

“Relationship of Perceived Inter-Parental Conflict on the Loneliness, Self Esteem and Attachment Style of Children”

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Abstract

A general effect of negative conflict between parents is the growth of emotional or behavioural difficulties for children (Grych et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2006.) As a result, children and young persons in high disagreement homes may have complications getting on with others. Attachment refers to a child's affiliation with and need for its caregiver(s), which sets the tendency for all prospect relationship patterns and communications. Loneliness, defined as worrying experience that occurs when a person's social interaction are perceived by that person to be less in magnitude, and especially in value, than required.

Objective of the current research is to find the association between perceived inter-parental conflict with that of loneliness, self esteem and attachment style of children (9 – 12 yrs). Explorative research design is adopted. 78 students (47 males and 31 females) were participants of the research. Convenience sampling technique is used to select the sample. Standardized psychological assessments were utilized to collect the relevant data namely; Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict Scale by Fincham, F.D. (1992), Self-Esteem inventory was developed by Coppersmith (1987). Attachment Style Classification Questionnaire for Latency Age Children by Ricky Finzi-Dottan (2012) & the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978). Alternate hypothesis state that there will be significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict, self esteem, loneliness and attachment style of children. The data collected is statistically analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient to find the relationship. Findings reveal that there is gender difference only in avoidant attachment style and general self-esteem. There exists significant relationship between secure attachment style, social self-esteem, general self- esteem and perceived interparental conflict.

Keywords: Attachment Style, Children, Loneliness, Perceived Inter- Parental Conflict, & Self esteem.

INTRODUCTION

Interparental Conflict

Conflict, refers to the arousal of two or more strong motives that cannot be solved together. Therefore conflict refers to anytime where opposing or incompatible actions, objectives, or ideas are present. Inter-parent refers to between the mother and father. Hence conflicts between the parents of the child refer to the interparental conflict.

Conflict between parents is a normal part of relationships and family life. Not all conflict is damaging, Destructive conflict behaviours which put children's mental health and long-term life chances at risk include aggression, non-verbal conflict or 'the silent treatment'. By contrast, constructive conflict – where there continues to be respect and emotional control, and conflict is resolved or explained – is linked to lower risks of child distress.

Parental Conflict at Crucial Points in Family Life

Families can be particularly vulnerable to stress and parental conflict at key transition points in family life. This includes:

- Poverty and economic pressure
- Becoming a new parent or having a baby
- Children starting primary or secondary school
- Parental separation or divorce.

Mechanisms That Explain How Conflict Affects Children

Conflict between parents affects children in two key ways. First, conflict impacts parenting style. Parenting may be affected in a number of ways, with parents adopting a range of behaviours, from highly intrusive and hostile parenting through to lax, disinterested parenting, all of which are associated with negative developmental outcomes for children (Cox et al., 2001). Secondly, how children understand, experience and respond to conflict between parents is also important, each with implications for the parent-child relationship and, in turn, children's development (Cummings and Davies, 2010).

The Outcomes of Interparental Conflict

There is a large body of evidence that shows that conflict between parents can have a negative impact on children's long-term mental health and future life chances. Children as young as six months show symptoms of distress when exposed to parental conflict, infants up to the age of five display symptoms such as crying or acting out, and children in middle childhood (six to 12 years) and adolescents show emotional and behavioural distress. Children who witness or are aware of conflict between parents, or who blame themselves, are affected to a greater extent. A common outcome of destructive conflict between parents is the development of emotional or behavioural difficulties for children (Grych et al., 2003; Cummings et al., 2006). Children's own social relationships can also be affected, with children prone to developing poor interpersonal skills (Finger et al., 2010). Difficulties can extend into school, with children less able to settle, more likely to have trouble getting on with peers, and less likely to achieve academically because of the impact of conflict between parents on children's cognitive abilities and attention (Harold et al., 2007). Children engage in physical or verbal aggression (Cummings et al., 2000; Davies et al., 2002; Kitzmann et al., 2003);

Attachment

Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969).

Attachment Styles

Based on the works of Bartholomew and Horowitz, etc., there are four adult attachment styles, which may change over time:

1. Secure Attachment Style

People with secure attachment strategies are comfortable displaying interest and affection. They're able to correctly prioritize their relationships within their life and tend to draw clear boundaries and stick to them. Secure attachment is developed in childhood by infants who regularly get their needs met, as well as receive ample quantities of love and affection.

2. Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment Style

They are often nervous and stressed about their relationships. They need constant reassurance and affection. They have trouble trusting people, even if they're close to them. Anxious attachment strategies are developed in childhood by infants who receive love and care with unpredictable sufficiency.

3. Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment Style

They are extremely independent, self-directed. They regularly complain about feeling "crowded" or "suffocated" when people try to get close to them. In every relationship, they always have an exit strategy. Avoidant attachment strategy is developed in childhood by infants who only get some of their needs met while the rest are neglected

4. Fearful-Avoidant Attachment Style

These types are not only afraid of intimacy and commitment, but they distrust and lash out emotionally at anyone who tries to get close to them. Anxious-avoidant types develop from abusive or terribly negligent childhoods.

Loneliness:

Loneliness, distressing experience that occurs when a person's social relationships are perceived by that person to be less in quantity, and especially in quality, than desired. The experience of loneliness is highly subjective.

Health Risks Associated With Loneliness

Loneliness has a wide range of negative effects on both physical and mental health, including:

- Depression and suicide
- Cardiovascular disease and stroke
- Increased stress levels
- Decreased memory and learning
- Antisocial behaviour
- Poor decision-making
- Alcoholism and drug abuse
- The progression of Alzheimer's disease
- Altered brain function

Self Esteem

It refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Consequence of low self-esteem

- Poor academic performance
- Teen pregnancy
- Dropping out of school
- Earlier sexual activity
- Criminal behaviour

- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Cutting
- Disordered eating

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Relationship between Perceived Interparental Conflict and Attachment Style

Heidemarie K. Laurent in 2009 investigated the impact of parents' observed conflict behaviour on subsequent child attachment security, both as a main effect and as moderated by parents' romantic attachment. Participants were 80 heterosexual couples involving men from the Oregon Youth Study and their first-born children results showed that Interparental psychological aggression predicted lower child security with father, regardless of romantic attachment.

The Relationship between Perceived Interparental Conflict and Loneliness in Children

H. Durell Johnson and Joseph C. Lavoie in 2001 did a research on interparental conflict and family cohesion. Analyses of responses from 124 late adolescents revealed that feelings of loneliness were related to perceived levels of interparental conflict for males and females and decreased family cohesion for females.

Shaina A. Kumar in 2018 examined the effects of interparental conflict (IPC) on interpersonal functioning and psychopathology in emerging adulthood. Results showed that, IPC was associated significantly with greater symptoms of depression and loneliness.

Relationship between Perceived Interparental Conflict and Self Esteem

Paul R. Amato in 1986 aimed to find the association between levels of marital conflict and the self-esteem in 132 children aged 8-9 years and 142 adolescents aged 15-16 years selected randomly. Marital conflict was negatively associated with self-esteem among primary school girls but not among primary school boys. Weak negative associations between conflict and self-esteem were found for male and female adolescents.

Gender Difference in Loneliness

Friday E. Okwaraji in 2016 did a research on Gender Differences, Loneliness, Self Esteem and Depression in sample of 610 Nigerian university students. Result further revealed no significant association between loneliness, self-esteem and gender.

Hadas in 2007 did a research on Gender differences in loneliness and depression of university students. The short-form UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8) was completed. Males were significantly higher in loneliness than females.

Gender Difference in Perceived Interparental Conflict

Muhammad Mussaffa Butt in 2014 aimed to explore the effect of inter-parental conflicts on the cognitive emotion regulation of children, based upon their own perception of these conflicts. The results of this study showed that there was gender difference in perceiving interparental conflict where boys perceive it more dangerous and have more consequence than girls.

Gender Difference in Attachment Style

Ozlem Karairmak in 2008 designed a research to examine gender differences in attachment styles. The participants comprised 371 Turkish undergraduate students. A Turkish version of Bartholomew and Horowitz's Relationship Questionnaire (RQ). Results showed that male participants attached more securely than females and female participants attached more fearfully than male participants.

In a 2009-study, Pierrehumbert. found that girls express more secure representations than boys do, when measuring attachment with a story completion task (The Attachment Story Completion Task; ASCT), The overall dominant insecure score for boys, however, is disorganized attachment style.

Gender Difference in Self-Esteem

Shelina Bhamani in 2014 aimed to explore the self-esteem trends in adolescents of Karachi, Pakistan with regard to gender differences. There were a total 224 (96 male and 126 female) adolescents and the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Scale: was adapted for this study. The data analysis revealed that female scored higher in self-esteem compared to male.

