



Ukraine



# THE ROLE OF PARENTING FOR ADOLESCENTS:

A report on the significance of positive  
parent-adolescent relationships in Ukraine

## Acknowledgements

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## Glossary

<b>ESPAD</b>	European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs
<b>HBSC</b>	Health and Behaviour in School-aged Children
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Science
<b>ODD</b>	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Science
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>SCORE</b>	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index
<b>SeeD</b>	Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development
<b>UISR</b>	Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremenko
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Adolescents:** the term adolescents in UNICEF is used for young people aged 10 to 18 years. However, the vast majority of adolescents that participated in the study were aged between 12 and 19.

**Life Skills:** UNICEF defines Life skills as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

**Areas near the conflict line:** the study defines areas near the conflict line as areas within 15 kilometres of the contact line in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Oblasts are administrative units within Ukraine.

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aims of the present study are threefold: first, the study aims to explore the importance of positive parenting for adolescent's behavioural and emotional well-being; secondly, the study aims to investigate the detrimental consequences of family abuse, as well as the protective role of the education system for abused adolescents, and finally, to explore how family abuse contributes to negative adolescent developmental outcomes. To address these three aims of the study, the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) implemented, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a large-scale quantitative study across Ukraine. Students from 200 educational institutions in 8 oblasts in Ukraine (Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Lviv, Kyiv, and the government-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) took part in the study. The total number of participants was 7,846 adolescents.

Analyses obtained numerous important findings. Regarding the first aim of the study, which was to provide insight into how adolescents in Ukraine experience their relationship with their parents, the study provided evidence of the significance of positive parenting for the behavioural and emotional adjustment in adolescents. Specifically, adolescents who perceive their parents exhibiting high levels of warmth and monitoring toward them, experience less behavioural and psychosocial challenges and healthier civic adjustment. For instance, externalising and internalising behaviours were more prevalent among adolescents whose parents displayed both low levels of warmth and monitoring, and less prevalent among their adolescent counterparts whose parents displayed high levels of warmth and monitoring. Furthermore, the study also found that positive parenting builds resilience for at-risk adolescents against maladjustment. In other words, exposure to conflict or victimisation experiences are detrimental to the adolescents' well-being, but only among adolescents whose parents exhibit low levels of warmth, monitoring, or involvement.

Then, the study sought to explore the negative impact of family abuse on adolescent development and found that, such abuse is predictive of a plethora of negative developmental outcomes, such as risky behaviours (e.g., substance use and self-harm), internalising behaviours (e.g., anxiety and depression), externalising behaviours (e.g., aggression and conduct problems), and suicidality. Despite this, however, our findings established the critical role that schools play for abused adolescents. Experiencing emotional connection to

one's school and receiving support and encouragement from peers or teachers can mitigate the negative developmental outcomes faced by adolescents who experience family abuse.

Furthermore, the study found that changes in the macrosystem generate changes in the microsystem as well, which in turn, may be responsible for maladjustment among adolescents. In other words, exposure to conflict in Ukraine increases family violence and abuse, which in turn, leads to the exhibition of numerous negative developmental outcomes in adolescents. Psychological abuse, in particular was the most crucial intervening variable between exposure to conflict and adolescent maladjustment such as anxiety, aggression, unsafe sexual behaviours, or oppositional defiance. Findings suggest that, in working with conflict-exposed families, we need to understand how conflict exposure is associated to adolescent maladjustment. This will ensure that policy interventions would be designed to be as effective as possible.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1. Background

There is a growing recognition that, for societies to shape their futures based on the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to invest in adolescents. However, approximately 230 million children and young people live in conflict-affected countries<sup>1</sup>, thus creating challenges in achieving this goal. In the context of Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of children are caught up in the unresolved violent conflict that affects the eastern part of the country, threatening society's ability to effectively invest in adolescents. Global research demonstrates that prolonged exposure to stress can have a detrimental impact for the cognitive, physical, behavioural, and socio-emotional well-being of young children<sup>2,3</sup>. Relevant to this, the close social environment surrounding children and adolescents in conflict-affected Ukraine report witnessing symptoms such as severe anxiety and social isolation, bed-wetting, nightmares, and aggressive behaviours<sup>4</sup>. Additional support is needed now so that young people in Donetsk and Luhansk can grow into healthy adults and rebuild their communities<sup>5</sup>.

Even though UNICEF provides psychosocial support through community protection services, teachers, and school-based psychologists, young people are affected countrywide. Experiencing the conflict through, for instance, military operations, exposure to shelling, or displacement, as well as the socio-political changes and economic challenges across Ukraine that come as a result of the conflict, all leave their mark on adolescents' well-being. Consequently, the need for effective and longer-term support is growing. In the present report, we adopt the view that the need is to invest more in family support and training programmes, where special emphasis should be given in parents of adolescents.

Adolescence is a critical stage in one's life. During adolescence, numerous neurocognitive, physical, behavioural and socioemotional transformations take place. Social relationships, in particular, alter, to make room for autonomy and independence<sup>6</sup>. One thing that remains important though throughout childhood and adolescence is the significant role that the parental figures play for healthy well-being. Adolescents, despite their growing need to be self-sufficient, still need positive parenting figures providing support, guidance, and help them reach their full potential. Positive parenting (for instance, attachment and parental warmth, parental monitoring of child's behaviour, friends, or whereabouts, and parental involvement and genuine interest in the child's life) are associated with an array of positive developmental outcomes, such as higher academic achievement<sup>7</sup> and a higher likelihood of school completion<sup>8</sup>.

Even though positive parenting is beneficial for all young people, it is also particularly valuable in conflict-affected settings. Family cohesion, caring, and responsive parenting behaviours have been found to act as protective factors in such circumstances<sup>9</sup>. In other words, positive parenting is essential in general, but its protective role might be even more critical and vital during times of armed conflict (such as the conflict in eastern Ukraine), where other protective factors – such as those provided by schools, peers, and community – are disrupted<sup>10</sup>. In Ukraine, where hundreds of thousands of adolescents have been internally displaced, more than 700 schools in eastern Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed. Thousands of children live in communities shelled monthly or are forced to take refuge in improvised bomb

1. United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2014). Children and emergencies in 2014: Facts and figures. Retrieved from [http://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF\\_Children\\_and\\_Emergencies\\_2014\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF_Children_and_Emergencies_2014_fact_sheet.pdf)

2. Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fantì, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019) "An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment," Ukraine: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

3. Shonkoff, J. P., Garner, A. S., Siegel, B. S., Dobbins, M. I., Earls, M. F., McGuinn, L., et al. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129, e232–e246. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663>

4. UNICEF (2017, April 07). 200,000 children need urgent support to overcome trauma of volatile conflict in eastern Ukraine [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/200000-children-need-urgent-support-overcome-trauma-volatile-conflict-eastern>

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6. Barber, B. K., Maughan, S. L., & Olsen, J. A. (2005). Patterns of parenting across adolescence. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 108, 5-16.

7. Lara, L., & Saracostti, M. (2019). Effect of Parental Involvement on Children's Academic Achievement in Chile. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10:1464, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01464

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shelters. Having warm, caring and responsive home environments might help build children's capacity for resilience and mitigate negative outcomes.

On the other hand, failure of parents to be positive figures may negatively impact adolescent development. Global studies consistently conclude that adolescent maltreatment at home is associated – both in the short-term and in the long-term – with numerous detrimental outcomes. For instance, child maltreatment (physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect) is predictively linked to a range of mental disorders, drug use, suicide attempts, and risky sexual behaviours<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, in a 30-year longitudinal study exploring childhood sexual abuse and developmental outcomes in adulthood, it was concluded that exposure to sexual abuse was (i) positively linked to mental health problems, post-traumatic stress (PTSD) symptoms, and risky sexual behaviours, and (ii) negatively associated to self-esteem and life satisfaction<sup>12</sup>. These findings demonstrate that family abuse has diverse and complex sequelae that extend in the long-term. These findings, although they come from international studies, are important for the context of Ukraine because, unfortunately, experiences of armed conflict serve to introduce and exacerbate family abuse. Parents, too, experience adversity because of the conflict. Ever since the war started in 2014, many adults encountered and continue to witness high levels of violence, or many lost their jobs and incomes. All these may contribute to difficulties in providing the positive care, nurturing, and involvement that adolescents need, with some parents reaching the far end of negative parenting by becoming perpetrators of family abuse.

However, despite the plethora of studies examining parental importance on adolescent development or the number of studies exploring how exposure to conflict impacts young people, there is limited research about the specific effect of war on parenting behaviours. However, such research is crucial. Family is considered the most important microsystem in a child's or adolescent's life, meaning that family dynamics are vital in determining one's well-being. In other words, even if effective assistance is offered in conflict-exposed adolescents in Ukraine through the education system or social workers and school-based psychologists, some children may not benefit as much unless the

implemented programmes are customized and tailored to support at-risk children (e.g. victims of family abuse). So, understanding the contribution of conflict on family processes and adolescent development would help design appropriate programmes for conflict-exposed families. If research concludes, for instance, that psychological abuse prevails under experiences of conflict, this might help stakeholders in the design and implementation of specific programmes targeting the decrease of psychological abuse in conflict-exposed families, thus "allowing" more adolescents to also benefit from other direct programming offered by UNICEF or other stakeholders.

Finally, equally important is the promotion and establishment of a positive relationship between the adolescent and other microsystems. Despite the negative impact of family abuse on adolescent's well-being and adjustment, other social relationships can act as a protective factor against negative developmental outcomes for at-risk children who experience adverse parent-children interactions. In studies with kindergarten children, it was found that high-quality teacher-child relationships act as a protective factor against the risk for aggressiveness in less securely attached children<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, school connectedness which is "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals"<sup>14</sup>, can become a safe haven for adolescents who experience rejection and abuse in their family environment. Relevant to this, school connectedness was explored in a 2017 study in eastern Ukraine, by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) in collaboration with UNICEF. Among the study's findings is that (physically and psychologically) abused adolescents strongly benefit from positive environments outside the abusive home environment. Specifically, familial abuse had a lower impact on adolescents' life satisfaction and levels of depression and anxiety when teacher support is high<sup>15</sup>. The findings emphasize the protective nature of the education system, so, consequently, school connectedness should be considered as a worthwhile target for at-risk adolescents.

In conclusion, the present report aims to provide insight into how adolescents in Ukraine experience their relationship with their parents. Furthermore, the study

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13. Buyse, E., Verschueren, K., & Doumen, S. (2009). Preschoolers' Attachment to Mother and Risk for Adjustment Problems in Kindergarten: Can Teachers Make a Difference? *Social Development*, 20(1), 33-50.

