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Determinants of conflicts with Parents in the view of young adolescents

Pedagogika Rodziny 4/2, 117-127

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



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Introduction

The confrontation of teenagers and their parents, which takes place during adolescence, is a natural phenomenon that allows the teenagers to grow up. It is one of the most important developmental dynamisms of this period. R. L. Paikoff and J. Brooks-Gunn [Myers 2003] suggest that the young adolescents, while looking for their own identity, also distance from their parents. Tesser [Myers 2003] points out the following as reasons for quarrels between teenagers and their parents: helping with the housework, bedtime and doing homework.

Quoting E. M. Duvall, Obuchowska [2002] sets a few conflict areas in the relations between parents – young adolescents, and emphasizes that they result from the following contradictions:

- between parental control – and the need of freedom with young adolescents;
- between parents' responsibility – and sharing it with young adolescents;
- between parents' attaching too much importance to school homework and study – and spending time doing other activities

It appeared interesting to establish:

Where, according to teenagers, do conflicts with parents arise from?

In order to find answers to the question so formulated, research was carried out amongst 372 students aged 13/14 – 18/19 years (chart 1.).

Chart 1. Sociometric Characteristics of the Youth

	GIRLS			BOYS			Total
	City	Country	Total	City	Country	Total	
Group I 13/14 – 14/15 lat	34	28	62	28	33	61	123
Group II 15/16 – 16/17 lat	31	31	62	33	30	63	125
Group III 17/18 – 18/19 lat	33	29	62	30	32	62	124
Ogółem:	98	88	186	91	95	186	372

Source: Own Study.

In analyzing the determinants of mutual conflicts in the family environment, the research covered relationships between the following variables:

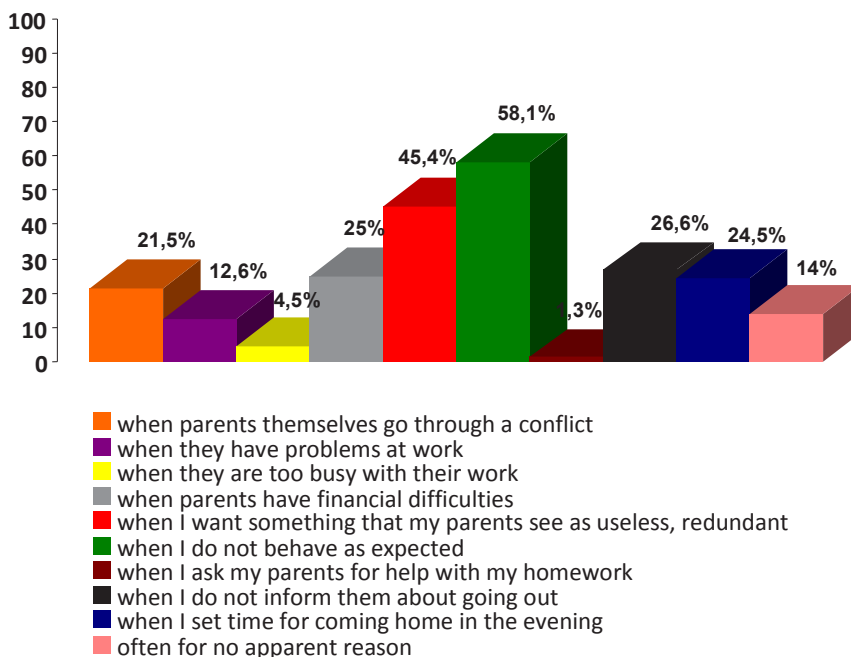
- situations, in which conflicts between the teenager and his parents arise most frequently, respective to the age of the surveyed;
- most frequent causes of conflicts between adolescents and their parents, respective to gender of the surveyed.

Situations conducive to conflicts between teenagers and their parents

In order to gather opinions about conflict-inducing attitudes of their mothers and fathers, the surveyed were asked to point out when most conflicts with their parents occur (diagram 1).

Over 50% of the surveyed (58.1%) point out that family conflicts most frequently occur when the child does not behave as expected by his mother or father, and also – according to 45.4% of the respondents – when the child desires something that his parents consider redundant. One in four respondents pointed out: no information about going out, parents' financial difficulties or agreeing on the child's deadline for coming home in the evening – as causes of disagreements with parents.

