RELATION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES TO SPIRITUALITY AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS IN MALE ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The present study was designed to investigate the conflict management styles of male adolescents in relationship with parents, friends, and others. The relation of conflict management styles to spiritual experience and demographic factors were also examined. The conflict styles were classified into integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising styles. Male adolescents (N=150) with age range from 16 to 18 years participated in this study. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multivariate and one-way ANOVA, and post-hoc tests were employed for data analysis. The male adolescents reported greater use of the integrating style in conflict situation. Daily spiritual experience showed a significant positive correlation with integrating and avoiding styles. Birth order, parents' education, parents' occupation, and parents' income revealed a significant effect on conflict management styles.

Keywords: conflict styles, spiritual experience, adolescent

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Conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships and often has a negative outcome on the individual, unless properly managed. According to Bell and Blakeney (1977) interpersonal conflict is defined as interaction between individuals expressing opposing interests, views, or opinions. In other words, conflicts occur when relational partners perceive incompatibility in such diverse areas as ideas, values, emotions, needs, and constraints on actions. Conflict management styles are types of conflict management strategies that an individual tends to use in conflict situation. Blake and Mouton (1964) first presented a conceptual scheme for classifying the styles for handling interpersonal conflicts. Their scheme was extended by Thomas (1976) who classified all conflict management strategies along two underlying dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. In similar line, Rahim (1983) depicted two dimensions, 'concern for self' and 'concern for others' as the basis for selecting five conflict management styles: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. The integrating style reflects high concern for self and others. The obliging style reflects low concern for self and high concern for others. The dominating style reflects high concern for self and low concern for others. The avoiding style reflects low concern for self and others. And, the compromising style reflects intermediate in concern for self and others (Rahim, 1992).

For adolescents, immaturity and the quest for independence and autonomy make conflict management particularly difficult. Adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood, is an important developmental phase, marked by a multitude of significant physical, psychological and social changes. The period of adolescence, "marks the decline of exclusive family influence/control and increased independence from family, greater involvement with peers, and more varied nonfamily influences" (Pleck & Hofferth, 2008, p. 267). When adolescents fail to understand that it is normal for two individuals to have different points of view, they may resort to argument or violence as a means of managing conflicts. Male adolescents engage in more conflict than females and are more likely to be involved with gangs. Although conflicts might have a negative impact on relationships, they are not necessarily detrimental for adolescent development. During adolescence, it is crucial to develop constructive conflict management

skills. Interacting with parents, within a certain emotional climate, provides adolescents a platform to learn how to deal with conflicts.

Antonella et al., (2012) found that adolescents use compromise and aggression (conflict styles), intimacy and frustration (conflict resolutions) with father, mother, friends and romantic partners. However compromise and intimacy are more frequent with friends and romantic partners than with the parents. In the investigation of conflict management styles between British and Pakistani mothers and their adolescent daughters, Gilani (2001) stated that both the groups used avoiding styles equally in a conflictual situation, although the British group used dominating style more than Pakistani group. A study on the conflict resolution styles in parent-adolescent relationships revealed that adolescents' use of positive problem solving increased with mothers, but did not change with fathers. Adolescents' use of conflict engagement was found to temporarily increase with mothers, but showed no change with fathers. Adolescents' use of withdrawal with parents increased, although this increase was temporarily with mothers. It was observed that both adolescents and their parents changed in their use of conflict resolution from early to middle adolescence (Van Doorn, Branie, & Meeus, 2011).

Adolescents are often neglected in spirituality research. There are little published studies that have attempted to relate spirituality of adolescence and psychological adjustment to conflict or stress. Van Dyke et al. (2009) found that daily spiritual experience to be a significant predictor of higher psychological adjustment and lower psychological distress in a group of urban lower socioeconomic status adolescents. They also found in this group that daily spiritual experiences are associated with positive affect for males and females, and a predictor of life satisfaction for adolescent males. A regression analysis of 615 adolescents showed that daily spiritual experiences, forgiveness and positive religious coping were associated with less depressive symptomatology exclusively in girls (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007).