Mullis AK in 1992 examined the self-esteem of adolescents over three years of high school. The study was designed to allow for cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons of adolescent self-esteem, including the effects of gender and socioeconomic status. Results showed that there was no gender difference in self-esteem.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Low Self-Esteem may lead to sensitivity to criticism, social withdrawal, hostility, and excessive preoccupation with personal problems, physical symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia and headaches. Loneliness has a wide range of negative effects on both physical and mental health, including: Depression and suicide, cardiovascular disease and stroke and increased stress levels. A person with an insecure attachment lives in an ambivalent state, in which they are afraid of being both too close to or too distant from others. They attempt to keep their feelings at bay but are unable to. They can't just avoid their anxiety or run away from their feelings. Thus the research aims to find whether these factors are related to perceived parental conflicts. The research finding would be helpful in spreading awareness of lifelong negative effects of parental conflict on children. This research would also be helpful for preparing the children to overcome the consequences of parental conflict, enable them to enhance strategies to cope better in order to lead happy and peaceful life.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and dimensions of self-esteem in children.
2. To find the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and dimensions of attachment style in children.
3. To find the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and loneliness in children

4. To find whether there will be a significant gender difference in dimensions of self-esteem, dimensions of attachment style, loneliness in children and perceived interparental conflict.

HYPOTHESIS

1. There will be no significant relationship between self-esteem dimensions and perceived interparental conflict in children.
2. There will be no significant relationship between attachment style dimensions and perceived interparental conflict in children.
3. There will be no significant relationship between loneliness level and perceived interparental conflict in children
4. There will no significant gender difference in the level of self-esteem in children.
5. There will no significant gender difference in the level of attachment style in children.
6. There will no significant gender difference in the level of loneliness in children.
7. There will no significant gender difference in perceived interparental conflict level in children.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Explorative research design was adopted and used in the current research.

NATURE OF THE SAMPLE

The sample consists of 78 students (47 male and 31female) in the age group of 9-12. The method of sampling adopted is convenient sampling. The sample participants belong to urban place.

TOOLS USED

Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale developed by Fincham, F.D (1992). The CPIC has acceptable levels of reliability as indicated by internal consistency and test-retest correlations. Attachment Style Classification Questionnaire for Latency Age Children by Ricky Finzi-Dottan (2012). The test-retest stability was in the high range ($r = .87-.95$). Self-Esteem inventory was developed by Coppersmith (1987). Test retest reliabilities obtained with the full SEI range from .88 to .70. The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, &

Ferguson, 1978). The measure was highly reliable, both in terms of internal consistency (coefficient a ranging from .89 to .94) and test—retest reliability over an I -year period ($r = .73$).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics will be used. Then inferential statistics like Pearson correlation coefficient was used to find the relationship between the perceived interparental conflict, self-esteem, attachment style and loneliness in children. t test was used to find the gender difference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: shows the relationship between perceived interparental conflict, attachment style, loneliness and self-esteem

	Loneliness	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	General Self Esteem	Social Self Esteem	Home Self Esteem	School Self Esteem	Parental Conflict
Loneliness	1	-.310**	.424**	.147	-.559**	-.010	-.387**	-.345**	0.201
Secure	-.310**	1	-.343**	-.014	.295**	.091	.213	.118	-.272*
Anxious	.424**	-.343**	1	.035	-.266*	-.053	-.199	-.079	.124
Avoidant	.147	-.014	.035	1	-.117	.015	-.242*	.012	.129
General Self Esteem	-.559**	.295**	-.266*	-.117	1	-.045	.420**	.373**	-.296**
Social Self Esteem	-.010	.091	-.053	.015	-.045	1	.032	.104	-.264*
Home Self Esteem	-.387**	.213	-.199	-.242*	.420**	.032	1	.239*	-.387**
school Self Esteem	-.345**	.118	-.079	.012	.373**	.104	.239*	1	-.207
Parental Conflict	0.201	-.272*	.124	.129	-.296**	-.264*	-.387**	-.207	1

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

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

Table 1 shows that there is no significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and loneliness which is contradicting the researches stating that there is a relationship between the two variables (H. Durell Johnson and Joseph C. Lavoie, 2001& Shaina A. Kumar, 2018) hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and loneliness is accepted.

