexpected positive association between post-divorce parental conflict and relative change in adolescents' self-esteem.

Keywords: divorce, parental conflict, adolescents, parent-child relationship, well-being

The impact of Post-Divorce Parental Conflict on Adolescents' Self-Esteem: An Examination of the Role of Parent-Child Relationship Quality

In 2021, 24.334 underage children in the Netherlands were involved in a formal divorce and an estimated 20.000 children each year are involved in informal divorces (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). A large body of research shows that children with divorced parents are disadvantaged in a number of life outcomes when compared to children from intact families (Amato, 2001; Lansford, 2009). One of these outcomes is low self-esteem (Hetherington, 2003). Suffering from low self-esteem can have a significant influence on one's life. Adolescents with low self-esteem are found more likely to suffer from mental health problems, commit crimes and experience higher unemployment rates as adults when compared to those with high self-esteem (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). It is not so much the parental separation, but the conflicts that often accompany it that seem responsible for the negative impact on adolescents' functioning (Amato & Keith, 1991; Spruijt & Kormos, 2014). More post-divorce parental conflict is in fact shown to be correlated with lower self-esteem in adolescents (Hetherington, 2003; Amato & Keith, 1991; Harold & Sellers, 2018; Noller et al., 2008). While post-divorce parental conflict has shown to negatively affect children's well-being, some studies suggest that the intensity and duration of these effects can vary (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Factors such as the parent-child relationship may influence the impact on children. The parent-child relationship can play a significant role in the level of self-esteem of adolescents. Several studies have shown that positive parent-child relationships promote self-esteem in adolescence (Keizer et al., 2019; Li & Seltzer, 2005; Wissink et al., 2006). This study takes a closer look at the possible moderating role of parent-child relationship quality.

Post-Divorce Parental Conflict and Self-Esteem

Every year, about 3.500 children in the Netherlands are involved in a high-conflict divorce (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2022). Parental conflict following a divorce is marked by parents' inability to communicate politely, parental disputes and hostility (Neff & Cooper, 2005). Multiple studies show a correlation between conflicting divorced parents and lower self-esteem among adolescents (Amato, 1986; Noller et al., 2008; Pawlak & Klein, 1997; Turner & Kopiec, 2006). Several explanations are given for this association. The emotional security theory, developed by Davies and Cummings (1994) suggests that parental conflict increases the child's vulnerability to psychological problems by threatening her or his sense of security in multiple family contexts (e.g. parent-child, interparental). Cognitions associated with threatened family security will likely affect child

functioning (Davies et al., 2002). In addition, according to the family systems theory family members are interdependent and interconnected (Bowen, 1993; Minuchin, 1985), *spillover effects* cause certain events or interactions within the parent's dyadic subsystem (parental conflicts) to negatively affect the child's individual subsystem (Cox & Paley 1997; Erel & Burman, 1995).

In a cross-sectional study, Turner & Kopiec (2006) examined the effect of exposure to parental conflict on the mental health of young adults in a sample of 649 students aged 18 to 29 years. The results show that exposure to parental conflict during childhood is negatively associated with self-esteem in young adulthood. Amato (1986) studied the cross-sectional relationship between parental conflict and level of self-esteem in a sample of 142 adolescents and 132 children. Among adolescents Amato noted a negative correlation between parental conflict and self-esteem only for males. This suggests that the effects of parental conflict differ, based on gender. Amato's findings propose that conflict between parents' damages self-esteem because it poses a loyalty dilemma for their children. Adolescents might blame themselves for the parental conflict, which causes lower self-esteem (Grych et al., 2000). Besides, Amato (1986) found that the negative effects of parental conflict tended to be stronger when the parent-child relationships were poor. The next section further examines parent-child relationship quality in relation to self-esteem.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Self-Esteem

Another factor related to adolescents' self-esteem is parent-child relationship quality. Research indicates that self-esteem is shaped and strengthened by positive, supportive and affective parent-child relationships (Li & Seltzer, 2005; Wissink et al., 2006). Those who perceive a positive and supportive relationship with their parents are more likely to feel greater self-worth and self-esteem. The attachment theory by Bowlby (1988) provides a valuable framework for understanding the link between parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem. This theory states that children's emotional and social development is primarily influenced by attachment relationships with their caregivers (Bowlby, 1988). Frequent interactions between children and their caregivers, where the caregiver offers a secure base, result in the development of attachment relationships (Benoit, 2004). Those who feel securely attached to their caregivers tend to show higher levels of self-esteem (Gamble & Roberts, 2005; Keizer et al, 2019; Wilkinson, 2004). A parent-child relationship of high quality is among other things characterized by warmth, communication and safety (Mahrer et al., 2018).

