

# The Relationship Between Parent-Child Relationship and Children's Mental Resilience

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**Abstract:** The parent-child relationship has a great impact on a child's psychological condition. Mental resilience is especially important for a person's development. However, there are a few studies on the relationship between parent-child relationship and mental resilience of children from middle school in China. This study mainly used correlation analysis and linear regression analysis to study the relationship between parent-child relationship (include parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict) and children's mental resilience (N=381). The results confirm that parent-child relationship is significantly correlated with resilience. Parent-child intimacy can positively predict resilience, and parent-child conflict can negatively predict resilience. In conclusion, Parent-child relationship has a significant impact on children's mental resilience. Parents should choose an appropriate way to interact with children to strengthen parent-child closeness and avoid excessive parent-child conflict.

## 1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that the relationship between parents and children are associated with children's academic performance, social ability, and emotional development (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). Many studies confirm that the attachment type will impact self-esteem, mental resilience, social skill, and adjustment and warm parent-child relationship always predict healthy emotional development during childhood. Wood (2007) find that the secure relationship between parents and children can improve children's learning capacity, and many research shows that parent-child relationship can predict children's academic achievement in pre-school (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). Parent-child relationship is considered as the foundation of the relationship between children with others (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). Warm and cooperative parent-child relationship is associated with positive social skills of children, while excessive parent-child conflict is associated with negative social outcomes (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). Compared with children whose parents are patient, children with cold, grumpy parents are more likely to be rejected by their peers (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011). Wood (2007) also find that the secure attachment is associated with positive partner relationship. In addition, parent-child relationship has significant impact on children's mental health (Wu & Lee, 2020). Through the testing and research of preschool children, Wood (2007) suggests that the secure attachment between parents and children is associated with reducing anxiety. There are many research shows that parental support and parent-child conflict are associated with internalized behaviour problems and the more parental support, the more knowledge the parents have, the less parent-child conflict, and the less internalized behaviour problems the children have (Wu & Lee, 2020).

Many previous studies have focused on the impact of parent-child relationship on children's mental state. For example, to explore the impact of parent-child relationships on a child's risk of depression as an adult, Alaie et al (2020) followed 382 children (227 of whom had depression) for 15 years, and they find that there was a statistically significant association between major conflict with parents and bipolar disorder in adulthood. Tucker, Mchale & Crouter (2003) find that children who had more conflict with their mothers had lower self-esteem. Children who have a closer and warmer relationship with their parents are more likely to effectively resolve conflict with their parents (Tucker, Mchale & Crouter, 2003). However, in previous studies, a few scholars have studied the relationship between

parent-child relationship and mental resilience among Chinese pre-school children. Here, it is necessary to explain what the term resilience means. The concept resilience was originally derived from physics and recently extended to psychology, means that in the face of difficulties, individual adaptation and development is still good (Davydov et al, 2010). However, the definition of resilience is still controversial and often criticized in academia (Davydov et al, 2010). Some studies suggest resilience is a kind of individual characteristics and it serves as a buffer against possible future difficulties (Davydov et al, 2010). Scholars who subscribe to this concept believe that positive emotions are a component of resilience that can reduce the risk of depression and help maintain a healthy mental state (Davydov et al, 2010). In other studies, resilience is considered as a process that using emotional resources help individuals cope with adversity (Davydov et al, 2010). Scholars who subscribe to this concept believe that resilience is a kind of power or process to make people stronger (Davydov et al, 2010). There are many studies to research the determinants of resilience and these studies are designed in areas such as family, psychology, society, genetics, and environment (Davydov et al, 2010). Most studies show that resilience is the result of both environmental factors (family, social, etc.) and genetic factors (Davydov et al, 2010). Children will encounter all kinds of setbacks and difficulties in the process of growing up. Children with good mental resilience will still keep good adjustment and positive mental state when they through pain and suffering and longitudinal studies have shown that more than half of children with good mental resilience are able to overcome trauma from early life, such as domestic violence (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012). Therefore, enhancing children's mental toughness is an important way to protect children's mental health. Considering that parent-child relationships have a profound effect on children's mental well-being, we wonder that weather parent-child relationships would also have an effect on children's resilience. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the relationship between parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict and mental resilience. We make the following hypotheses: 1. Parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict are significantly correlated with mental resilience. 2. Parent-child closeness can positively predict resilience, while parent-child conflict can negatively predict mental resilience.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants of this study are 413 students in grade 3 through 8 ( $M=4.53$ ,  $SD=1.49$ ) and their parents from a middle school in Beijing. Among them, 286 were only children and 127 had siblings. There are 209 boys, 200 girls and four missing data. They were randomly selected from different classes.