14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

15. Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fanti, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019) "An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment"; Ukraine: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

seeks to explore the detrimental effects of family abuse on adolescents' behavioural and psychosocial well-being and how other sources of support can mitigate these harmful effects. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following three research questions:

1. How important is positive parenting for the decrease of detrimental outcomes?

## 2.2. Scope of the study

This report is focused on the importance of positive parenting, and was developed by SeeD and UNICEF. It is based on the analysis of self-report data collected in the autumn of 2018 from 7,846 adolescents. Adolescents were recruited from 200 educational institutions from 8 oblasts in Ukraine: Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Lviv, and Kyiv oblasts. Overall, the study aims to provide insight on the contribution of parents to adolescents' behavioural and psychosocial development. In turn, this will inform family experts and other key stakeholders (e.g. Ministry of Education and Sciences) on the vitality of encouraging healthy family relationships or promoting healthy relations with other microsystemic sources

2. Can the education system act as a protective mechanism for adolescents who experience abuse at home?

3. Does conflict exposure contribute to negative adolescent developmental outcomes directly, or indirectly through microsystemic violence?

which can act as sources of resilience for disadvantaged adolescents.

Findings will also inform experts and stakeholders on how prevention and intervention programmes can be tailored to the needs of adolescents. For instance, this report will shed light on how family abuse mediates the relationship between conflict exposure and detrimental outcomes. Understanding the contribution of conflict on family processes and which type of abuse prevails under experiences of conflict, would help in the design of specific programmes targeting the decrease of such abusive behaviours.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The measures complied with UNICEF's and national ethical considerations on conducting research using children. To select the indicators which would be added to the questionnaire, an extensive literature review on adolescence development was conducted along with consultations with experts on adolescent development. Numerous indicators were selected for inclusion in the final questionnaire, ranging from adolescents' positive experiences in the family context (e.g. family connectedness, warmth, monitoring, involvement)

or experiences of abuse (e.g. physical abuse, psychological abuse, exposure to domestic violence), to numerous negative developmental outcomes, such as externalising and internalising behaviours (e.g. aggression, oppositional-defiant disorder [ODD], anxiety, and depression), and risky behaviours (e.g. substance use, unsafe sexual behaviours, and self-harm). A full list of the adolescent indicators can be found in the appendix.

### 3.1. Instruments: Questionnaires

Each indicator included in the questionnaire was measured through 2 to 5 items. Each item in an indicator measured different aspects of the overall concept and was then aggregated to form a composite scale. For instance, parental monitoring was measured through 8 items – 4 items addressed the degree to which mothers are aware of adolescents' whereabouts, social networks, and online behaviour, and four respective questions for fathers' awareness. Likewise, nine items measured family abuse – three items per a distinct type of abuse. For instance, to measure psychological abuse, three items that tap into different aspects of the indicator were included in the questionnaire; specifically, adolescents were asked

to indicate whether anyone in their family or anyone living in their home (i) screamed at them loudly and aggressively, (ii) called them mean names or cursed them, and (iii) threaten to leave or abandon them. In the same manner, three items measured physical abuse, and three items measured sexual abuse. In some cases, internationally validated psychometric instruments that provide reliable measures of the indicators were used in the questionnaire, while in other instances original items were designed using best practices in psychometric scale construction.

### 3.2. Ethical Considerations

The research team thoroughly reviewed all ethical considerations to ensure the protection of children's rights during the study. UNICEF contracted the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremchenko<sup>16</sup> (UISR), a leading institute accredited for conduct of national surveys and with substantial experience in school-based surveying to provide expert advice on the questionnaire formulation and its translation. UISR is the institute which gathered the first wave of data for the Eastern Ukraine Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) survey. UISR is also the Ukrainian accredited institute for the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs<sup>17</sup> (ESPAD) and leads Ukraine's data collection for the Health and Behaviour in School-aged Children<sup>18</sup> (HBSAC), both cross-national studies taking place in 35 and 48 countries respectively. UISR carried out an initial independent ethical review of the questionnaire

developed by the research team following which the questionnaire was revised before being pilot tested in students in Bila Tserkov. Approval for the survey was obtained from the Commission on Psychology and Pedagogy of the Scientific-Methodical Council of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine<sup>19</sup>. Before administering the paper-based questionnaire regional field managers from the UISR National network received a full day training. Students were then informed about the objectives of the study, how the data would be used and informed that participation was on a voluntary basis, that not all the questions needed to be answered and that they could withdraw at any time. Each student received a questionnaire and an individual envelope in which they sealed their completed questionnaire. All individual envelopes of the class were then sealed by the interviewer in a second envelope prior to the return of the teacher in the room.

16. <http://www.uisr.org.ua/>

17. <http://www.espad.org>

18. <http://www.hbsc.org>

19. <http://www.mon.gov.ua/>

### 3.3. Data Collection

The adolescent data was collected through a paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaire in the Ukrainian language in the first semester of the 2018-2019 school-year (October to early December). The sample consisted of 7,846 adolescents aged between 12-19 years old (mean age = 15.46 years). Both genders were represented in the sample. Boys represented 46.3 percent of the sample (3,634 males), girls represented 53.5% (4,197 females), and a further .2% (15 adolescents) did not provide their gender information.

Adolescents were students from 200 education institutions in Ukraine who resided in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Lviv, and Kyiv oblasts. For the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, a sample was formed by zones separately: zone 0-5 km, zone 5-15 km and zone 15+ km from the territory of contact line.

# 4. FINDINGS

## 4.1. The importance of positive parenting

### 4.1.1. Profiles of parenting behaviours

Our analyses demonstrated that there are different profiles of parenting, with only some resulting in favourable outcomes for adolescents. So, similar to what was discussed in the introduction, the importance of positive parenting cannot be ignored. Myriad of research has established the contribution of positive parenting for the healthy behavioural and psychosocial development of adolescents. For instance, developmental psychologists have noted that different behaviours were highly correlated to specific kinds of parenting, such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles. The study explores the impact of the different parenting profiles observed on adolescent developmental outcomes. Our analyses showed four distinct profiles of parenting:

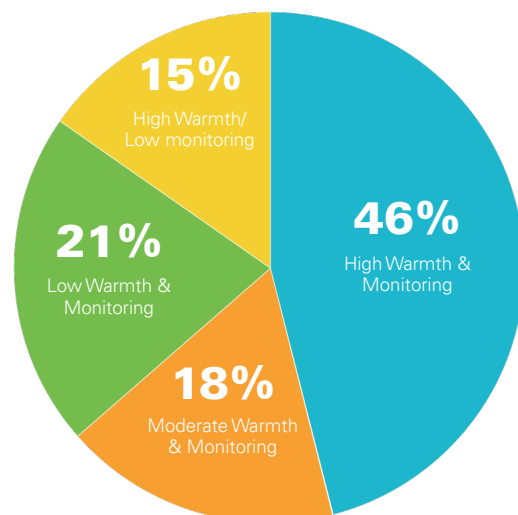
1. Parents with high levels of warmth and high levels of monitoring towards their adolescent children. Mean scores were high on items of warmth, such as “Your dad/mom shows to you that he/she loves you” and “Your dad/mom smiles warmly or gives you a hug”. This means that, as parents, they are warm and responsive to the needs of their adolescent child, forming a close emotional bond with him. Mean scores were also high in items that measure how much they know about the young person’s friends, their whereabouts, or their online behaviour. The majority of parents in Ukraine (46%) belong in this category.

2. Parents who demonstrate moderate levels of warmth and monitoring.

3. Parents who score low in both warmth and monitoring. What this means is that such parents may be cold and unresponsive toward the adolescent’s emotional needs, whilst also fail to enforce rules about their behaviour. Parents from this category are usually indifferent towards their child and utterly uninvolved in his/her life. Alarmingly, one in five parents in Ukraine (21%) belong in this category.

4. Parents who demonstrate high warmth and low monitoring. So, on the one hand, adolescents’ emotional needs are met, yet at the same time, parents seem to be indulgent and lenient without knowing much about their adolescent child’s behaviour.

With these different profiles of parenting in mind, it is possible to investigate under which types of parenting behaviours certain behaviours emerge.



**4.1.1.1. High Warmth and Monitoring are associated with a healthy behavioural, psychosocial, and civic adjustment**

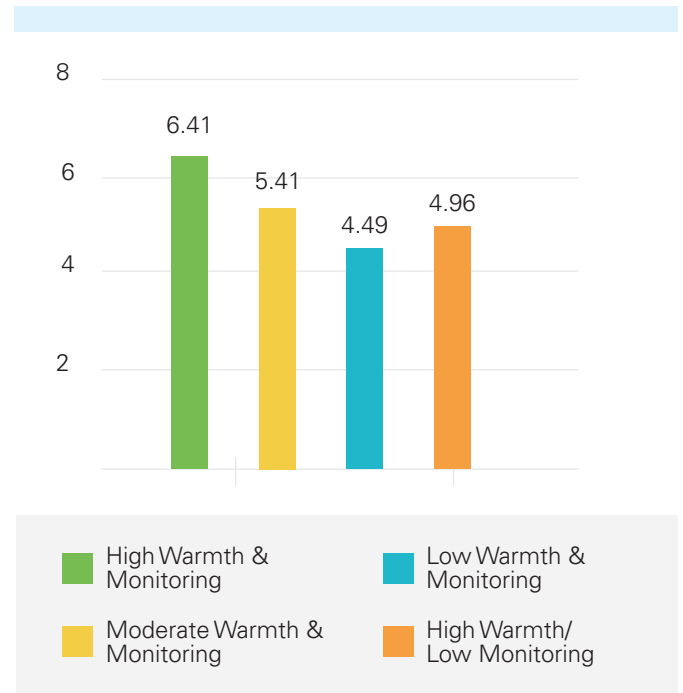
Differences in parental behaviours, unsurprisingly, brought out differences in behavioural and psychosocial adjustment. Group differences were found in all outcomes, such as externalising and internalising behaviours, and readiness for civic participation. Adolescents in Ukraine whose parents display both high levels of warmth and monitoring demonstrate the most positive (and the least negative) outcomes, such as:

**School Connectedness.** When parents are warm toward their child and monitor their behaviour, this is associated with higher levels of school connectedness. Mean scores in school connectedness for adolescents who experience both warmth and monitoring from their parents is 6.41, but this falls to 4.49 for adolescents with parents who display low warmth and monitoring parents. Home and school are two of the most important microsystems for children and adolescents, and our findings support the longstanding view that what happens at home transfers to the school environment.