Diagram 1. Situations causing conflicts in the family environment, as seen by young adolescents



When analyzing the link between situations causing parent-child disagreements and the age of the adolescents, there are a few dependencies. First of them ($p < 0.02$) pertains to situations in which parents themselves go through some kind of conflict (indicated by 13.0% of the youths from Age Group I, 27.2% from Age Group II and 24.2% from Age Group III).

It is clear from the above that this situation concerns older teenagers as the youngest of the surveyed chose this answer half as much.

There is another dependency ($p < 0.02$) between the age of the youths and a conflict-inducing situation in which parents go through some kind of difficulty at work. This answer was selected by 6.5% of the respondents from Age Group I, 12.8% from Age Group II and 18.5% from Age Group III, which indicates that this is a situation concerning the oldest teenagers three times as often as the youngest ones, and also that the older the child, the more conflicts occur in the circumstances described.

Causes of conflict relations between adolescents and their parents

In order to establish some of the causes of conflicts between adolescents and their parents and to identify which causes of disagreements manifest most often, the surveyed population was asked to indicate which cause and how often (very often, often, sometimes, rarely) is the source of family dispute.

The youths clearly see the connection between the attitude towards school duties and towards parents and family dispute (chart 2). Most frequently indicated causes of conflict with the father included: bad grades at school (56.7%), time spent studying at home (47.9%) and the way of addressing the parents (45.7%).

Young adolescents pointed out as a frequent, or very frequent cause of conflicts between them and their fathers: disobedience and stubbornness (4.0% and 11.5%), time spent studying (4.3% and 10.2%), attitude towards brothers and sisters (3.8% and 10.2%), the way of addressing the parents (5.6% and 6.7%), unwillingness to study (5.9% and 6.1%) and bad grades at school (3.85 and 7.8%).

Few of the young respondents indicated the following as occasionally showing sources of conflicts: taking drugs or attempting to take drugs (7.2%), hygiene habits (8.3%), lifestyle or nutrition habits leading to obesity (7.0%) and dieting or using other slimming products (6.2%).

The most young adolescents indicated: bad grades at school (64,5%), time spent studying at home (55.1%), attitude towards parents (50.3%) and attitude towards brothers and sisters (47.3%) as the most frequent reasons for disagreements in relations with the mothers (chart 3).

The research shows that the young adolescents notice the relation between disagreements with their mothers and their own approach to school study and attitude towards the family. The youths pointed out the following as frequent or very frequent causes of conflicts with their mothers: time spent studying at home (6,2% and 16,9%), bad grades at school (6,7% and 13,2%), attitude towards brothers and sisters (7,2% and 12,4%), disobedience and stubbornness (6,2% and 12,1%), unwillingness to studying (5,9% and 9,9%).

Chart 2. Causes of conflicts between young adolescents and their fathers, as seen by the youths

Cause of conflict between teenagers and their fathers	Frequency of conflicts with father							
	Very often		Often		Sometimes		Rarely	
	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%
Bad grades at school	14	3,8	29	7,8	71	19,1	97	26,1
Missing school	9	2,4	18	4,8	37	9,9	71	19,1
Time spent studying at home	16	4,3	38	10,2	50	13,4	74	19,9
Teachers' comments	3	0,8	12	3,2	21	5,6	57	15,3
Attitude towards Barents	21	5,6	25	6,7	63	16,9	61	16,4
Attitude towards brothers and sisters	14	3,8	38	10,2	48	12,9	48	12,9
Preferred clothing	6	1,6	10	2,7	10	2,7	51	13,7
Pursuit of autosomy	9	2,4	10	2,7	21	5,6	46	12,4
Going on holiday with a partner	10	2,6	13	3,5	13	3,5	40	10,7
Negative attitude towards school and study (unwillingness)	22	5,9	23	6,1	29	7,8	41	11,0