### **2.2 Procedures**

At the start of the study, Student participants will be explained how to fill out the questionnaire and consent form by them and their parents. Then, the students were given questionnaires and consent forms, which they took home to fill out with their parents. They were given to the researchers the next day. Researchers conduct statistical and data analysis.

### **2.3 Measures**

Chinese version of child-parent relationship scale

Fathers and mothers are asked using Chinese version of child-parent relationship scale (CPRS; Pianta, 1992), which has been proved to have high reliability and validity, to independently rate the relationship between their children and them. This scale is consisted by closeness and conflict subscales. The closeness subscale assesses parents' perceptions of the intimacy, warmth and friendly communication between them and their children (e.g., "When I praise my child, he/she beams with pride"), and the conflict subscale assesses parents' perceptions of conflicts and unpleasant experiences between them and their children (e.g., "My child sees me as a source of punishment and criticism"). The scale needs to be completed on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Definitely does not apply) to 5 (Definitely applies). Parents completed the scale depend on the experiences with their children during

previous 3 months. High score on closeness subscale will be recorded close parent-child relationship, and high score on conflict subscale will be recorded conflictual parent-child relationship. When mothers and mothers report closeness, Cronbach's coefficients were 0.73 and 0.87, whereas when mothers and fathers report conflict, Cronbach's coefficients were 0.79 and 0.81.

The scale of mental resilience for Chinese adolescents

We use the scale of mental resilience for Chinese adolescents (Hu & Gan, 2008) to rate children's mental resilience. This scale consists of 3 main dimensions: focus on the goal, emotional control and positive cognitive. There are 27 items in this scale around these three dimensions (e.g., failure and setbacks will make me doubt my ability) on Likert Scale from 1 (Definitely does not apply) to 5 (Definitely applies). Children are asked to complete this scale independently. High score on this scale will be indicated strong mental resilience.

### 3. Results

The valid data is 381 in this study because there are 4 missing data in sex and 32 invalid data in mental resilience. Table1 presents the minimum, maximum, means, standard deviation of study variables: grade, parent-child closeness, parent-child conflict, and mental resilience. We took parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict as independent variables and mental resilience as dependent variables for correlation analysis. The results show that there was significant correlation between parent-child closeness and mental resilience ( $P < 0.05$ ), and there was significant correlation between parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict ( $P < 0.01$ ). There was significant correlation between parent-child conflict and resilience ( $P < 0.01$ ). We took parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict as independent variables and psychological mental resilience as dependent variables for linear regression analysis. The R square value of the model is .030, which means that parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict can explain 3.0% of the change of mental resilience. The regression coefficient of parent-child closeness was .266 ( $t = 1.97, P = .049 < .05$ ), and the regression coefficient of parent-child conflict was  $-.161$  ( $t = -2.30, P = .022 < .05$ ), indicating that parent-child closeness could positively predict mental resilience, and parent-child conflict could negatively predict mental resilience (Table2).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics: numbers, minimum, maximum, means, standard deviation of study variables: grade, parent-child closeness, parent-child conflict, resilience.

	Minimum	Maximum	Means	Standard deviation
Grade	3	8	4.53	1.49
Parent-child closeness	18.00	36.00	29.24	3.41
Parent-child conflict	12.00	46.00	23.58	6.428
Mental resilience	17.00	60.00	49.00	8.69

Table 2 The regression coefficient of parent-child closeness

	Standardized regression coefficient	t	p	R-squared	F
	Beta				
Constant		9.76	0.00***	.030	F (2, 378) =5.815
Parent-child closeness	.10	1.97	.049*		
Parent-child conflict	-.12	-2.30	.022*		