In the survey of literature, it is evident that there is relatively less exploration on conflict management styles and spiritual experience of adolescents. Therefore, there is a need to examine how adolescents, especially, male adolescents approach or manage their conflicts with parents, teachers, friends and others. It is also necessary to investigate the influence of daily spiritual

experience and demographic characteristics on conflict management styles of male adolescents. Therefore, this study formulated the following objectives:

1.   To identify the conflict management style used predominantly by male adolescents.

2.   To study the correlation between conflict management styles and daily spiritual experience.

3.   To investigate the relation of conflict management styles to daily spiritual experience and demographic factors, precisely birth order, urban/rural background, parents' education, parents' occupation, and parents' income.

Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty male adolescents participated in the present study. The age of participants ranged from 16 to 18 years and they were from different states in India. About 65 % of them were doing higher secondary in school and the remaining 35% were in first year of graduation. Consent was obtained from all the participants.

Materials

a.   Personal Information Sheet: The participant's demographic information such as age, birth order, gender, urban/rural background, parents' Education, parents' occupation, and parents' income were collected.

b.   The Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II (ROCI–II): It is a 28 item questionnaire measuring conflict management styles. It is designed to measure five independent dimensions of the styles of handling interpersonal conflict: Integrating (IN), Obliging (OB), Dominating (DO), Avoiding (AV), and Compromising (CO). The five styles of handling conflict are selected on the basis of repeated factor and item analyses. The subject responds to each statement on a 5–point Likert scale that range from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A higher score represents greater use of a conflict style. The instrument has been reported to have satisfactory test-retest and internal consistency reliabilities (Ben-Yoav & Banai, 1992), and the five-style model has been shown to have factorial validity in non-Western cultures (Van De Vlient & Kabanoff, 1990).

c.   Daily Spiritual Experience Scale: It is a 16-item self-report measure of spiritual experience and specifically aims to measure ordinary, or daily, spiritual experiences – not

mystical experiences (e.g., hearing voices) – and how they are an everyday part of the individual's life. It measures how beliefs and understandings are part of moment-to-moment features of life from a spiritual or religious perspective. The first 15 items of the questionnaire are measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale: many times a day, every day, most days, some days, once in a while, and never or almost never. Item 16 is measured on a 4-point scale: Not Close at All, Somewhat Close, Very Close, As Close as Possible. Higher the total score, higher the spiritual experience. The scale has been validated in adolescents and has shown good internal consistency and good test-retest performance (Harris et al., 2008).

Procedure

In this study, conflict was operationalized by defining a conflict episode as an event in which parents, teachers, or friends said or did something that caused the individual to become dissatisfied with the relationship. The study examined the conflict management styles of male adolescents in situations of disagreements with parents, teachers, friends and others. The test administration lasted approximately 30 minutes. The test was conducted at the convenient time of the participants who were appearing for selection tests of Indian Armed Forces at Mysore. The personal information sheet was completed initially and thereafter ROCI-II and Daily spiritual Experience Scale were administered in group to participants. The research designs adopted in this study were descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multivariate and one-way ANOVA, and post-hoc tests. The demographic factors were treated as independent variables, while five conflict management styles and daily spiritual experience were treated as dependent variables.

Results

The data obtained were analyzed using the appropriate statistical tools after being tested for normality and linearity.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation among conflict management styles and daily spiritual experience