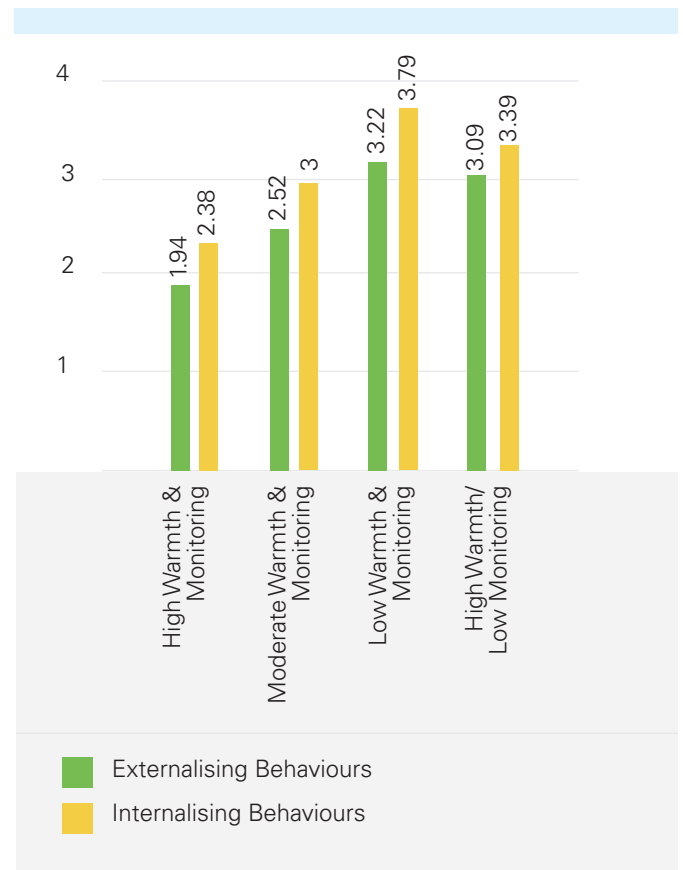
**School-related Outcomes.** School-related differences, such as experiences of bullying and victimisation, were also uncovered. When parents are warm and attentive to their offspring’s emotional needs, all the negative outcomes show a decreased trend.

**Internalising and Externalising Behaviours.** Adolescents in Ukraine who experience warmth and monitoring in their families display the least externalising or internalising symptoms, compared to all the other types of parenting. These important findings show that- similar to other outcomes- group differences emerge for problematic behaviours as well. Positive parenting decreases the likelihood that adolescents’ will “act out” against other people by being, for instance, aggressive or defiant, and will also be less likely to experience negative emotionality such as anxiety and depression.

**School Connectedness**



**Internalising and externalising behaviours**



**Risky Behaviours.** Risky behaviours were found to be less pronounced among adolescents whose parents are involved in their lives (mean score = 0.41). In other words, a style of parenting that encompasses both warmth and monitoring is associated with a decreased likelihood that adolescents would engage in unsafe sexual behaviours, self-harm, or substance use. In contrast, the mean score for risky behaviours quadruples (mean score = 1.63) when adolescents are surrounded by uninvolved parents who show no emotional interest toward their children.

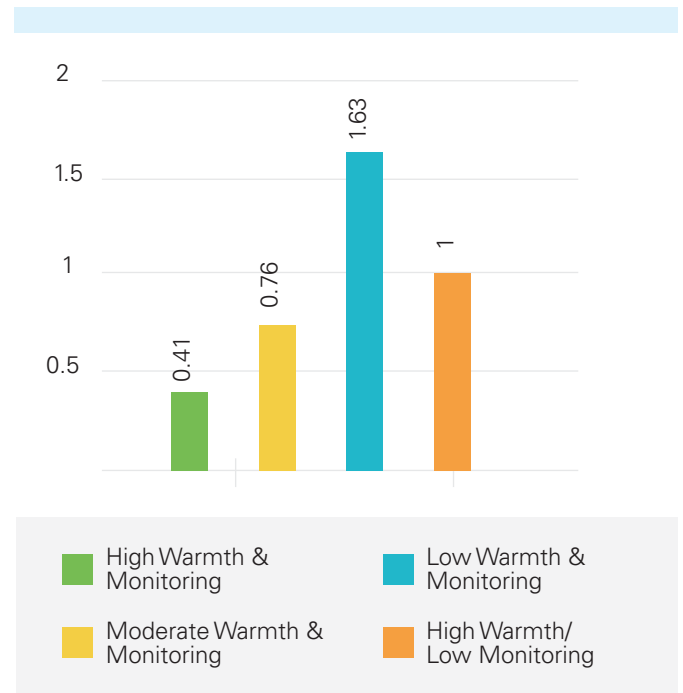
**Civic Behaviour.** Similar to the other findings, adequate parental warmth and monitoring relate to healthy non-violent civic behaviour. Interestingly, a healthy microsystem progresses to a healthy relationship with the macrosystem as well. In other words, the likelihood to participate in civic matters is relatively higher among adolescents whose parents monitor their behaviour and who express their love. In contrast, readiness for non-violent civic participation decreases when parents fail to monitor their child’s behaviour or be emotionally available towards them.

We know from the international literature that for adolescents to experience educational attainment, positive behavioural, psychosocial, and civic development, parents should be highly involved in their adolescent child’s life. When parents are warm, emotionally available, and are interested in what goes on in their child’s life, adolescents are more likely to transfer their positive microsystemic experiences into other contexts as well, such as the school community or the society at large. Indeed, findings from the adolescent study in Ukraine demonstrate that adolescents whose parents are adequately involved in their lives are less likely to become either bullies or victims of bullying, experience less internalising problems (such as anxiety and depression), and exhibit less negative outward behaviours.

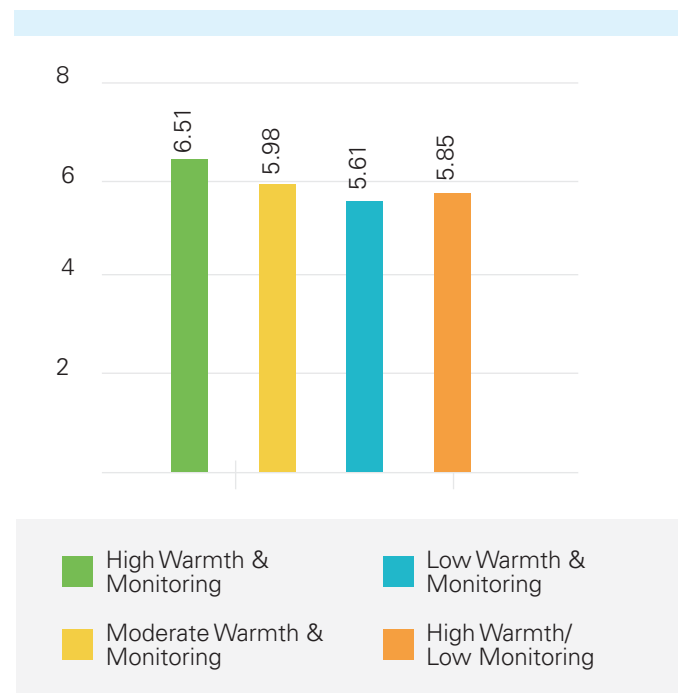
Furthermore, adolescents who have caring and involved parents are more likely to transfer their positive feelings outwards, and act positively in their wider social environment as well. On the other hand, when parents do not express their love or care to monitor their child’s behaviours, this indifference can be catastrophic for young people. Adolescents display a wide range of self-destructive behaviours, in the form of abusing illegal substances or engaging in unsafe sexual behaviours. They also direct their anguish outwards, in the form of aggression and bullying, or experience increased anxiety and depression.

The findings should be considered by key parenting stakeholders when designing prevention and interventions programmes. As the family is the most

**Risky behaviours**



**Readiness for non-violence civic engagement**



important microsystem, parents should be considered as the main source of security for children and adolescents; thus, when there is lack of interest from parents’ side or even too much emotional interest but little behaviour control, this opens the door to disruptive behaviours and emotional troubles. Despite the fact that parents of adolescents, usually willingly, begin to reduce or alter some of their behaviour control tactics as they attempt to grant more autonomy to their children, our findings highlight that adolescents’ behaviours still need to be monitored.

Furthermore, the high percentage of parents who show neither parental warmth nor monitoring towards their adolescent child should alarm developmental psychologists and adolescent experts in Ukraine. In response to that percentage, stakeholders should first explore in detail the cultural and social norms related to the situation. This would help addressing the issue. One way would be to offer parent training programmes which would emphasise to parents the importance of showing legitimate interest in their children – such as who they hang out with, what they do online, where they are in after-school hours, while simultaneously

expressing their caring feelings. Additionally, programmes would with parents on the distinction between involvement and too much involvement that leads to “suffocation,” or the distinction between monitoring and being overcontrolling. Adolescence is a unique time in one’s life, where the young people, on the one hand, still need their parents’ presence in their lives, but on the other hand also need to have the space and freedom to be autonomous, independent, and understand themselves.

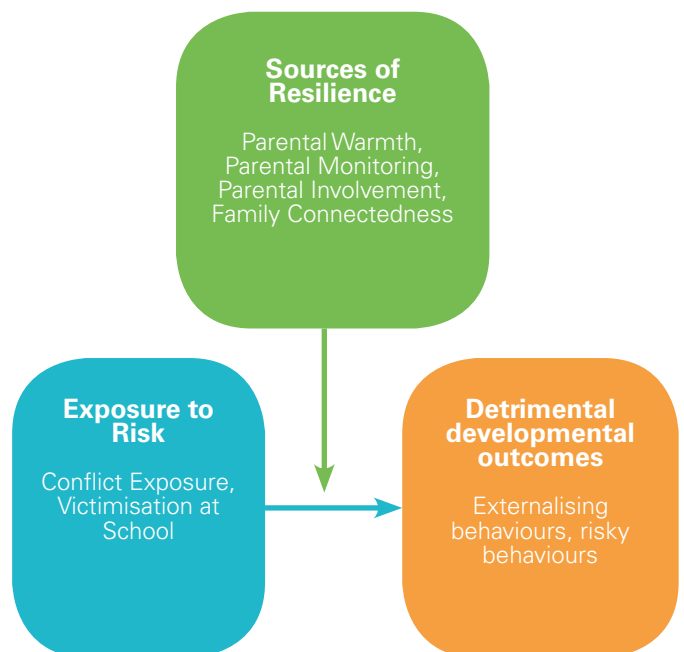
### 4.1.2. Parenting as a source of resilience

To further examine the contribution of positive parenting to adolescents’ behavioural and psychosocial adjustment in Ukraine, a risk-resilience approach was used (see Figure 1). The aim for this analysis was to investigate which familial resilience factors (e.g. warmth, monitoring) mitigate the negative developmental outcomes faced by at-risk adolescents.