It is also found from table 1 that there is a negative significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and secure attachment style which is in line with research stating that interparental aggression is related to child's lower secure attachment (Heidemarie K. Laurent, 2009) hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and loneliness is rejected. The anxious attachment style, avoidant attachment style does not have significant relationship with interparental conflict hence the hypotheses stating that there will be no significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and anxious attachment style and that there will be no significant relationship between perceived interparental conflict and avoidant attachment style are accepted.

The general self-esteem has negative relationship with the parental conflict which is line with the research of Paul R. Amato in 1986 hence it is found that parental conflict is associated with child's general opinion about him/ her in general situations. More the parental conflict more the low self-esteem of the child. Hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no significant relationship between general self-esteem and parental conflict is rejected. The table shows that there is a negative significant relationship between parental conflict and social self-esteem, this may be due to the fact that children with high parental conflict house has problems in settling down in school and are more likely to have trouble getting on with peers, (Harold et al., 2007) Hence the hypothesis stating that here will be no significant relationship between social self-esteem and parental conflict is rejected. The table shows that there is a negative significant relationship between parental conflict and home self-esteem this may be due to parenting style as the parenting may be affected by parental

conflict in a number of ways, with parents adopting a range of behaviours, from highly intrusive and hostile parenting through to lax, disinterested parenting (Cox et al., 2001), hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no relationship between home self-esteem and parental conflict is rejected. The school self-esteem is not related to parental conflict hence the child's belief in one's studying ability is not associated with parental conflict, hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no significant relationship between school/academic self-esteem and parental conflict is accepted.

It is also found from the table that general self-esteem has significant negative relation with loneliness and anxious attachment style. The general self-esteem is also significantly and positively related to secure attachment style. Loneliness is negatively related to secure attachment style, school self esteem and home self-esteem. Loneliness has significant positive relationship with anxious attachment style. Avoidant attachment style is negatively related to home self-esteem.

Table 2: shows the gender difference in perceived interparental conflict, attachment style, loneliness and self-esteem variables

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t
Loneliness	Male	47	36.77	7.434	4.30
	Female	31	45.87	11.266	
Secure	Male	47	19.89	3.396	1.668
	Female	31	18.52	3.820	
Anxious	Male	47	15.02	3.819	-.913
	Female	31	15.87	4.311	
Avoidant	Male	47	13.15	3.264	3.267*
	Female	31	15.42	2.553	
Total Self Esteem	Male	47	59.49	10.065	1.175
	Female	31	56.39	13.220	
General Self Esteem	Male	47	15.51	3.078	1.789*
	Female	31	13.94	4.218	
Social Self Esteem	Male	47	4.70	1.545	.368
	Female	31	4.84	1.695	
Home Self Esteem	Male	47	4.89	1.605	1.22
	Female	31	4.39	2.044	
School Self Esteem	Male	47	4.64	1.647	1.08
	Female	31	5.03	1.449	
Parental Conflict	Male	47	42.21	11.174	.224
	Female	31	42.84	13.364	

*significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It is found from table 2 that there is no gender difference in loneliness which is line with Friday E. Okwaraji's research hence the hypothesis stating there that there will be no gender difference in loneliness is accepted. It is found that there is no gender difference in secure attachment style and anxious attachment style which is contradicting the research stating that male participants attached more securely than females and female participants attached more fearfully than male participants (Ozlem Karairmak) hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no gender difference in secure and anxious attachment style are accepted. It is found that there is no gender difference in, social self-esteem, school self- esteem, home self-esteem, but it is found that there is a significant gender difference in general self-esteem which is in line with shelina's research. It is also found that there is no gender difference in parental conflict; hence hypothesis stating that there will be no gender difference in parental conflict is accepted. The result shows that there is a gender difference in anxious attachment style hence the hypothesis stating that there will be no gender difference in anxious attachment style is rejected.

CONCLUSION

1. There is no significant relationship between loneliness and perceived interparental conflict in children.
2. There exists significant relationship between secure attachment style and perceived interparental conflict in children.
3. There is no significant relationship between anxious attachment style and perceived interparental conflict in children.
4. There is no significant relationship between avoidant attachment style and perceived interparental conflict in children.
5. There exists significant relationship between general self-esteem and perceived interparental conflict in children.
6. There exists significant relationship between social self-esteem and perceived interparental conflict in children.

7. There is no significant relationship between school self-esteem and perceived interparental conflict in children.
8. There exists significant relationship between home self-esteem and perceived interparental conflict in children.
9. There exists significant gender difference in general self-esteem in children.
10. There is no significant gender difference in all the dimensions of the variables in children.
11. There exists significant gender difference in avoidant attachment style in children.

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