Variables	Mean	SD	IN	OB	DO	AV	CO	DSE
Integrating (**IN**)	4.42	.04	1.00					
Obliging (**OB**)	3.50	.07	**.26****	1.00				
Dominating (**DO**)	3.02	.09	-.15	.12	1.00			
Avoiding (**AV**)	2.80	.09	-.11	**.37****	**.30****	1.00		
Compromising (**CO**)	3.58	.07	**.30****	.08	.13	.07	1.00	
Daily Spiritual Experience (**DSE**)	58.62	1.87	**.18***	.12	.08	**.26****	.05	1.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations among the five conflict management styles and daily spiritual experience. It is very evident that integrating style (reflects high concern for self and others) was the predominant conflict management style in male adolescents. The mean score of daily spiritual experience indicates that male adolescents have a moderate level of ordinary spiritual experience in daily life. The results also show that there were a positive correlation between obliging and integrating styles (p<.01), and between compromising and integrating styles (p<.01). And there were a positive correlation between avoiding and obliging styles (p<.01) and, between avoiding and dominating styles (p<.01). The daily spiritual experience was found to have a significant positive correlation with integrating (p<.05) and avoiding (p<.01) styles of conflict management.

Table 2: Correlation of conflict management styles and daily spiritual experience to demographic factors

Variables	Birth Order	Urban/Rural Background	Parents' Education	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Income
Integrating	.07	-.01	-.11	.00	.08
Obliging	-.14	**-.18***	**-.17***	.06	.00
Dominating	.07	-.05	-.06	.03	.13
Avoiding	-.15	**-.24****	.11	-.02	.05
Compromising	.07	.02	-.07	.01	**.18***
Daily Spiritual Experience	-.07	-.10	.09	-.14	.03

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

When conflict management styles and daily spiritual experience were correlated with birth order, urban/rural background, parents' education, parents' occupation, and parents' income (Table 2), it was noted that none of the demographic factors were significantly correlated with daily spiritual experience. However, there was a significant negative correlation between obliging style and urban/rural background (p<.05), and between avoiding style and urban/rural background (p<.01). Also, a significant negative correlation was observed between obliging styles and parents' education (p<.05). The comprising style was having a positive correlation with parents income (p<.05). The rural male adolescents showed low obliging (M = 3.16) and avoiding styles (M = 2.45), whereas the urban male adolescents showed high obliging (M= 3. 50) and avoiding (M = 2.95) styles. The negative correlation between obliging style and parents' education suggested that with parents' higher education, the adolescents' obliging style reduces. The positive correlation between compromising style and parents' income revealed that compromising style of adolescence increases with increase in parents' income.

The multivariate analysis revealed significant effects for birth order, Wilk's A = .708, F(18,393)=2.84, p <.01, parents' education, Wilk's A = .859, F(12,278)=1.84, p <.05, parents' occupation, Wilk's A = .822, F(12,282)=2.43, p <.01, and parents' income, Wilk's A = .869, F(12,284)=2.49, p <.05. There was no significant difference among five conflict management styles between rural and urban male adolescents. In birth order, the follow-up ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference in dominating, avoiding, and compromising styles, F(3,144)=2.72, p<.05, F(3,144)=6.68, p<.01, and F(3,144)=2.64, p=.05 respectively. The bonferroni post-hoc test indicated that single born (M=3.61) used higher degree of dominating style as compared to younger born (M=2.95). It was interesting that the middle born (M=3.53) reported higher avoiding style as compared to younger born (M=2.55), whereas younger born (M=3.69) displayed higher compromising style as compared to middle born (M=3.11).

In parents' education, the follow-up one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference in obliging style, F(2,144)=4.03, p<.05. The bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that adolescents of graduate parents (M=3.52) were showing significantly higher obliging style as

compared to post-graduate parents' adolescents (M=3.01). In parents' occupation, the one-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference in obliging style, $F_{(2,146)}=4.32$, $p<.05$. The bonferroni post-hoc test revealed that adolescents of self-employed parents (M=3.87) were showing significantly higher obliging style as compared to private employed parents' adolescents (M=3.21). In parents' income, the follow-up univariate ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference in dominating and avoiding styles, $F_{(2,147)}=3.92$, $p<.05$, and $F_{(2,147)}=4.58$, $p<.01$ respectively. The bonferroni post-hoc test indicated that dominating ($p<.05$) and avoiding styles ($p<.05$) significantly differed for low (< Rs.10000), middle (Rs.10001-25000), and high (> Rs.25000) income parents' group. The adolescents of low income parents' group (M=2.20) reported low dominant style as compared to adolescents of middle (M=3.15) and high income parents' group (M=3.09). Similarly, adolescents of low income parents' group (M=2.12) reported low avoiding style as compared to adolescents of middle (M=3.05) and high income parents' group (M=2.90).