Wissink et al. (2006) evaluated the association between parent-child relationship quality, parenting behavior and several developmental outcomes (including self-esteem)

among 541 adolescents aged 12 to 16 years old. They discovered that a negative quality of the parent-adolescent relationship was related to lower levels of self-esteem. In their longitudinal study Keizer et al. (2019), examined the association between the perceived quality of parent-adolescent attachment relationships and adolescents' self-esteem, separately for father and mother. The study included 633 adolescents between the ages 11 to 18 years old. The results showed that adolescents' self-esteem was positively correlated with the perceived quality of their attachment relationships with their mothers and fathers. Interestingly, the study also discovered that, when compared to the father-adolescent attachment relationship, the perceived quality of the mother-adolescent attachment relationship had a stronger association with self-esteem.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality as a Moderator

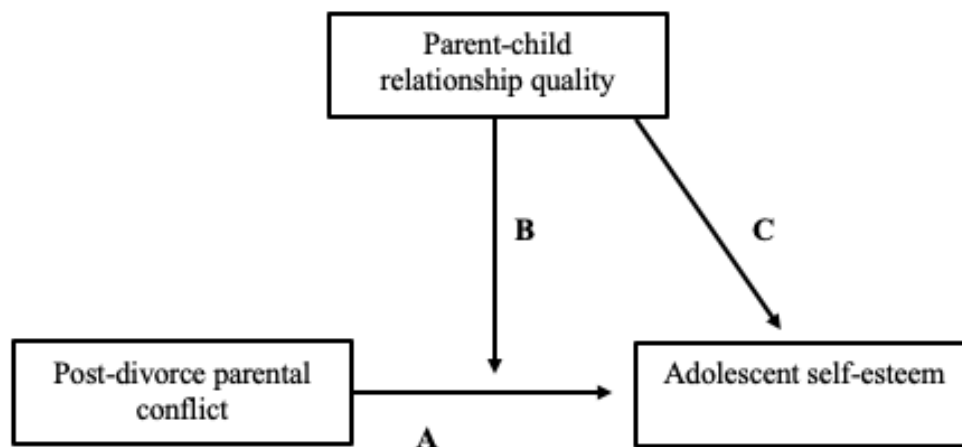
Even though research has shown that parental conflict is a significant predictor of reduced self-esteem, not all children suffer the same negative outcomes. A potential factor that may buffer against the negative impact of parental conflict is parent-child relationship quality. The parent-child relationship has shown to be a key factor in children's well-being (Stafford et al., 2016) and is in particular important in the context of divorce as parents are an important source of support (King et al., 2017). Several studies suggest that parent-child relationship quality can serve as a buffer for problems in children and adolescents (Mahrer et al., 2018; O'Hara et al., 2021; Sandler et al., 2013). In a sample of 141 divorced families with high conflict, Sandler et al. (2013) looked into the relationship between mother and father parenting quality and child mental health issues. The findings support the idea that the well-being of children in high-conflict divorced families is better when they spend enough time with at least one parent who provides high quality parenting. However, not much is known about how parent-child relationship quality moderates the relationship between post-divorce parental conflict and children's self-esteem. Investigating this moderation, to better understand how parent-child relationship quality could buffer against negative outcomes is therefore crucial.

Current Research

The purpose of this study was to gain more insight into the longitudinal relationship between post-divorce parental conflict and adolescents' self-esteem, and the possible moderating role of parent-child relationship quality. While several studies have examined the impact of parental conflict on adolescents' self-esteem and the influence of parent-child relationship quality on various outcomes, there is limited research that combines these factors in a longitudinal design. This study could serve as scientific evidence on the course of

adolescents' self-esteem after parental conflict post-divorce, considering parent-child relationship quality. In addition, this study could have significant practical implications for professionals. By identifying the possible protective role of parent-child relationship quality, professionals could be informed and improve interventions that promote positive parent-child relationships.