Exposure to risk in the study is conceptualised as exposure to conflict, or victimisation experiences. Both are considered adverse situations which affect adolescents’ development negatively. In Ukraine, more than a third of adolescents are victims of bullying behaviours. For instance, approximately 40% of adolescents in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were victims of moderate to severe physical victimisation, whereas more than one in two adolescents were victims of verbal bullying<sup>20</sup>. Victimisation experiences link with mental health problems such as behaviour problems, internalising behaviours, and even bullying behaviours. Exposure to conflict also contributes to externalising and internalising problems. Furthermore, it is negatively associated with life satisfaction, meaning that increased conflict exposure is predictive of a reduced sense of wellbeing<sup>21</sup>.

Figure 1.

**The Risk – Resilience model.**



20. Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fanti, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019) “An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment,” Ukraine: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

21. Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fanti, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019) “An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment,” Ukraine: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).



To test the unique impact of high-risk experiences on adolescent development, a structural equation model (SEM) was performed (see Figure 2). Our analyses demonstrate that:

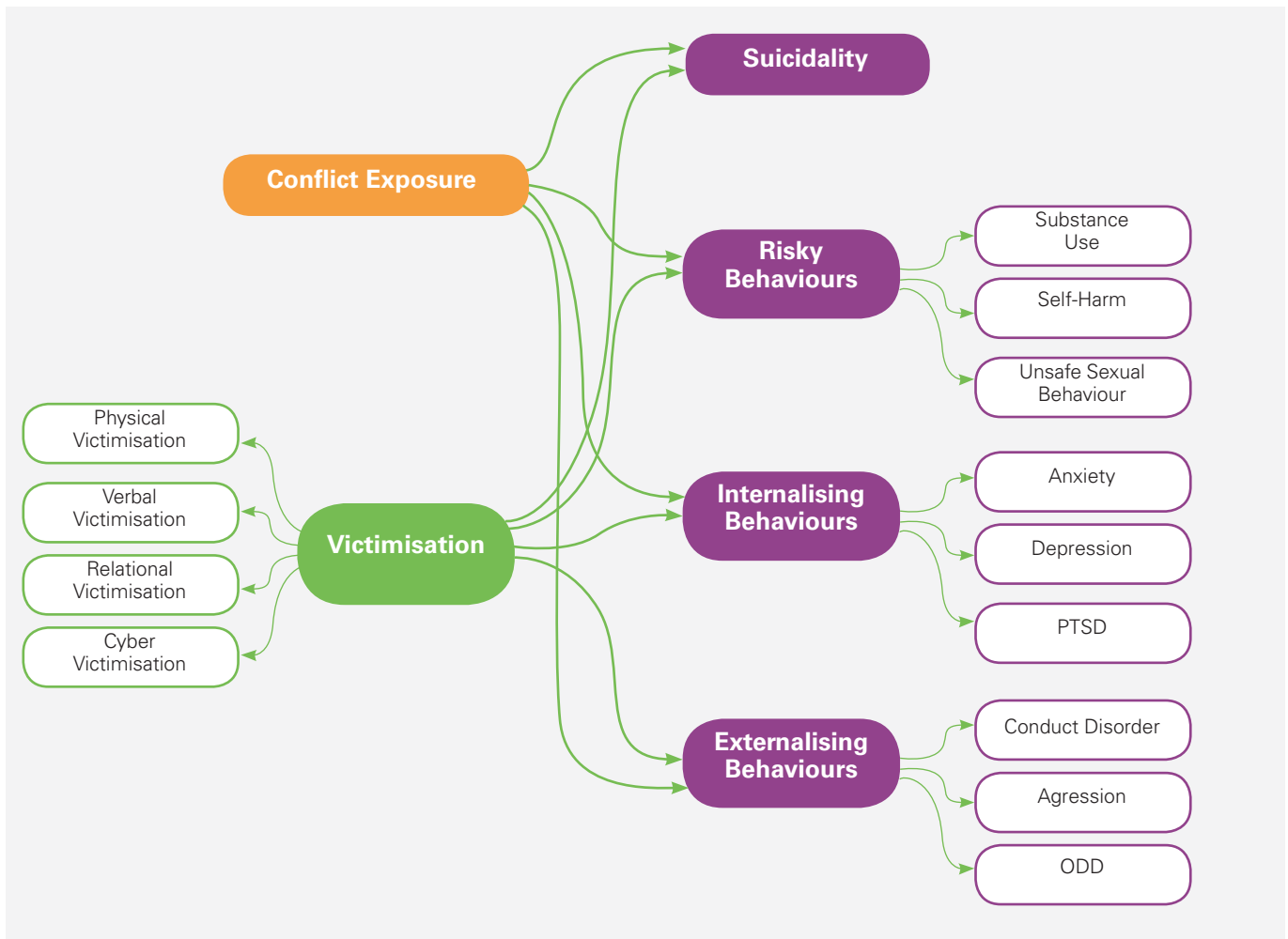
- Conflict exposure posits a high-risk factor for negative coping mechanisms, including risky behaviours, externalising and internalising problems. In other words, the more adolescents are exposed to experiences of conflict (e.g. seeing armed soldiers or experiencing financial hardship as a result of the conflict) the more likely they were to engage in self-destructive behaviours,

face academic challenges, or experience negative emotionality.

- Being a victim of bullying has a significant role in shaping adolescents’ development. The adolescent study assessed different forms of victimisation, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyber victimisation, and found that victimised adolescents are more prone to negative adjustment, either in the form of, aggression, abuse of illegal substances, in engaging in risky sexual behaviours, or through negative emotionality such as higher levels of anxiety, depression, and even suicidality.

Figure 2.

**The Structural Equation Model for Victimization and Conflict Exposure as predictors of developmental outcomes.**



To explore parenting as a source of resilience in the adolescent study in Ukraine, three meta-scales were created; a maternal meta-scale encompassing all three measures of positive maternal parenting (maternal warmth, maternal monitoring, and maternal

involvement), a paternal meta-scale encompassing the three respective measures of positive paternal parenting, and a parental meta-scale incorporating all measures of both maternal and paternal positive parenting practices.

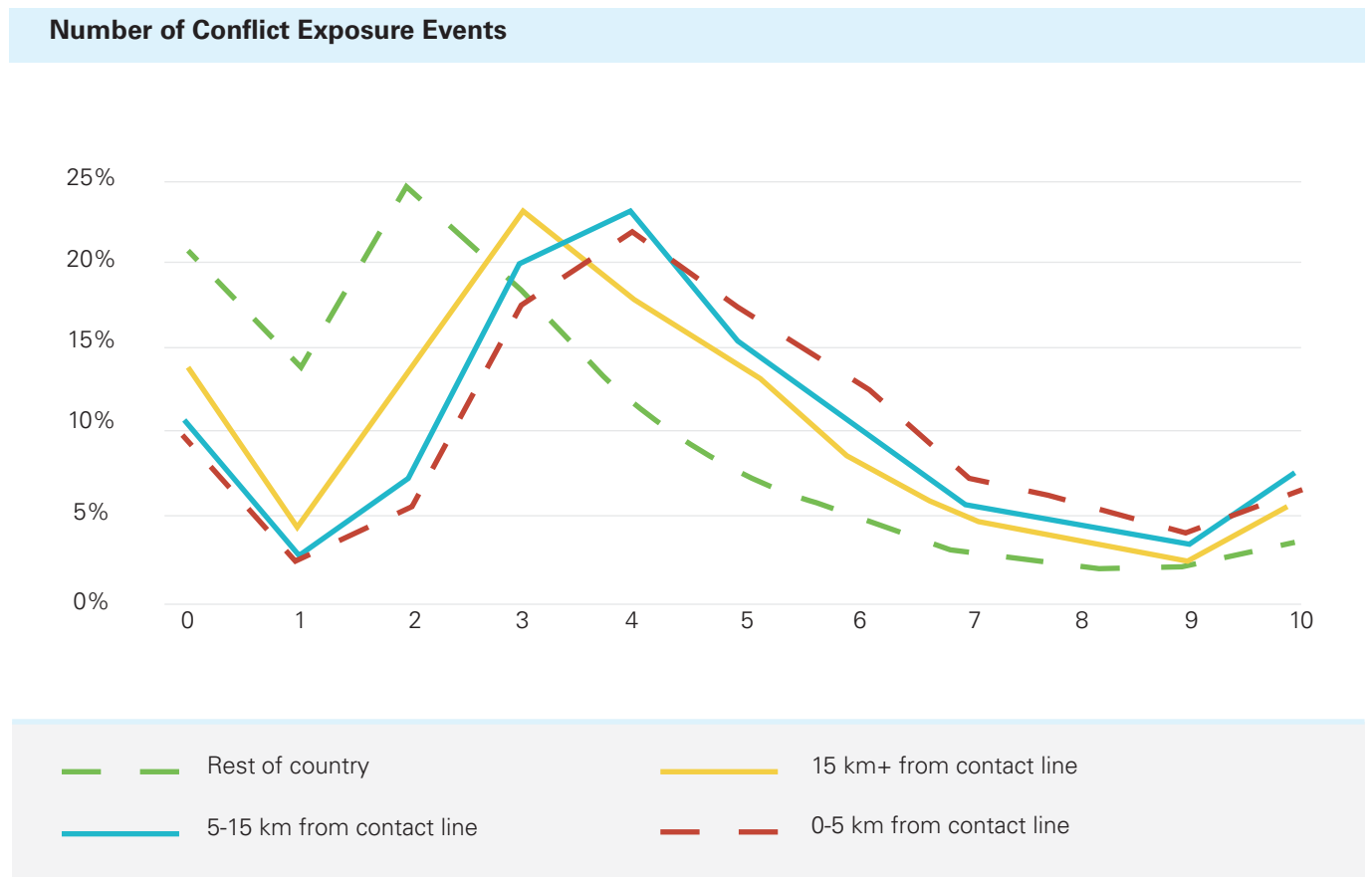
**4.1.2.1. Exposure to Conflict**

Proximity to the contact line brings about higher exposure to conflict-related negative experiences. Adolescents near the contact line were, unsurprisingly, found to be more exposed to a higher number of conflict-related occurrences. Frequencies of responses (see Figure 3) show that 6 per cent of adolescents living in close proximity (0-5km) to the grey zone reported exposure to 7 such events against 1 per cent of their peers living outside of government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Exposure to conflict was measured with ten items tailored to the context of eastern Ukraine, wherein adolescents were asked to

indicate whether they experienced any of the following as a result of the conflict: (i) if they saw armed soldiers, (ii) saw heavy military equipment, (iii) heard or saw actual fighting, (iv) were displaced from their home, (v) close relative or friend participated as a combatant, (vi) saw people who were wounded or had been killed, (vii) their family was separated because of the conflict, (viii) close relative or friend was injured, (ix) close relative or friend was killed, or (x) their family suffered economic hardship because to the conflict.