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the predominant style of conflict management of male adolescents and to investigate the relation of conflict management styles to daily spiritual experience and demographic factors. Findings of this study indicated that male adolescents tend to show high preference for the integrating style of conflict management. According to Rahim (1983), the integrating style reflects collaboration between participants, such as openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach a solution acceptable to both sides. In the research study of Antonella et al., (2012) adolescents were found to use compromise and aggression styles with parents, friends, and romantic partners. A possible explanation for the incongruent results of the present study is that, in conflict situation with parents and others, adolescents might have been influenced by collectivistic dimension that emphasis on maintaining relational harmony rather than individualistic dimension which insists upon individual rights and self-concerns. The other reason might have been the influence of non-western culture in grooming up of children in family. Besides, the results of correlation analysis showed a positive correlation between daily spiritual experience and integrating style. Therefore, it might be said that spirituality of adolescents may have influenced adolescents in their preference of the integrating style to a greater extent in conflict situation.

This study also examined the relation of conflict management styles to demographic factors. Analyses revealed that there was a significant difference in birth order, parents' education, parents' occupation, and parents' income. It was noted that single born reported a significantly greater use of dominating style as compared to younger born. It was also found that younger born tend to show low avoiding style and high compromising style as compared to middle born. Rahim's (1983) conceptualization of the dominant style was based on the importance of satisfying self-needs, and the compromising style involves a give-and-take strategy to make a mutually acceptable decision. It might be said that through socialization processes, single born presumed to be more assertive and less cooperative, whereas the younger born was considered to be relatively sensitive and warm. Generally middle born delegate the responsibility to elder or younger, therefore, it is not remarkable that they use avoiding style to a higher degree in managing conflicts.

It was interesting to note that obliging style was used significantly higher degree by adolescents whose parents were graduates or self-employed. The obliging style was conceptualized as satisfying the needs of other sides (Rahim, 1983). In the conflict settings, using the obliging style would mean "losing face". The results indicated that adolescents whose parents have minimum degree or under insecure jobs/occupation might consider the obliging style to be appropriate to maintain good relationship, so that they would not lose a source of support or assistance from others at deprived situation. The parents' income indicated a significant difference in dominating style and avoiding style of male adolescents. The adolescents of low-income parents reported low dominant and avoiding styles as compared to adolescents of middle and high income parents. It should be noted that adolescents whose parents were in the middle and high income categories selected dominating and avoiding styles as the major strategy in conflict situation. It indicates that adolescents belonging from middle to high income family might prefer to be assertive and uncooperative and seeking own concerns at the other party's expense. Otherwise, they might be neither assertive nor cooperative and postpone dealing with conflict by withdrawing from threatening situation. It may be briefly stated that as parents' income increases the concern for others reduces for male adolescents in conflict situation.

In this way, the present study indicated greater use of the integrating style by male adolescents in conflict management with parents, friends, and others. However, adolescents showed remarkable differences in the preference of conflict management styles when related to demographic factors. There were some limitations in this study. First, demographic factors were used as variables that were assumed to affect the conflict management of adolescents. However, there are other variables that may affect the tendencies toward conflict strategies, such as cultural background, level of intimacy with parents and others. Second, the literature on adolescents' conflict management styles and spirituality are very little to draw generalization of the findings.

In the overall analyses, the present study found the predominant conflict management styles of male adolescents and the relation of conflict management strategies to some of the demographic factors. Although, this study had some limitations, it is hoped that the findings from this study will be useful for the research in conflict handling behavior and spirituality of adolescents.

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