The following research question has been addressed: Is there an association between post-divorce parental conflict and adolescents' self-esteem, and does the parent-child relationship quality impact the strength of this association? Based on the family systems theory (Bowen, 1993; Minuchin, 1985), the emotional security theory (Davies & Cummings) and the studied literature that has shown a correlation between post-divorce parental conflict and self-esteem (Amato & Keith, 1991; Harold & Sellers, 2018; Hetherington, 2003; Noller et al, 2008; Pawlak & Klein, 1997; Turner & Kopiec, 2006), adolescents' self-esteem was expected to be negatively related to post-divorce parental conflict (path A in *Figure 1*). Hence, more parental conflict was associated with a larger negative change in self-esteem over time. Furthermore, it was expected that a higher quality of the father-child- and mother-child relationship was positively associated with adolescents' self-esteem. (path C in *Figure 1*). Based on the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) and research showing that a positive parent-child relationship promotes self-esteem amongst adolescents (Keizer et al., 2019; Li & Seltzer, 2005; Wissink et al., 2006) and parents are an important source of support for children during divorce (King et al., 2017). Finally, it was expected that the negative effect of post-divorce parental conflict on adolescents' self-esteem was smaller when there was a higher parent-child relationship quality (path B in *Figure 1*). As stated above, previous research has shown that a high-quality parent-child relationship can serve as a buffer for the negative effects on children following divorce (Mahrer et al., 2018; O'Hara et al., 2021; Sandler et al., 2013). This is also consistent with the attachment theory, which suggests that a child's social and emotional development is primarily influenced by the attachment relationships with their caregivers (Bowlby, 1988).

Figure 1*Conceptual Model***Methods**

The data reported in this study are derived from the longitudinal research project ‘Family Dynamics after Divorce’ (FDD; Van Dijk et al., 2021). The data were collected between February 2016 and December 2020. The FDD study was approved by the Faculty Ethics Review Board of Utrecht University. The study consists of three annual measurements (referred to as T1, T2 and T3). The current study uses data from all three measurement waves. Parental conflict was measured at T1 to establish a clear temporal precedence, examining how parental conflict shortly after divorce is related to adolescents’ self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured at T1 and T3, to be able to investigate the long-term effects of parental conflict on self-esteem and to examine a relative change in self-esteem over time. The average of parental conflict across multiple time points was used (T1, T2 and T3) to be able to provide a comprehensive representation of the construct by capturing the longitudinal nature of the parent-child relationship.

Procedure

The participants were recruited through online advertising aimed at divorced parents, newsletters in schools and in waiting rooms of counsellors, mediators and general practitioners. Both parents as well as the children had to give informed consent for the participation in this study. At all three measurement waves, children, fathers and/or mothers and teachers of the children filled out questionnaires. The questions were read out loud for children between the ages of 8-10, or those with dyslexia or a reading disability. Data were collected through annual home visits. If both parents participated, there was one home visit with mother and one with father.

Participants

The sample of this study consisted of $N = 74$ families, with information collected from $n = 132$ children and adolescents, $n = 74$ mothers, and $n = 53$ fathers at T1. At T1, the children and adolescents were between the age of 8 – 17 years old ($M = 11.79$; $SD = 2.30$), of which 52.5% were boys and 48.5% girls. The group of children primarily comprised of Dutch children (95%). Just over half of them (55%) went to primary school and the rest to secondary school. Almost a third of the children (30.3%) lived with both parents an equal amount of time (3-4 days/nights each), 53.4% lived mostly with their mother and 16.3% lived mostly with their father. At T1, parents were on average separated for 11.4 months ($SD = 6.47$). Mothers were between 29 and 55 years old ($M = 43.58$ years, $SD = 5.69$) and fathers were between 32 and 61 years old ($M = 45.56$, $SD = 6.34$).

Measures

Parental Conflicts

To measure post-divorce parental conflict at T1 the subscale ‘parental conflict’ (10 items) of the Coparenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ; Schum & Stolberg, 2007) was used. The CBQ is a standardized 86-item questionnaire that measures co-parenting interactions and parenting behaviors of divorced parents, measured from the perspective of the child. This instrument is designed for ages between 10 -17. It questions their parents’ behavior from the past three months. The child reported measures were being used since children seem to experience a divorce differently than their parents (Wallerstein, 1991). Grych (2005) states that children’s report of conflict that they witnessed tend to be more closely related with their adjustment than are parents reports of conflict. An example item of the scale was ‘my parents complain about each other’. Some items had to be reversed. The items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (5). The scores were combined to an average score for ‘parental conflict’, with a higher score implying more parental conflict. The reliability and validity of the CBQ have been examined and are sufficient according to Rothbart et al. (2001) and in the current study (Cronbach’s $a = .90$).