Figure 3.

**Conflict exposure in Ukraine.**



**4.1.2.1.1. Positive parenting builds resilience for conflict-exposed adolescents against detrimental developmental outcomes.**

Positive parental parenting, defined within the adolescent study in Ukraine as mothers' and fathers' levels of monitoring, involvement, and display of

warmth, was identified as an important resilience factor for numerous negative developmental outcomes when exposed to conflict.

More specifically:

- *Internalising Problems and Suicidality:* exposure to conflict is also predictive of internalising behaviours and suicidality. This may be for several reasons; for instance, witnessing shelling, experiencing family division and economic hardship, and the constant insecurity can be directed inwards in the form of internalising behaviours, such as anxiety, PTSD, or suicidality. On the other hand, resilience analyses show that positive parenting acts as a buffer against the impact of exposure to conflict on internalising symptoms or suicidality. In other words, conflict exposure has a more significant effect on internalising problems or suicidality, but only among adolescents with low levels of parental warmth, parental monitoring, or parental involvement.

#### 4.1.2.2. Positive parenting builds resilience for victimised adolescents against detrimental developmental outcomes.

The negative impact of victimisation experiences on adolescents' developmental outcomes is very similar to that of conflict exposure in that victimisation deteriorates the ability to develop into well-adjusted adolescents in all sectors of life. However, similarly to conflict exposure, positive parenting mitigates the negative impact of victimisation. Specifically:

- *Internalising Problems and Suicidality:* victimisation experiences are detrimental to the victim's inner world, impacting on their ability to adjust psychologically. Victimised adolescents experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation. This may be because victims of bullying, due to their vulnerable position, do not believe that they have the power to influence their environment. This results in them "giving up", causing the person to feel helpless and hopeless, and experience feelings of anxiety and depression<sup>22</sup>. Despite the destructive consequences of being a victim of bullying, though, positive parental parenting protects adolescents from the negative impact of victimisation on internalising symptoms or suicidality. That means, victimised adolescents experience greater anxiety, depression, PTSD, or suicidality, but this applies only to adolescents with low levels of parental warmth, parental monitoring, or parental involvement. Positive parenting provides an avenue for adolescents to calm, gain strength,

- *Risky Behaviours and Externalising Behaviours:* risky behaviours and externalising problems are inevitable consequences of exposure to conflict. Similar to internalising behaviours and suicidality, experiences related to conflict exposure leads to going through inner anguish. In some cases, it can be directed outwards, through externalising behaviours that include aggression and conduct disorder, or through self-destructive behaviours, such as substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviour, or self-harm. Resilience analyses though, revealed that positive parenting acts protectively against externalising problems or risky behaviours among conflict-exposed adolescents. This means that when adolescents are recipients of positive parenting, the links between conflict exposure and externalising problems, and conflict exposure and risky behaviours are disrupted.

develop life skills, and navigate constructively through their challenging experiences. So, even if victimised adolescents experience disappointment from their school microsystem, they gain strength and consolation from their family not to crumble.

- *Risky Behaviours and Externalising Behaviours:* risky behaviours and externalising problems are inevitable consequences of victimisation. Similar to internalising behaviours and suicidality, victimisation is an important stressor which gravely affects adolescents' behavioural outcomes. Victims of bullying go through a lot of anguish which may sometimes be transformed into negative outward behaviour, in the form of aggression, defiance, and oppositionality. Furthermore, victimised adolescents may also seek to "escape" the pain and anguish they go through by exposing themselves to self-destructive behaviours, such as abusing illegal substances or engaging in unsafe sexual experiences. However, this association between victimisation and externalising behaviours, or between victimisation and risky behaviours is mitigated by positive parenting practices. In other words, victimised adolescents benefit from parents who display positive parenting practices. It protects them from directing their pain to self-destructive behaviours or the outward environment.

22. Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky, G. I., & Alloy, L. B. (1989). Hopelessness depression: A theory-based subtype of depression. *Psychological Review*, 96, 358-372.

### 4.1.2.3. Conclusions from resilience analyses

Conflict-exposed adolescents or victimised adolescents experience failure from the system. Failure from their community to protect them from experiencing adverse events such as seeing armed soldiers or people wounded/killed, being separated from their family because of the conflict, or being displaced from their home. Victimised adolescents, on the other hand, experience failure from the education system to protect them against violence from peers within the school. Consequently, this exposure to various forms of violence contributes to the development of negative developmental outcomes, such as negative emotionality and destructive behaviours.

Section 4.1.1.1. discussed the finding that adolescents whose parents exhibit warmth, monitoring, and involvement toward them also experience less behavioural and psychosocial challenges and healthier civic adjustment. The present section also demonstrates and confirms how important having parents who display positive parenting practices is. Involved and caring parenting is essential for the healthy development of

adolescents. The results of the adolescent study in Ukraine show that, even if adolescents experience challenging situations, positive parenting mitigates the impact of risk exposure.

Understandably, since Ukraine is a conflict-affected country, being exposed to conflict – especially in the eastern parts of the country – is unavoidable. Likewise, being a victim of bullying has become a reality for a large percentage of adolescents. So, understanding the mechanisms through which the negative effects of either conflict exposure or victimisation can be lessened is crucial as it provides key evidence for policy interventions. Our analyses provide support for the need to include parents in specific programmatic interventions tailored to the needs of conflict-exposed adolescents, or of adolescents who are victims of bullying. Parent training programmes would explore the short-term and long-term importance of positive parent-adolescent relations and encourage and promote a high-quality parent-adolescent relationship.

## 4.2. The negative impact of family abuse on adolescents and the protective role of School Connectedness

The second aim of the adolescent study in Ukraine was to explore other sources of influence which can help mitigate the negative developmental outcomes for children who experience adverse and harmful caregiving experiences. Despite the fact that Ukraine has little statistical data on child abuse, in 2016 the Ukrainian national police registered 127,478 reports of domestic violence<sup>23</sup>, a figure which is widely accepted to be greatly underreported. Ukraine prioritised Sustainable Development Goal target 16.2, which calls to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”<sup>24</sup>, making the investigation of family abuse in the context of Ukraine important. In the current study, family abuse was composed of four constitutive elements – physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, and exposure to domestic violence. In global literature, the long-term consequences of family abuse are well established. In a meta-analysis published in 2012, researchers concluded that there is a causal relationship between child maltreatment

and a range of mental disorders (e.g. depressive disorders), substance use, suicidality, and risky sexual behaviour<sup>25</sup>. In Ukraine, a recent report by the World Health Organisation reported that approximately one in four young people experienced physical or emotional neglect, 12% experienced emotional abuse, 11% physical abuse, and 5% were victims of sexual abuse. Furthermore, in the same report, it is noted that young people who experienced adverse childhood experiences had increased risks for suicide attempt, alcohol and substance use and abuse, having multiple sexual partners, and early sexual initiation<sup>26</sup>. Overall, it is clear that exposure to violence in the familial micro-system predicts behavioural, emotional, and mental health problems.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that despite parent-child relationships being of poor quality, other relational influences may positively impact the young child. For instance, positive teacher-child relations were found to protect children who experienced

23. Zakhosha, V., Sakhno, Y., Sethi, D., & Korol, N. (2018). “Adverse childhood experiences and health-harming behaviours among students in Ukraine: Report on survey results.” World Health Organization.

24. UN General Assembly (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1. Retrieved from: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>

25. Normal, R. E., Byambaa, M., De, R., Butchart, A., Scott, J., & Vos, T. (2012). The long-term health consequences of child physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS Medicine*, 9(11).

26. Zakhosha, V., Sakhno, Y., Sethi, D., & Korol, N. (2018). “Adverse childhood experiences and health-harming behaviours among students in Ukraine: Report on survey results.” World Health Organization.

negative attachment to their mothers against negative outcomes<sup>27</sup>. This is particularly important because, despite significant efforts from psychologists, social workers, developmental experts, and policy-makers,

based on the prevalence rates reported above, family abuse is still strong with many children and adolescents suffering on a frequent basis.

27. Buyse, E., Verschuere, K., Doumen, S. (2011). Preschoolers' attachment to mother and risk for adjustment problems in kindergarten: Can teachers make a difference? *Social Development*, 20(1), 33-50.

## 4.2.1. Family Abuse impacts adolescent development negatively

Family abuse, as expected, is predictive of numerous unhealthy developmental outcomes. A structural equation model (SEM) was carried out to test the unique negative impact of family abuse on adolescent adjustment. Due to the crucial importance of the family system, we expected that experiences of family abuse would be detrimental to adolescents' behavioural and emotional well-being. Figure 4 shows the empirically validated model for family abuse among adolescents from all eight oblasts. Specifically, family abuse:

- Is linked to increased suicidality. One way to explain this association is that family abuse elicits negative feelings, such as feelings of defeat, entrapment, and hopelessness. A hopeless individual who fears that he is trapped in a vicious and violent environment is more likely to consider suicide as "the only way out"<sup>28</sup>.
- Contributes to higher levels of risky behaviours. It may be that adolescents who experience violence within their families may abuse illegal substances or engage in other self-destructive behaviours as a "short-term" escape from their experiences, or as a coping mechanism – to cope with the emotional toll of abuse.
- Increases negative emotionality, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD. The findings support the common-held view that harmonious family life is a prerequisite for adolescents' emotional well-being. Experiencing family abuse leads to inner pain and anguish which, in some adolescents, may then be directed inwards, in the form of internalising symptomatology.
- Leads to higher levels of externalising behaviours, which include aggression, conduct problems, and oppositional defiance. Adolescents experiencing abuse at home, are thus, more likely to display behaviours like arguing or hitting other people, destroying other peoples' property, or defying rules at home or school. One explanation for this predictive association might be that when maltreating parents or other family members do not provide the positive environment that children and adolescents need to in order to feel safe and learn how to regulate their emotions, this leaves the door open for maladaptive behavioural functioning<sup>29</sup>.