Wrong free time management	11	2,9	21	5,6	36	9,7	47	12,6
Late home coming	13	3,5	22	5,9	36	9,7	38	10,2
Smoking Tobacco	11	2,9	11	2,9	5	1,3	32	8,6
Taking drugs or attempting to take drugs	3	0,8	1	0,2	2	0,5	27	7,2
Drinking alkohol	9	2,4	7	1,9	11	2,9	40	10,7
Excessive use of cosmetics	5	1,3	6	1,6	11	2,9	31	8,3
Hygiene habits	3	0,8	5	1,3	7	1,9	31	8,3
Too much attention on tidiness	11	2,9	19	5,1	35	9,4	35	9,4
Desire to possess designer clothes	10	2,7	11	2,9	24	6,4	39	10,5
Excessive use of the home telephone or mobile phone	10	2,7	15	4,0	38	10,2	37	9,9
Dieting or using other slimming products	10	2,7	1	0,3	18	4,8	23	6,2
Lifestyle or nutrition habits leading to obesity	5	1,3	7	1,9	8	2,1	26	7,0
Acquaintance, friendship with people disapproved of by parents	7	1,9	9	2,4	13	3,5	30	8,1
Choice of friends, male and female	9	2,4	8	2,1	22	5,9	39	10,5
Prefer being alone	6	1,6	6	1,6	13	3,5	31	8,3
Disobedience and stubbornness	15	4,0	43	11,5	36	9,7	47	12,6
Appearance – hairstyle, clothes	7	1,9	1	0,3	20	5,4	32	8,6
Spending nights out of home	11	2,9	10	2,7	18	4,8	28	7,5

Source: Own Study.

Note: The percentage does not amount to 100 because only positive answers to this question were considered.

Chart 3. Causes of conflicts between young adolescents and their mothers, as seen by the youths

Cause of conflict between teenagers and their mothers	Frequency of conflicts with mother N = 371							
	Very often		Very often		Very often		Very often	
	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%
Bad grades at school	25	6,7	49	13,2	92	24,7	74	19,9
Missing school	14	3,8	25	6,7	51	13,7	63	16,9

Time spent studying at home	23	6,2	63	16,9	64	17,2	55	14,8
Teachers' comments	3	0,8	16	4,3	28	7,5	58	15,6
Attitude towards parents	22	5,9	33	8,9	72	19,3	60	16,1
Attitude towards brothers and sisters	27	7,2	46	12,4	57	15,3	46	12,4
Preferred clothing	7	1,9	16	4,3	19	5,1	50	13,4
Pursuit of autonomy	8	2,1	14	3,8	32	8,6	42	11,3
Going on holiday with a partner	10	2,7	15	4,0	16	4,3	38	10,2
Negative attitude towards school and study (unwillingness)	22	5,9	37	9,9	33	8,9	42	11,3
Wrong free time management	16	4,3	24	6,4	42	11,3	46	12,4
Late home coming	12	3,2	30	8,1	36	9,6	40	10,7
Smoking tobacco	10	2,7	11	2,9	10	2,7	34	9,1
Taking drugs or attempting to take drugs	3	0,8	2	0,5	4	1,1	27	7,2
Drinking alcohol	8	2,1	11	2,9	15	4,0	36	9,7
Excessive use of cosmetics	7	1,9	4	1,1	11	2,9	28	7,5
Hygiene habits	5	1,3	6	1,6	10	2,7	29	7,8
Too much attention on tidiness	27	7,2	29	7,8	28	7,5	31	8,3
Desire to possess designer clothes	14	3,8	12	3,2	36	9,7	32	8,6
Excessive use of the home telephone or mobile phone	14	3,8	15	4,0	40	10,7	43	11,5
Dieting or using other slimming products	9	2,4	7	1,9	20	5,4	23	6,2
Lifestyle or nutrition habits leading to obesity	7	1,9	5	1,3	8	2,1	25	6,7
Acquaintance, friendship with people disapproved of by parents	11	2,9	10	2,7	20	5,4	30	8,1
Choice of friends, male and female	11	2,9	14	3,8	27	7,2	34	9,1
Prefer being alone	6	1,6	9	2,4	18	4,8	32	8,6

Disobedience and stubbornness	23	6,2	45	12,1	54	14,5	37	9,9
Appearance – hairstyle, clothes	9	2,4	10	2,7	15	4,0	37	9,9
Spending nights out of home	14	3,8	10	2,7	17	4,6	28	7,5

Source: Own Study.

Note: The percentage does not amount to 100 because only positive answers to this question were considered.