Parent-Child Relationship Quality

The perceived quality of the parent-child relationship was being measured at T1, T2 and T3 with the subscales ‘parental warmth’ and ‘parent-child communication’ (for mothers and fathers separately), of the CBQ (Schum & Stolberg, 2007), reported by children. Example items of the scales were ‘I do fun things with my mother/father’ (parental warmth; 7 items), ‘my mother/father and I have friendly talks’ (parent-child communication; 6 items). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree*

(5), where higher scores indicate a higher parent-child relationship quality. A total average score for father-child and mother-child relationship quality was calculated by combining the scores of the subscales 'parental warmth' and 'parent-child communication', as they correlated well. The subscales used for mother-child relationship quality can be perceived as reliable (Cronbach's $a = .85$), the same goes for father-child relationship quality (Cronbach's $a = .92$).

Self-Esteem

The level of self-esteem was measured at T1 and T3 by using the subscale 'self-esteem' of the CBSK-A, and adapted version of the Children's Competency Experience Scale (CBSK; Treffers et al., 2002). The CBSK provides an impression of how a child perceives himself and how he or she rates his or her own abilities and adequacy in a number of relevant areas of life (Treffers et al., 2002). An example item of the scale (consisting out of 5 items) was 'I am quite satisfied with myself'. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Not true at all* (1) to *Completely true* (5), where higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem. The scores were combined to a total average score of the variable 'self-esteem'. With a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 5, a high score implied a high level of self-esteem. Some items had to be reversed. Cronbach's alpha at measurement waves 1 and 3 ranged from $a = .71$ to $a = .81$.

Analyses

The data were analyzed using the *IBM SPSS Statistics 28 program*. This research consisted of *relationship-based* research questions with three variables: The dependent variable (self-esteem), the independent variable (parental conflict) and a possible moderator (parent-child relationship quality). All variables are on interval measurement level. Two multiple regression analyses with interaction effects were conducted to answer the research questions. Before the regression analyses were performed, it was examined whether the associated assumptions were met: normal distribution, outliers, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. As a first step of the analysis, the main effect for the first research question was established: the association parental conflict and self-esteem. Second, the model was extended by testing the relationship between parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem. As a third step, the interaction terms parental conflict*father-child relationship quality and parental conflict*mother-child relationship quality was added to the model to examine an interaction effect. The different interaction terms for father- and mother-child relationship quality were tested in two separate models. In all the models of the regression analyses age, gender and self-esteem at T1 were added as covariates. During the analyses a significance level of .05

was maintained. A significant interaction effect will be shown in a plot. When a significant interaction effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is found, there is a moderation effect (Field, 2018).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of all study variables and their correlations are presented in Table 1. On average, parental conflict within the sample was remarkably low, despite the lack of direct comparison material. Parental conflict was significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem at T1, and was not correlated with self-esteem at T3. This means a higher degree of parental conflict was associated with a lower degree of self-esteem at T1. Additionally, parental conflict showed a significant negative correlation with father-child relationship quality, but not with mother-child relationship quality. Father-child relationship quality was also significantly positively correlated with self-esteem at T3. Meaning higher father-child relationship quality is associated with higher levels of self-esteem at T3. Both gender and age were significantly correlated to self-esteem at T1 and T3.

Table 1

Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for all Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Parental conflict T1							
2 Father-child RQ	-0.25**						
3 Mother-child RQ	-0.03	0.41**					
4 Self-esteem T3	0.12	0.20*	0.18				
5 Self-esteem T1	-0.18*	0.10	0.14	0.29**			
6 Age T1	0.13	-0.19*	0.02	-0.23*	-0.20*		
7 Gender	0.10	-0.03	0.24**	-0.24**	-0.22*	0.08	
<i>M</i>	1.88	3.83	4.08	4.08	4.17	11.76	0.48
<i>SD</i>	0.70	0.73	0.46	0.85	0.68	2.30	0.50

Notes: RQ = Relationship Quality. For gender: 0 = boys; 1 = girls.

**p < .01, *p < .05

Regression Analyses

Before running the regression analyses, the assumptions associated with multiple regression analyses were examined. The frequency distribution of the standardized residuals and the scatter diagram showed that the assumptions of normal distribution and linearity of

the residuals were met. Also, there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables. All VIF scores were between 1-5, meaning the variables were moderately correlated (Field, 2018). When viewing the scatter diagram of the standardized residuals, the assumption of homoscedasticity was violated, however not severely.