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*Family abuse was composed of questions associated with physical (e.g. "has anyone in your family locked you up in a small place, tied you up, or chained you to something"), psychological (e.g. "has anyone in your family threatened to leave you or forever abandon you"), and sexual (e.g. "has anyone in your family tried to have sex with you when you did not want them to") abuse, as well as questions associated with exposure to domestic violence (e.g. "have you seen adults in your home hit, kick, slap, punch each other or hurt each other physically in other ways").*

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- Lowers adolescents' life quality, as measured through life satisfaction (measured on a 10-point rating ladder, where 0 is indicative of "worst possible life," and 10 signifies "best possible life") and quality of life (e.g. "my daily life has been filled with things that interest me"). In other words, adolescents' life quality is one area which is affected drastically by maltreatment.

Mostly, the lack of family bonds in adolescents' families in Ukraine impacts young peoples' developmental outcomes. Child maltreatment and family abuse are important determinants of various emotional, behavioural, and educational

difficulties that include, among others, aggression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviours, and suicidality. These are highly concerning findings which should alarm developmental experts and policymakers on the need to effectively address violence in the context of the family, provide positive parenting training, and support at-risk adolescents. As the World Health Organization argues, prevention and protecting children from violence is a priority and has more benefits than dealing with the consequences in the long run. Specifically, violence against children brings about both public health consequences and economic costs, thus undermining investments in the education sector and health sector, as well as erode the productivity of future generations<sup>30</sup>.

28. Taylor, P. J., Gooding, P., Wood, A. M., Tarrier, N. (2011). The role of defeat and entrapment in depression, anxiety, and suicide. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137, 391–420.

29. Kim, J., & Cicchetti, D. (2010). Longitudinal pathways linking child maltreatment, emotions regulation, peer relations, and psychopathology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51, 706-716.

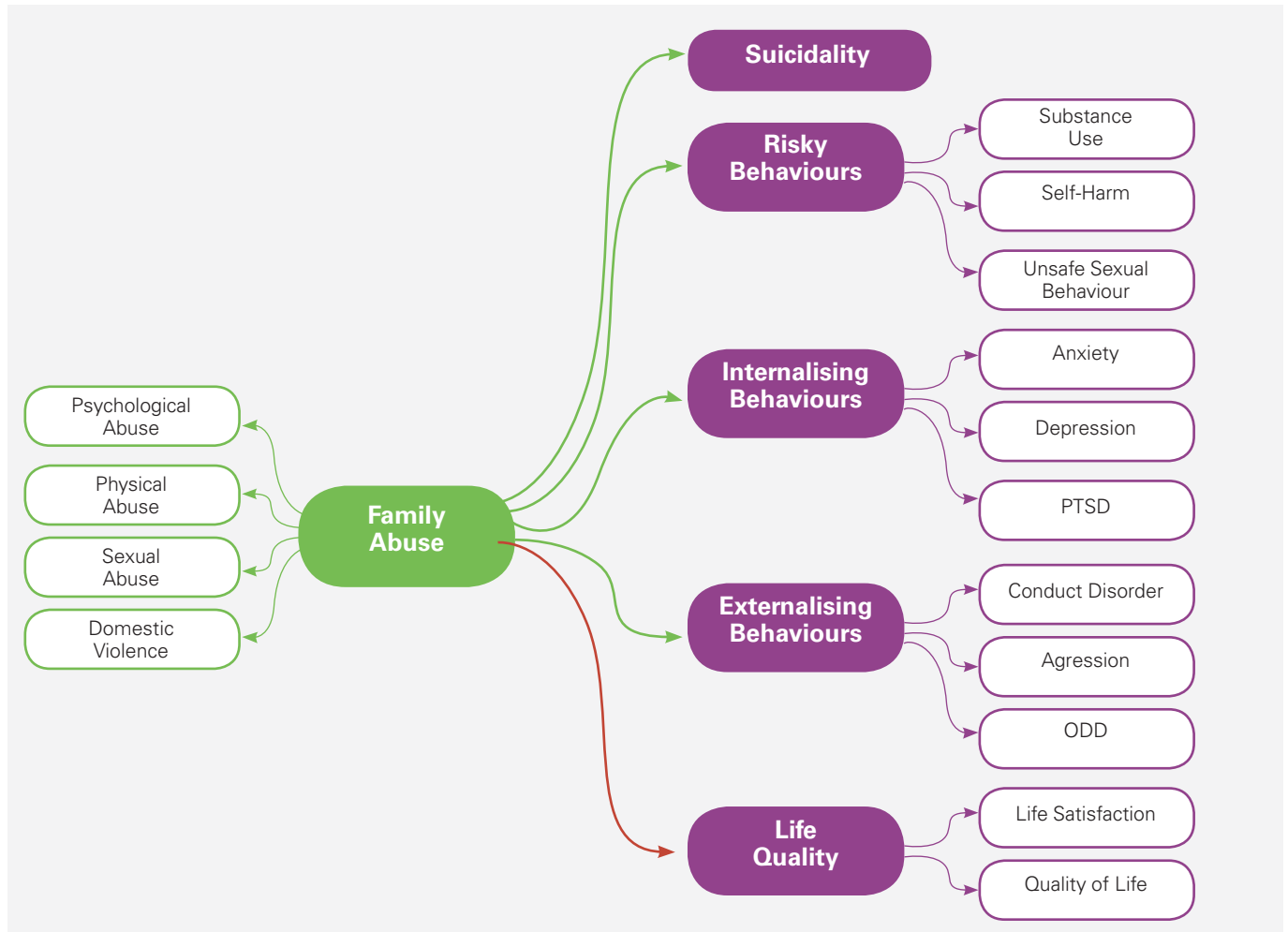
30. World Health Organization (2016). INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children. Geneva: World Health Organization ([http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/inspire/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/)).

One way to strengthen youngsters who experience family maltreatment is to identify sources of resilience

that can lessen the detrimental outcomes of family abuse.

Figure 4.

**The Structural Equation Model for Family Abuse as a predictor of developmental outcomes.**



### 4.2.2. The importance of School Connectedness for adolescents who experience family abuse

Adolescents who are abused at home but receive support from teachers or are emotionally invested with their schools have less adverse development outcomes. This finding is important. It shows that even though the family constitutes the most critical microsystem for one's well-being and adjustment, children and adolescents also form other important interpersonal relationships throughout their lives. These relationships can be particularly beneficial for at-risk adolescents, and especially those who are maltreated at home.

In other words, since the school is also an essential microsystem in child and adolescent development, we expect that at-risk adolescents who experience school connectedness will not suffer the negative consequences of family abuse to the same degree than less connected adolescents. To this end, the Ukraine adolescent study explored which contexts outside of the family environment mitigate the detrimental impact of exposure to family abuse.

#### 4.2.2.1. School Connectedness builds resilience for adolescents who are exposed to domestic violence against negative developmental outcomes.

Emotional connection to school and teacher support were identified as important protective factors for internalising behaviours and externalising behaviours among adolescents who are exposed to incidents of domestic violence. Witnessing domestic violence, even if adolescents are not victims of abuse themselves, has catastrophic consequences. The fear and uncertainty they feel causes the young person to consider their home an unsafe, unwanted place. Moreover, due to the distressing nature of domestic violence, both the perpetrator as well as the victim, may fail to provide the adolescent with the attention and the support they need. Thus, it is particularly significant that emotional connection to school and teacher support act protectively towards abused adolescents. Being emotionally invested in the school may supersede the negativity that the context of home brings out. Thus, even if adolescents feel threatened or scared from what they experience at home, the fact that they feel an emotional connection to another microsystemic environment, seems to be enough to

#### 4.2.2.2. School Connectedness builds resilience for adolescents who experience physical abuse against detrimental developmental outcomes.

Adolescents experiencing physical abuse strongly benefit from safe and supportive environments outside the home. Specifically, emotional connection to school and teacher support interrupt the pathways from physical abuse to internalising behaviours and externalising behaviours. In other words, the findings demonstrate that, for instance, high physical abuse is more strongly associated with anxiety and depression when adolescents experience low teacher support.

On the other hand, when adolescents consider their teachers to provide them with the support, encouragement, and guidance they need, this can compensate for the abuse they experience in the familial context. Further, physical abuse had a lower impact on adolescent's internalising symptomatology (e.g. anxiety and depression) when peer support was high. This highlights how vital alternate supportive figures are for adolescents' inner well-being. Overall, for internalising problems, emotional connection to school came out as the most important protective factor, followed by teacher support.

#### School Connectedness consists of three constituent elements:

- Teacher Support
- Peer Support
- Emotional Connection to School

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*Emotional connection to school and teacher support build resilience against externalising and internalising problems for adolescents' subject to exposure to domestic violence.*

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alleviate the negative consequences of exposure to domestic violence. Similarly, teacher support refers to adolescents' perceptions of the amount of care, concern, and encouragement their teacher directs toward them. Considering that abused parents are often in no position to focus their attention on their adolescent child, having an alternate supportive and encouraging adult can help the adolescent develop a sense of belonging or self-worth which may protect them from educational and mental health problems.

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*While emotional connection to school and teacher support build resilience against negative outcomes for adolescent's subject to physical abuse, peer support is an important protective factor for internalising symptoms.*

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In contrast, the opposite was true for externalising problems. These findings can add to the development of successful prevention and intervention efforts. For example, physical abuse is less associated with internalising problems when adolescents are, primarily, emotionally invested in their schools, and lesser to when they experience teacher support. Stakeholders should use this finding, and in working with adolescents suffering from anxiety or depression, school experts and policymakers should chiefly focus on deepening emotional connections between young people and their schools.

#### 4.2.2.3. School Connectedness builds resilience for adolescents who experience psychological abuse against detrimental developmental outcomes.

The protective effects of teacher support and emotional connection to school extend to adolescents who also experience psychological abuse at home. The implied derogation and deprecation of the adolescent that comes as a result of psychological abuse as well as parents' failure to respond positively to their child's emotional and psychological needs may hinder the youngster's ability to experience peaceful emotional well-being. On the same note, psychological abuse may also lead to aggression and other behavioural problems by arousing anger.

