



Child-Parent Family Therapy and Conflict with Romantic Partner



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to show a correlation between family therapy with an adult child and their caregiver, and conflict in romantic relationships. The study will take place at a community mental health center clinic, aiming at a population that already plans to receive therapy. Conflict will be measured on a scale to determine if there is a change before and after therapy. If a connection is established, this study will help to further emphasize how relationships within a system can have an important impact on other relationships within the same system, even if it is indirectly.

METHODS

Participants

- ❑ **The target population will be adults from ages 20-30. Participants must be in a romantic relationship and have at least one living biological parent. The sample size will be 20 participants. Participants will be recruited through community mental health. Therapists working at community mental health will be recruited into the study, who will then recruit clients into the study. Participants must be willing to receive therapy together with their biological parent during the course of the study.**

Procedures

- ❑ Participants will be asked to fill out a survey before they start therapy (T1), six weeks into therapy (T2), and at a six month follow up (T3). The survey will be implemented and collected by one of the researchers. Between the six-week survey and the six month follow up, participants will not be required to participate in therapy.

RESULTS

- ❑ This measure will be used to calculate a quantitative value for conflict. This value will then be used to better understand the correlation between family therapy between a parent and child and conflict with a romantic partner, if one exists.
- ❑ Conflict will be measured before and after therapy, to see if there was an impact on frequency of severity.

INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Within romantic relationships, frequency of conflict is a common focus of therapy. Research in the past has focused on the link between frequent conflict in romantic relationships and decreased relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1994). Better understanding of what creates conflict, as well as what helps to resolve it, is beneficial to the continued development of couple's therapy.
- ❑ Looking at the parent-child relationship in therapy might be one potential avenue for better understanding conflict in romantic relationships. Previous research has looked at the relationship between parental domestic violence experienced during childhood and violence in romantic relationships during young adulthood (Antle, Karam, Barbee, Sullivan, Minogue & Glover, 2019). Young adults or adolescents that experienced violence during childhood were more likely to be accepting of violence in their romantic relationships. In the same vein, other research has looked at the link between attachment-based family therapy with young adults and increased ability for emotional processing. They found that therapy around the parent-child relationship was helpful for emotional processing, even during adulthood.

MEASURES

Romantic partner conflict scale will be used as a measure (Zacchilli, Hendrick & Hendrick, 2009). This scale aims to measure conflict that comes up through day to day interactions, rather than specific incidents or abusive relationships. There are several aspects of conflict that this scale takes into account, including communication, love, sexuality, sex differences, relationship satisfaction and respect. The measure has 39 items with six subscales. Compromise, Domination, Avoidance, Submission, Separation and Interactional Reactivity. Conflict around parents is included in this measure. While that may be particularly relevant to the study, all aspects of conflict will still be collected.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- ❑ The question is, does family therapy with a parent-child dyad during adulthood help to decrease conflict in romantic relationships?
- ❑ It is hypothesized that family therapy focusing on the parent-child relationship will result in decreased conflict with a romantic partner.

Discussion

- ❑ This study aims to show the connection existing between different systems, and the impact the relationships within one system can have on another. Relationships within the family of origin can have an impact on all other aspects of life, including a romantic partner. There is plenty of research around how experiences during childhood can impact romantic relationships, but there is very little research on how current relationships with family can impact romantic relationships. For future research, specific types of therapy and conflict should be compared. There are many types of therapy and conflict that can have varying impacts, so more specific research in this area is necessary. Also, research around how this relationship may be impacted by culture and gender should be researched to account for differences in socialization and beliefs.

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