Like with conflicts with their fathers, the young adolescents pointed out that the rarest causes of conflicts are: taking drugs or attempting to take drugs (7,2%), lifestyle or nutrition habits leading to obesity (6,7%), hygiene habits (7,8%) and excessive use of cosmetics (7,5%). This may prove that these problem situations do not occur in the surveyed population or show that the parents do not seem to notice these problems.

Some important statistical relations between the most frequent causes of conflicts with mothers and the gender of the surveyed youths have been presented in Chart 4.

Chart 4. The most important causes of conflicts with mothers, indicated by girls and boys.

CAUSE OF CONFLICT	GIRLS N = 186						BOYS N = 186						Statistical significance
	Very often and often		Sometimes and rarely		Not indicated		Very often and often		Sometimes and rarely		Not indicated		
	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	
Bad grades at school	26	14,0	80	43,0	80	43,0	48	25,8	86	46,2	52	28,0	p<0,02
Time spent studying at home	29	15,6	63	33,9	94	50,5	57	30,6	56	30,1	73	39,2	p<0,01
Teachers' comments	4	2,1	41	22,0	141	75,8	15	8,1	45	24,2	126	67,7	p<0,05
Attitude towards parents	31	16,6	81	43,5	74	39,8	24	12,9	51	27,4	111	59,7	p<0,01
Negative attitude towards school and study	19	10,1	37	19,9	130	69,7	40	21,5	38	20,4	108	58,1	p<0,02
Smoking tobacco	7	3,7	23	12,3	156	83,9	14	7,5	21	11,3	151	81,2	p<0,05
Taking drugs	2	1,1	19	10,2	165	88,7	3	1,6	12	6,4	171	91,9	p<0,05
Drinking alcohol	4	2,1	24	12,9	158	84,9	15	8,1	27	14,5	144	77,4	p<0,01

Excessive use of cosmetics	7	3,7	25	13,4	154	82,8	4	2,1	14	7,5	168	90,3	p<0,05
Hygiene habits	3	1,6	18	9,7	165	88,7	8	4,2	21	11,3	157	64,4	p<0,01
Desire to possess designer clothes	16	8,6	40	21,5	130	69,7	10	5,4	28	15,0	148	79,6	p<0,01
Excessive use of the telephone	20	10,7	52	28,0	114	61,3	9	4,8	31	16,6	146	76,5	p<0,01
Dieting or using other slimming products	9	4,8	30	16,1	147	79,0	7	3,7	13	7,0	166	89,2	p<0,05

Source: Own Study.

Note: in setting the statistical significance only frequent and very frequent causes of conflict were considered.

The research shows that while some reasons affect disagreements between daughters and their mothers, quite different reasons trigger mother-son conflict relations. The most significant causes of conflicts between girls and their mothers include: attitude towards parents (60.1% of girls and 40.3% of boys); excessive use of the phone (38.7% of girls and 21.4% of boys); dieting or using other slimming products (20.9% of girls and 10.7% of boys); desire to possess designer clothes (30.1% of girls and 20.4% of boys); excessive use of cosmetics (17.1% of girls and 9.6% of boys). In turn, boys experience conflict relations with their mothers more often than girls due to: bad grades at school (72.0% of boys and 57.0% of girls), negative attitude towards school and study (41.9% of boys and 30.0% of girls), time spent studying at home (60.7% of boys and 49.5% of girls), teachers' comments (32.3% of boys and 24.1% of girls) and hygiene habits (15.5% of boys and 11.3% of girls). Therefore, mother-daughter conflicts more often concerns issues of fashion and lifestyle, whilst mother-son conflicts basically revolve round issues of school duties and studying.

The causes of conflicts of young adolescents with their mothers concerning addictions are condition by the child's gender. Most frequently, conflicts arise because of alcohol abuse – it is almost four times more frequent with boys (often and very often) – 8.1%, than girls – 2.1%. Next mentioned was tobacco smoking, which also concerns boys more (18.8%) than their female friends (16.0%). Taking drugs, on the other hand, is more often a cause of conflict between mothers and daughters (11.3%) than mothers and sons (8.0%).

Some important statistical relations between the most frequent causes of conflicts with fathers and the gender of the surveyed youths have been presented in Chart 5.