However, findings from the adolescent study in Ukraine demonstrate that externalising behaviours or inner

turmoil is more likely experienced by psychologically abused adolescents who also experience low levels of teacher support or emotional connection to the school. Programmatic interventions should consider these findings and focus on how school connectedness can protect adolescent victims of psychological abuse from developing internalising symptoms or problematic behaviours. Once again, enhancing teacher-adolescent relations or emotional attachment to the school seems promising for maltreated adolescents.

#### 4.2.2.4. School Connectedness builds resilience for adolescents who experience sexual abuse against detrimental developmental outcomes.

Extensive research into how sexual abuse impacts well-being has demonstrated that it is associated with a range of psychological, behavioural, emotional, and sexual challenges. This highlights the need to develop the necessary mechanisms to protect adolescents with such negative familial experiences. In our analyses, the protective nature of school connectedness is proven to be very significant for adolescents who experience sexual abuse at home. Both emotional connection to school and teacher support were identified as important resilient factors for all adverse developmental outcomes. Specifically, emotional connection to school and teacher support build resilience for adolescents who experience sexual abuse against:

- *Suicidality*: family abuse is predictive of extreme distress leading the victims to consider suicide as "the only way out"<sup>31</sup>. School connectedness allows individuals to gain support from alternative sources of support when family coherence is low. So, findings in the study of adolescents in Ukraine showed that the likelihood of suicidality in sexually abused adolescents diminishes when they receive support and emotional availability from their teachers or experience emotional connection to their schools.
- *Risky Behaviours*: emotional connection to school and teacher support interrupt the pathways from sexual abuse to risky behaviours. In other words, sexually abused adolescents are more likely to abuse illegal substances, engage in risky sexual

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*Research evidence shows that sexual abuse prior to age 16 was associated with major depression, anxiety disorder, suicidal ideation and suicide attempt, alcohol and drug dependence, post-traumatic stress (PTSD) symptoms, decreased life satisfaction, decreased age of onset of sexual activity, and increased number of sexual partners.*

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behaviours, or harm themselves only when emotional connection to school and teacher support is low. School connectedness, on the other hand, can compensate for their negative experiences in the familial context.

- *Externalising Behaviours*: emotional connection to school and teacher support build resilience for abused adolescents against externalising behaviours. This means that adolescents who are exposed to sexual abuse yet experience high teacher support and are emotionally connected to their schools are less likely to engage in behaviour problems in the form of aggression, defiance, or conduct problems.
- *Internalising Behaviours*: for internalising behaviours, all components of school connectedness act as protective mechanisms for adolescents experiencing sexual abuse. Emotional connection to school and teacher support are

31. Taylor, P. J., Gooding, P., Wood, A. M., Tarrier, N. (2011). The role of defeat and entrapment in depression, anxiety, and suicide. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137, 391-420.



identified as the most important resilient factors, protecting abused youngsters from negative emotionality. Peer support also builds resilience against internalising symptomatology; in other words, having sexual abuse is linked to anxiety, depression, and PTSD, but only in individuals with

low levels of peer support. The findings can be used for the design of programmatic interventions which would aim to enhance the adolescent's support system and increase their emotional investment for their school.

#### 4.2.2.5. Conclusions from resilience analyses

The Ukraine study of adolescents found that adolescent victims of familial abuse suffer a plethora of educational and mental health challenges as a result of their negative experiences at home (for a discussion on this, see section 4.2.1.). However, our findings also show that regardless of experiencing family abuse, being emotionally invested in other microsystemic contexts and receiving support and encouragement from other figures may have a positive impact on the adolescent.

In other words, the results from our analyses establish the crucial role of schools, measured through school connectedness, in interrupting the pathways from different types of family abuse to detrimental developmental outcomes. Adolescents experiencing family abuse lose their faith in themselves and others. Such traumatic experiences – from being exposed to domestic violence to being sexually abused – are predictive of a wide range of dysfunctional emotions and behaviours, including higher levels of depression, anxiety, substance use, unsafe sexual practices, and suicidality<sup>32</sup>. Emotional connection to school and teacher support can protect against pervasive stress and behaviour problems in adolescents who are exposed to family abuse, helping abused adolescents progress to a healthier behavioural and emotional

development than would help adolescents who face a complete lack of support from all close social contexts. In addition, teacher and peer support may offer the young person not only support and encouragement but also an opportunity to ask for help. Adolescents who do disclose about their traumatic experiences and manage to get help are more likely to get psychosocial support which, in turn, limits the likelihood that they will act out, engage in self-destructive behaviours, or experience negative emotionality. Finally, peer relations are, overall, significant in adolescence, but especially so for young people who experience inner turmoil due to sexual or physical abuse. Peer relationships are very important for these adolescents as they foster higher levels of emotional security and help form accurate self-perceptions, two things that are usually missing from abused young people suffering from internalising problems.

Our findings from the adolescent parenting study in Ukraine provide evidence-based recommendations on how to build resilience among abused adolescents. The evidence should support both the supply and demand sides for implementation of reforms and programmes which increase quality education and school connectedness among adolescents.

32. Normal, R. E., Byambaa, M., De, R., Butchart, A., Scott, J., & Vos, T. (2012). The long-term health consequences of child physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS Medicine*, 9(11).

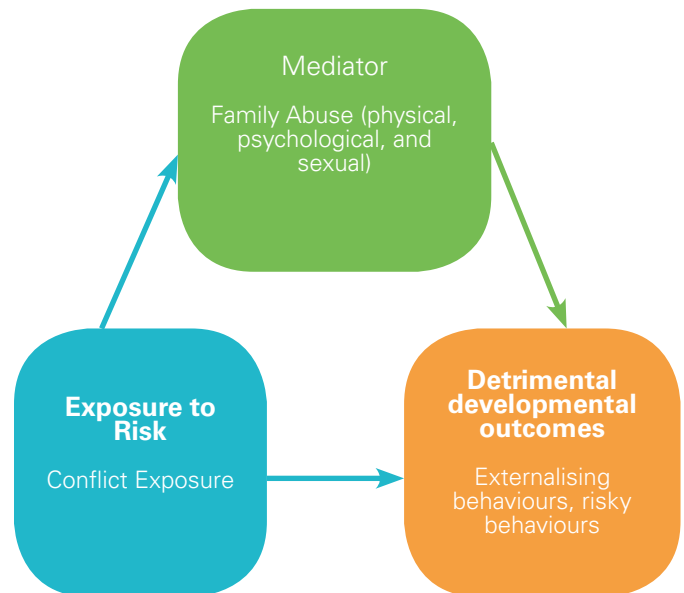
## 4.3. Family violence as a mediator of conflict exposure

The aim, here, was to investigate whether conflict exposure contributes to developmental outcomes directly, or indirectly through microsystemic violence. Sometimes, changes in the macrosystem brings about changes in the microsystem as well. Exposure to conflict leads to many changes in peoples' lives, such as displacement, family separation, and greater financial challenges. All these might bring about changes in parenting practices as well – demonstrated through an increase in family abuse. Past research has provided evidence that war exposure is linked to the amount of maltreatment reported by the child<sup>33</sup>. In turn, this contributes to adolescents' increased negative developmental outcomes.

To explore whether family abuse explains the relationship between conflict exposure and negative developmental outcomes, a mediation model was used (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.

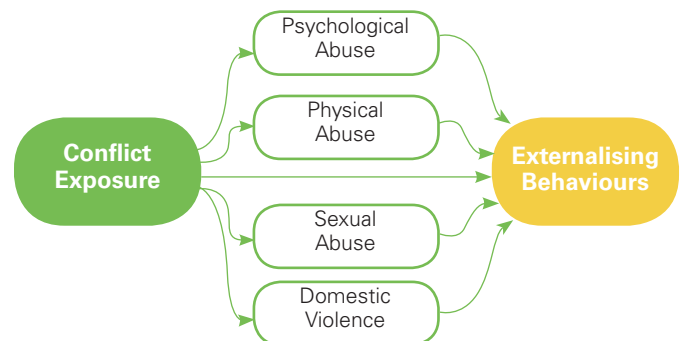
### The Mediation Model.



### 4.3.1. Family abuse mediates the relationship between conflict exposure and detrimental developmental outcomes

Family abuse mediates the relationship between conflict exposure and adolescent maladjustment. What this means is that exposure to conflict is associated with increased family abuse, leading to more behaviour problems, negative emotions, and school maladjustment.

**Externalising Behaviours.** Family abuse partially mediates the relationship between exposure to conflict and externalising behaviours. To some degree, conflict-exposed adolescents are likely to exhibit behaviours, such as aggression and defiance, due to the conflict itself. On the other hand, exposure to conflict is associated with increased family abuse in all levels – physical, psychological, sexual – which then results in adolescents displaying behaviour problems. Psychological abuse, specifically, seems to be an important mediator; due to the negative consequences of the conflict (e.g. financial difficulties, loss of a job, displacement), parents may take their stress and frustration out on their adolescent children. As a result, adolescents may also “act out”, directing their frustration negatively to the outward environment. For conflict-exposed youth with high levels of aggressiveness, defiance, and conduct

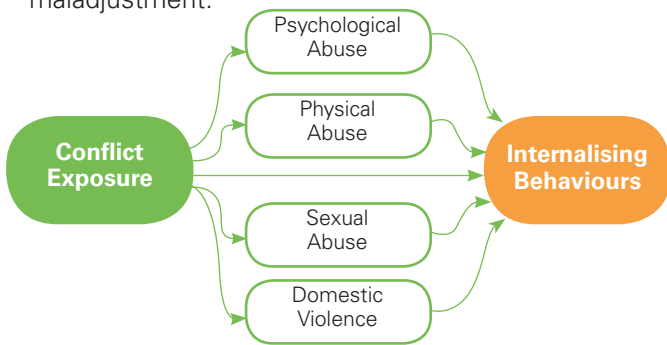


problems, family programmes that aim to intervene and work on parental abuse and help establish more positive parent-adolescent dynamics, might be highly beneficial.