Post-divorce Parental Conflict and Self-Esteem

To investigate the association between parental conflict and self-esteem, a regression analysis was conducted (Model 1, Table 2). The results showed that model 1 significantly explained 17.6% of the variance of self-esteem T3, $F(4, 117) = 6.26, p < .001, R^2 = .18$. The main effect of parental conflict in this model was also significant. More specifically, higher levels of parental conflict were related to a larger positive change in self-esteem, while controlling for age, gender and self-esteem at T1.

Parent-child Relationship Quality and Change in Self-Esteem

In the second model, father-child and mother-child relationship quality were added to investigate the association between parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem T3. The analysis showed that the second model explained 23.4% of the variance of self-esteem (Model 2, Table 2) which is significant, $F(6, 115) = 5.87, p < .001, R^2 = .23$. However, the main effects of mother-child relationship quality ($p = .10$) and father-child relationship quality ($p = .13$) were not significant.

Moderation

As a third step the interaction terms of parental conflict and parent-child relationship quality were added, separately for mother-child and father-child relationship quality (Model 3.1 & 3.2, Table 2). The results showed that Model 3.1 explained a significant 23.8% of the variance in self-esteem, $F(7, 114) = 5.009, p < .001, R^2 = .24$. The results revealed that the interaction effect of mother-child relationship quality and parental conflict was not significant ($p = .44$). Model 3.2 explained a significant 24.8% of the variance in self-esteem, $F(7, 114) = 5.373, p < .001, R^2 = .25$. The interaction effect of father-child relationship quality and parental conflict showed no significance ($p = .15$). This means that there is no moderating effect of parent-child relationship quality.

Table 2

Results Regression Analyses, Self-Esteem T3 as Dependent

Variable for all Models

Predictor	<i>B</i>	SE	β	<i>p</i>
Model 1				

Constant	3.75	.73		<.001
Parental conflict T1	.23	.10	.19	.032
Self-esteem T1	.30	.11	.23	.009
Gender	-.30	.15	-.18	.038
Age	-.07	.03	-.20	.023
<hr/>				
Model 2				
Constant	2.10	.91		.071
Parental conflict T1	.28	.10	.24	.008
Self-esteem T1	.25	.11	.20	.027
Gender	-.41	.15	-.24	.007
Age	-.07	.03	-.18	.041
Mother-child RQ T1 – T3	.30	.18	.16	.095
Father child RQ T1 – T3	.16	.11	.14	.130
<hr/>				
Model 3.1				
Constant	1.97	.92		.091
Parental conflict T1	.29	.10	.24	.007
Self-esteem T1	.26	.11	.21	.021
Gender	-.41	.15	-.24	.008
Age	-.06	.03	-.17	.048
Mother-child RQ T1 – T3	.27	.18	.15	.131
Father child RQ T1 – T3	.19	.11	.17	.095
Conflict*Mother-child RQ	.06	.07	.07	.436
<hr/>				
Model 3.2				
Constant	2.14	.91		.057
Parental conflict T1	.26	.11	.21	.017
Self-esteem T1	.23	.11	.18	.036
Gender	-.40	.15	-.24	.008
Age in years	-.06	.03	-.16	.063
Mother-child RQ T1 – T3	.16	.20	.09	.440
Father child RQ T1 – T3	.30	.14	.26	.038
Conflict*Father-child RQ	-.10	.10	-.16	.152

Note: for gender: 0 = boys; 1 = girls.

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this study was to gain more insight into the association between post-divorce parental conflict and adolescents' level of self-esteem, and to examine the possible moderating role of parent-child relationship quality. Adolescents' level of self-esteem post-divorce is important to examine because children from divorced families are at increased risk for low self-esteem (Hetherington, 2003). In addition, those suffering from low self-esteem are found more likely to commit crimes, suffer from mental health problems and experience higher unemployment rates as adults when compared to those with high self-esteem (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Examining the moderation of parent-child relationship quality could help understand how to buffer for the possible negative outcomes of post-divorce parental conflict and create effective intervention strategies. The findings showed that post-divorce parental conflict was positively related to relative change in self-esteem among adolescents. Parent-child relationship quality had no significant effect on self-esteem and no moderating effect was found.