The statistical analysis of the research results indicates that both girls and boys similarly perceive the causes of conflicts in parent-child relations as well as their

frequency. The significant statistical dependencies in conflict relations with fathers have a similar configuration to those of mothers. It seems important that there was no statistically significant dependencies between the children's gender and disagreements with fathers because of hygiene habits, excessive use of cosmetics, smoking and taking drugs

Chart 5. The most important causes of conflicts with mothers, indicated by girls and boys.

CAUSE OF CONFLICT	GIRLS N = 186						BOYS N = 186						Statistical significance
	Very often and often		Sometimes and rarely		Very often and often		Sometimes and rarely		Very often and often		Sometimes and rarely		
	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%	
Bad grades at school	11	5,9	82	44,1	93	50,0	32	17,2	86	46,3	68	36,6	p<0,01
Time spent studying at home	15	8,0	62	33,4	109	56,4	39	21,0	62	33,3	85	45,7	p<0,01
Teachers' comments	4	2,1	38	20,4	144	77,4	11	5,9	40	21,5	135	72,6	p<0,05
Attitude towards parents	28	15,0	74	39,8	84	45,2	18	9,6	50	26,9	118	63,4	p<0,01
Negative attitude towards school and study	11	5,9	36	19,3	139	74,7	34	18,3	34	18,3	118	63,4	p<0,01
Smoking tobacco	8	4,3	20	10,8	158	84,9	14	7,5	17	9,1	155	83,3	n/a
Taking drugs	1	0,5	19	10,2	166	89,2	3	1,6	10	5,4	173	93,0	n/a
Drinking alcohol	4	2,1	22	11,8	160	86,0	12	6,4	29	15,6	145	78,0	p<0,05
Excessive use of cosmetics	5	2,7	27	14,4	154	82,8	6	3,2	15	8,1	165	88,7	n/a
Hygiene habits	3	1,6	18	9,6	165	88,7	5	2,7	20	10,8	161	86,6	n/a
Desire to possess designer clothes	14	7,6	36	19,3	136	73,1	7	3,7	27	14,5	152	81,7	p<0,05
Excessive use of the telephone	15	8,1	47	25,2	124	66,7	10	5,4	28	15,0	148	79,6	p<0,05

Dieting or using other slimming products	6	3,2	30	16,1	150	80,1	5	2,7	11	5,9	170	91,4	p<0,05
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Source: Own Study.

Note: in setting the statistical significance only frequent and very frequent causes of conflict were considered.

Conclusion

The parents-young adolescents relations are full of difficulties. It turns out that, according to the youths themselves, the most frequent conflicts both with the mother and father arise from similar issues, but it is definitely more common for teenagers to get into conflicts with their fathers because of disobedience and stubbornness, whilst bad grades at school more often trigger conflicts between the youths and their mothers.

A lot of the problems that young adolescents and their parents have with one another are probably the result of an unclear status of the adolescents – they are no longer small children, but not yet adults.

The young adolescents also usually become more withdrawn towards their parents than they were in their childhood. The parents, on the other hand, do not cope with recognizing the autonomy of their growing children, are not certain of their responsibility, fear the negative peer pressure, which all results in inconsistency in upbringing, with a tendency to limiting the autonomy. This becomes the source of many conflicts [Obuchowska 2002, p. 178]

Abstract: The relations between parents and their teenage children are full of difficulties, which often turn into conflicts. This paper attempts to answer the question: What, in the opinion of teenagers, or young adolescents – causes conflicts with parents? Research conducted has allowed to point out certain situations and causes of conflict relations between the parents and their children.

Key-Words: adolescence, conflicts, educational difficulties.

Streszczenie: Relacje między rodzicami i ich nastoletnimi dziećmi nasycone są wieloma trudnościami, które niejednokrotnie przeradzają się w konflikty. W niniejszym materiale podjęto próbę znalezienia odpowiedzi na pytanie: Z czego – w opinii nastolatków - wynikają konflikty z rodzicami? Przeprowadzone badania pozwoliły wskazać sytuacje i przyczyny konfliktowych relacji rodzic – dziecko.

Słowa kluczowe: dorastanie, konflikty, trudności wychowawcze

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