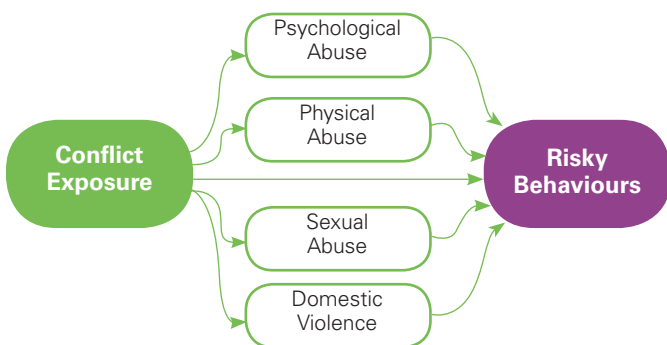
**Internalising Behaviours.** Similar to the other outcomes, family abuse partially mediates the relationship between conflict exposure and internalising problems, such as anxiety and depression. That means that even though conflict exposure is in itself a determinant of adolescents experiencing negative emotionality, it may also happen through an increase in the prevalence of family abuse and exposure to domestic violence. Psychological abuse and exposure to domestic

33. Catani, C., Jacob, N., Schauer, E., Kohila, M., & Neuner, F. (2008). Family violence, war, and natural disasters: A study of the effect of extreme stress on children's mental health in Sri Lanka. *BMC Psychiatry*, 8, 33-43.

violence, in particular, contribute very highly to internalising experiences. One explanation for this might be that adolescents who experience psychological abuse may consider their parents as being non-responsive to their emotional and psychological needs. As a result, the implied derogation that comes with physical abuse makes it difficult for a child to develop positive emotionality. Furthermore, being a first-hand witness of the suffering of a loved family member or experiencing neglect as a result of this suffering also contributes to adolescents experiencing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Seeing how negatively these types of abuse influence young people’s emotionality, tailored, and well-developed programmes for conflict-exposed families should become a priority. Implementing programmes that aim to reduce exposure to domestic violence in conflict-affected families, or to reduce family abuse will also help to prevent adolescent’s psychological maladjustment.

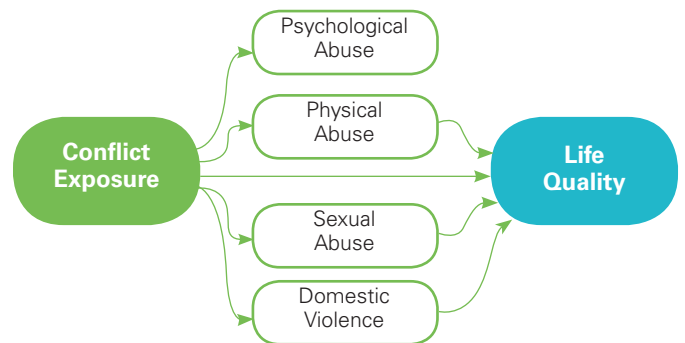


**Risky Behaviours.** Once again, family abuse and exposure to domestic violence partially mediate the relationship between conflict exposure and risky behaviours. Even if exposure to conflict is a strong determinant of engaging in risky behaviours, our results also indicate that it is not only conflict exposure that determines whether adolescents will display self-destructive behaviours. Conflict exposure significantly increases the prevalence of family abuse and incidents of domestic violence, which, in turn, contribute to self-destructive behaviours. Sexual abuse, in particular, is strongly associated with



risky behaviours. Previous research also supports our finding; childhood sexual abuse was associated with increased alcohol dependence and illicit drug dependence, as well as with increased number of sexual partners and decreased age of onset of sexual activity<sup>3435</sup>. All in all, because adolescents suffer both at the microlevel and at the macrolevel, they might seek out a short-term “way out” which can take the form of abusing illicit drugs, unsafe sexual practices, or self-harm.

**Life Quality.** Finally, life quality, which is about how people rate the quality of their life and how satisfied they feel with their lives, is partially mediated by family abuse and exposure to domestic violence. Once again, psychological abuse and being a silent victim of domestic violence takes a toll on adolescents’ life quality. Similar to previous research findings<sup>36</sup>, emotional abuse is both the most challenging type to identify but also the most damaging for a child or a young person.



34. Fergusson, D. M., McLeod, G. F. H., & Horwood, L. J. (2013). Childhood sexual abuse and adult developmental outcomes: Findings from a 30-year longitudinal study in New Zealand. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 37, 664-674.  
 35. Zakhosha, V., Sakhno, Y., Sethi, D., & Korol, N. (2018). “Adverse childhood experiences and health-harming behaviours among students in Ukraine: Report on survey results”. World Health Organization.  
 36. Chahine, E. F. (2014). Child abuse and its relation to quality of life of male and female children. *Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 159, 161-168.

#### 4.3.1.1. Conclusions from mediation analyses

Mediation analyses demonstrated that changes in the macrosystem bring about changes in the microsystem, which in turn, may be responsible for negative developmental outcomes. Specifically, our results indicate that conflict exposed families tend to become more violent and abusive, which leads to numerous detrimental outcomes, such as behaviour problems, negative emotionality, and self-destructive behaviours. In other words, adolescents living near the contact line are not only more at risk of being exposed to conflict but also suffer from the consequences of the conflict in the form of increased risk exposure in the family. The findings show that conflict is not only associated with instability, economic hardship, and constant danger. Our results also provide evidence on the contribution of conflict in Ukraine on family processes.

Understanding the mechanisms through which conflict exposure leads to adolescent maladjustment is very important because it provides key evidence for policy

interventions. Exposure to conflict increases all forms of family abuse, which then increases the exhibition of adverse outcomes. However, our analyses show that, in most cases, psychological abuse is the most crucial intervening variable between conflict exposure and detrimental consequences. In other words, even if all types of family abuse and exposure to domestic violence are associated with increased maladjustment, psychological abuse seems to affect individuals more negatively. These findings should be considered when planning support services for conflict-exposed adolescents.

Overall, the results should be considered as strong evidence to include strengthening parents' abilities to support adolescents in relevant programmes and interventions, particularly supporting behavioural change and social norms towards lessening and/or eliminating emotional abuse by parents.

## 5. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated parenting in conflict-exposed Ukraine, as well as the contribution of other microsystemic environments on adolescent development. From the results of the present study, we can draw the following conclusions and policy recommendations:

- 1.** Parental warmth, in combination with parental monitoring, significantly contribute to positive developmental outcomes for adolescents, such as higher school connectedness, and lower externalising and internalising problems or risky behaviours like substance abuse and unsafe sexual behaviours. We propose that parent training programmes should focus on communicating the importance of balancing warmth with monitoring and involvement.
- 2.** Conflict exposure and experiences of victimisation had a lower negative impact on adolescent's developmental outcomes when parents display high levels of warmth, monitoring, and involvement. Parents should be included in the programmatic interventions that aim to help and support conflict-exposed or victimised adolescents.
- 3.** Even though abused adolescents suffer numerous detrimental outcomes as a result of the abuse they experience, school connectedness acts as a protective factor mitigating the negative consequences of family abuse. When school connectedness is high, abused adolescents do not suffer to the same degree the negative outcomes that their low connectedness counterparts suffer from. So, to decrease the negative long-term consequences of abused adolescents, emphasis must be placed on nurturing their resilience through supportive peer relations, teacher support, and emotional connection to their school.
- 4.** Exposure to conflict is linked to detrimental outcomes both directly and indirectly through the increase in all forms of family abuse, especially psychological abuse. In other words, family abuse increases in Ukraine as a result of the conflict exposure, which, in turn, increases the exhibition of adverse outcomes in adolescents. That demonstrates that stakeholders investing in programmatic interventions in conflict-exposed Ukraine should not only invest in enhancing school cohesion. Instead, they should also incorporate family- and parent-training programmes in policies and interventions, aiming to solutions that will decrease family abuse and increase family connectedness.

## Appendix 1.

## Glossary of Adolescent Component Indicators

Indicator	Indicator Description
Aggression	Extent to which one is aggressive in daily life, such as frequently getting into fights and confrontations.
Anxiety	Degree to which one feels anxious and insecure to an extent that the person finds it hard to stop worrying and relax.
Bullying	Exposure- repeated over a period- to negative behaviour by one or other persons including in person or online harassment and physical violence.
Civic Behaviour	Readiness for positive, non-violent, civic engagement.
Conduct Disorder	The display of disruptive and violent behaviours and, difficulty in following rules.
Depression	Degree to which one feels depressed or very sad.
Emotional connection to school	Degree to which one is emotionally invested in their school.
Exposure to conflict	Degree to which one feels exposed to the conflict through being close to regions that are subject to shelling, having family members participating in the conflict, or experiencing family division because of the conflict.
Exposure to domestic violence	Exposure to abusive incidents in the household from one family member towards another.
Life satisfaction	The degree to which a person feels satisfied with his/her life overall.
Parental Involvement	Parental involvement refers to the amount of participation and connection a parent has when it comes to a child's social and academic life.
Parental Monitoring	Refers to parents being aware and supervising their adolescents' activities (at school, at home, with friends and peers) and communicating their concerns to their adolescent child.
Parental Warmth	Parental warmth is about parents providing their adolescents with regular support, speaking to them in a positive and friendly manner.
Peer support	The extent to which one feels supported by and can rely on peers for support.
Physical abuse	Exposure to physical abuse from parent, sibling or caregiver.
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	Experiencing persistent mental and emotional stress that is triggered after exposure to a traumatic or dangerous event.
Psychological abuse	Exposure to psychological abuse from parent, sibling or caregiver.
Quality of life	The way a person evaluates different aspects of his/her life in terms of mood, relations with others, and goals and the degree to which a person feels satisfied with his/her life.
Readiness for non-violent civic engagement	Willingness to engage in civic and political matters using non-violent means, and to participate in local youth initiatives to play a role in public affairs relevant to one's interests such as youth councils.

Indicator	Indicator Description
School connectedness	The extent to which one feels connected to peers and teachers in the school context.
Self-harm and suicidality	Thoughts of and attempts to injure oneself or commit suicide.
Sexual abuse	Exposure to sexual abuse from parent, sibling or caregiver.
Substance use	Frequency of tobacco, alcohol or drug use.
Teacher support	The amount of help, concern and friendship the teacher directs toward the students.
Unsafe sexual behaviour	Inclination to engage in unprotected sex with multiple partners.
Victimization	Directly experiencing bullying in the form of repeated physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm.
Composite Indicators	
Internalizing problems	Includes Anxiety, Depression, and PTSD.
Externalising problems	Includes Aggression, Conduct Disorder, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder.
Bullying	Includes Physical, Relational, Verbal and Cyber bullying.
Overall life quality	Includes life satisfaction and Quality of Life.
Risky behaviours	Includes substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviours, and self-harm.
Victimization	Includes Physical, Relational, Verbal and Cyber victimisation.

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