Post-Divorce Parental Conflict and Self-Esteem

Based on the emotional security theory, the family systems theory and previous research (Amato & Keith, 1991; Harold & Sellers, 2018; Hetherington, 2003; Noller et al, 2008; Pawlak & Klein, 1997; Turner & Kopiec, 2006) we expected higher levels of parental conflict to be negatively associated with adolescents' self-esteem. In contrast to previous research, the current study shows a significant positive association between parental conflict and adolescents' level of self-esteem, after controlling for age, gender and parental conflict. This means that higher levels of parental conflict post-divorce predict a larger positive change in adolescents' level of self-esteem. The unexpected and remarkable positive main effect of parental conflict on self-esteem could be explained by the fact that this study controlled for earlier levels of self-esteem. The study might have captured those children who experienced most parental conflict and thus reported low self-esteem. Because conflict decreased over time, these children increased more in their self-esteem (as they had more to gain) than the children who experienced lower conflict and higher self-esteem to begin with. Future research could further assess this.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Self-Esteem

Second, based on the attachment theory and previous research (Keizer et al., 2019; Li & Seltzer, 2005; Wissink et al., 2006) higher parent-child relationship quality was expected to be positively related to adolescents' self-esteem. Against the expectations, both mother-child and father-child relationship quality were no significant predictors for adolescents' level of

self-esteem, after controlling for age, gender and parental conflict. Meaning that parent-child relationship quality does not predict relative change in self-esteem. Some studies support the idea that the period leading up to and during the divorce might have a larger impact on children's well-being than the post-divorce period. In their meta-analysis Amato & Keith (1991) found that parental relationship quality prior to divorce was a more significant predictor of children's well-being than the post-divorce period. This could explain why the results were not in line with the attachment theory and previous research.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality as a Moderator

Lastly, we examined whether parent-child relationship quality moderated the relation between parental conflict and self-esteem. The hypothesized negative effect of post-divorce parental conflict on adolescents' self-esteem was expected to be smaller when there was a higher parent-child relationship quality. Based on findings showing that the parent-child relationship can serve as a buffer for negative outcomes following post-divorce parental conflict (Mahrer et al., 2018; O'Hara et al., 2021; Sandler et al., 2013). The findings did not show any support for this hypothesis, as there were no significant interaction-effects. Several reasons could explain why no moderation was found. The sample was relatively small, which may have limited the ability to detect the expected relationships. Also, there is a possibility that there are other variables that were not measured in this study that may have influenced the relationship between post-divorce parental conflict, parent-child relationship quality and self-esteem.

Strengths and Limitations

The results should be interpreted with caution, due to some limitations. The assumption of homoscedasticity was slightly violated. Additionally, the sample was relatively small and might not reflect all families post-divorce. The first measurement wave of this study included parents who had been separated for 1 week up to 2 years. Previous studies have shown that parental conflicts can decline rapidly already one year after divorce (Birditt et al., 2010). Furthermore, some children in the study come from the same family. The nesting of the data can result in non-independent observations since siblings are likely to share similar backgrounds and environmental factors. This could lead to correlations between the measurements of siblings and can impact the analyses and generalizability of the findings to a broader population.

Despite some limitations, this study contains a number of strengths. This study made use of validated and standardized questionnaires. Next to that, a longitudinal design was used, which is preferred due to a more comprehensive approach of your research (Caruana et al.,

2015). The longitudinal design gave the opportunity to assess a relative change in self-esteem over time and examine the long-term impact of parental conflict shortly after divorce. Child-reported data was used, even for measuring post-divorce parental conflict. The child-reported data was expected to be more closely related to children's levels of self-esteem, as previous research had shown that children's report of conflict tend to be more closely related with their adjustment than parents report of conflict (Grych, 2005).

Conclusion

Against the expectations, the findings showed an association between post-divorce conflict and relative change in self-esteem with an opposite direction of effect than what was expected. Moreover, parent-child relationship quality did not influence adolescent self-esteem nor the relationship between post-divorce parental conflict and adolescent self-esteem. More research is needed to confirm the suggested theories on why the results did not support the hypotheses. The results challenge conventional assumptions that all forms of parental conflict are detrimental to adolescents' self-esteem. They suggest the possibility that the impact may vary depending on factors such as timing and coping mechanisms. Understanding that certain adolescents may show positive changes in self-esteem despite conflict can help guide intervention strategies that for example promote coping-skills and resilience. Professionals could provide targeted support to enhance positive outcomes, when helping adolescents navigate the challenges associated with post-divorce parental conflict. Future research could further explore the possible factors contributing to these findings.

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