### 4. Discussion

There are two important findings in the present study. Firstly, there was significant correlation between parent-child relationship and mental resilience, which was in line with hypotheses. The result

confirms that parent-child relationship has a significant influence on children's mental resilience. The reason for this result may be related to protective factors of mental resilience. Lee, Cheung & Kwong (2012) suggest that the difference between children who have good mental resilience and children who do not have good mental resilience is protective factors of resilience. The protective factors include internal and external protective factors (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012). Internal factors including optimism, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and so on can help people deal with psychological trauma actively, and maintain a good mental state (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012). External protective factors including functional social support system can help people cope with the stress of their surroundings (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012). The results of previous studies on protective factors can be divided into four parts: bonding, competence, optimism and environment (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012). Among them, the factor "bonding" includes the attachment between children and parents, and warm parent-child relationships often represent secure attachments between parents and children (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012). Therefore, parent-child closeness is benefit to the development of protective factors "bonding", which is benefit to the development of children's mental resilience. In addition, family environment is an important point in the factor "environment" (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2012) which is inseparable from the parent-child relationship. Warm parent-child relationship usually represents warm family environment, which is conducive to protective factor "environment" and mental resilience, while excessive parent-child conflict represents bad family environment which is not conducive to protective factor "environment" and mental resilience.

The second finding of this study is parent-child closeness could positively predict mental resilience, and parent-child conflict could negatively predict mental resilience, which was also in line with hypotheses. As noted above, self-esteem is also an important protective factor for mental resilience. Self-esteem can buffer anxiety, promote positive development of children, and help the recovery of mental resilience (Tian, Liu & Shan, 2018). Tian, Liu & Shan (2018) research found that parents' support and encouragement are important conditions for children to form high self-esteem. Similarly, optimism is an important protective factor of resilience. Study of Korkeila et al (2004) confirm that the early experience is related of the development of optimism in children's lifespan. Children who have close relationships with their parents are more likely to be optimistic people (Korkeila et al., 2004). The results of these studies may explain the predictive effect of parent-child relationship on mental resilience. Closer parent-child relationships tend to represent better development of internal protective factors such as self-esteem and optimism. Therefore, parent-child closeness can positively predict resilience. In Tian, Liu & Shan's (2018) study, although parent-child conflict has a positive direct effect on mental resilience, the total effect including indirect effect of parent-child conflict are negative. This suggests that moderate parent-child conflict is not necessarily negative but may partly reflect the onset of independence (Tian, Liu & Shan, 2018). However, excessive parent-child conflict is often related to children's poor adjustment and is not conducive to the development of a warm home environment, high self-esteem, and secure attachment with parents described above. Therefore, this may explain the second finding that parent-child conflict can negatively predict children's mental resilience. All in all, parent-child relationship has a strong influence on some protective factors of mental resilience, which are important determinants of resilience. Therefore, the influence of parent-child relationship on mental resilience is significant and cannot be ignored.

The findings of this study could help parents choose better ways to raise their children. As mentioned above, children's resilience is related to protective factors. Maintaining a warm parent-child relationship and avoiding excessive parent-child conflict is conducive to the development of these protective factors, and thus to the mental resilience of children. Therefore, when parents interact with their children, they could try to choose a reasonable way to promote parent-child closeness. For example, Shorer, Swissa, Levavi & Swissa (2019) find that strict and harsh parenting is associated with anxiety and externalizing behavioral problems of children, while parents who feature playfulness in their parent-child interactions are more likely to develop closer relationships with their children. Besides, children who enjoy playing tend to show more curiosity, imagination and confidence, and are better at regulating their emotions (Shorer, Swissa, Levavi & Swissa, 2019). Thus, Parents can try to

interact with their children regularly through playing to development protective factors such as self-confidence and foster close parent-child relationships.

## 5. Conclusion

As we all know, parent-child relationships have an important impact on children's mental health. Mental resilience is an important factor in a child's life. However, previous studies have paid little attention to the relationship between parent-child relationships and mental resilience of Chinese children in middle school. After studying 413 children and their parents, this study confirm that parent-child relationship (including parent-child closeness and parent-child conflict) is significantly related to children's mental resilience. Parent-child closeness can positively predict children's mental resilience, and parent-child conflict can negatively predict children's mental resilience. Parents could choose an appropriate parenting way to raise their children, such as interaction characterized by playing, to strengthen parent-child closeness and avoid excessive parent-child conflict to promote the development of children's mental resilience.

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