

Aggression among High School Children due to Family Conflicts: A Psychological Analysis of Parent-Child Relationship Dynamics and Behavioural Outcomes

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Abstract

Parent-child conflict is widely recognized as an important correlate of adolescent aggression, yet evidence from South Asian school settings remains limited. This study examined associations between family conflict and aggressive behaviour among high school students in Lahore, Pakistan. Using a correlational design, data were collected from 100 adolescents (50 boys, 50 girls) aged 14-15 years, recruited through purposive convenient sampling from three private academies. Participants completed a demographic form, the Family Conflict Scale, and an Aggressive Behavior Scale. Pearson correlations, hierarchical regression, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Results indicated significant positive associations between family conflict (overall, mother, and father subscales) and overt/negative aggression, whereas conflict was not significantly related to positive or constructive forms of aggression. Regression analyses showed that higher levels of aggression significantly predicted greater family conflict. Boys reported significantly higher aggression and parent-child conflict than girls. Aggression was also negatively associated with academic achievement, with students obtaining lower grades exhibiting higher aggression scores, while no significant differences in aggression emerged by birth order. These findings highlight parent-child conflict as a salient risk factor for externalizing behaviour and poorer academic outcomes in adolescence. School- and family-based interventions that enhance communication, reduce conflict, and strengthen adolescents' self-regulation may help mitigate aggression in this population.

Keywords: Parent-child conflict, Adolescent aggression, Family conflict, Academic achievement

1. Introduction

Parent-child conflict has increasingly been recognized as a critical factor contributing to the emergence of aggressive behavior in children and adolescents. The high-school years coincide with puberty, a pivotal developmental stage characterized by profound biological, psychological, and socio-emotional transformations [1]. Human development is inherently dynamic; individuals undergo continuous changes across physiological maturation, cognitive restructuring, and social role negotiation [2, 3]. During this transitional period, families frequently seek consultation due to escalating tensions between parents and their children. While parents sometimes interpret such conflict as evidence of intrinsic deficits or maladjustment within the child's functioning, developmental research suggests that conflict often reflects normative striving for autonomy and identity formation [4, 5].

Nevertheless, persistent or poorly managed parent-child conflict has been consistently associated with adverse psychological outcomes, including heightened aggression, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and impaired daily functioning [6, 7].

Recent empirical work supports and extends these associations. For example, Chaudhry et al. [8] found that perceived inter-parental conflict among adolescents significantly predicted aggression, with moderating roles of individual traits such as optimism/pessimism. Moreover, a study of Pakistani adolescents by Ali Lakhdar et al. [9] reported that a poor parent-child bond doubled the prevalence of physical aggression (95% CI: 1.82, 3.00) compared to those with strong bonding. Another short-term longitudinal investigation showed that higher attachment quality to parents and peers predicted lower levels of aggression and higher prosocial behavior over a four-month interval [10, 11]. Also, a Russian study confirmed a direct relationship between the adolescent's evaluation of parent-child relations and the level of conflict-behavior in teens [12]. These studies underscore

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the importance of relational quality in the family system as central to aggression risk during adolescence.

Human development progresses continuously across the lifespan, yet some developmental stages exert particularly strong and lasting influences on personality and emotional adjustment. The high-school years represent one such critical period, marking the transition from childhood to adolescence and involving major physiological, psychological, and social changes. Research shows that psychosocial factors-such as parental support, stress exposure, and adjustment demands-play a central role in shaping adolescents' behavioral and emotional outcomes [13-16]. When parent-child conflict increases, adolescents become more vulnerable to stress, emotional dysregulation, and aggressive behavior, especially as they strive for autonomy and a clearer sense of identity during this stage [17-19]. These dynamics highlight the importance of positive parent-child relationships in reducing conflict-related aggression and supporting healthy developmental transitions.

2. Conflicts

Conflict typically emerges when individuals pursue incompatible goals or behaviors, creating a psychological state in which competing needs or emotions must be reconciled. In contemporary family research, parent-adolescent conflict is understood as arising primarily from everyday issues such as household responsibilities, personal appearance, peer interactions, and lifestyle choices-rather than deep disagreements over values or beliefs. These conflicts reflect the developmental tension between parents' efforts to maintain structure and adolescents' growing need for autonomy and independence [17].

Adolescence is a period of substantial transformation in the parent-child relationship, during which parental control decreases and adolescents gain greater freedom in decision making. Increased participation in extra-familial activities and expanding social networks contribute to shifts in relational boundaries [17]. Recent research indicates that as adolescents adopt more adult-like characteristics, parents may experience ambivalence including competitiveness or emotional discomfort-which can unintentionally heighten conflictual interactions.

Psychologically, puberty involves significant emotional and behavioral adjustments. Adolescents become more reactive to stress and increasingly motivated to establish a distinct personal identity, often challenging parental perspectives as part of identity development. Heightened emotional reactivity may lead to exaggerated responses during interpersonal stress. Studies show that increased stressor sensitivity during adolescence can serve adaptive developmental functions but may also contribute to emotional dysregulation and elevate the risk of interpersonal difficulties and psychopathology [20, 21]. As a result, unresolved parent-adolescent conflict can

adversely affect emotional functioning and relational stability during this critical developmental stage.

3. Aggression

In contemporary psychological research, aggression is defined as behavior intended to cause harm to another person who seeks to avoid such harm. Aggression can be expressed through observable physical acts, such as hitting or damaging property, as well as through verbal or relational behaviours that inflict emotional or psychological harm. Although related, aggression and violence are not identical: violence is considered a more extreme manifestation of aggressive behavior, whereas aggression includes a broader spectrum of harmful actions that vary in intensity and form [22].

Aggressive behaviors-whether physical, verbal, or relational-are influenced strongly by family processes, particularly parenting practices. Studies demonstrate that low parental warmth, high coercive control, inconsistent discipline, and exposure to parental hostility significantly increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in children and adolescents [23]. Conversely, supportive parenting characterized by acceptance, responsiveness, and well-regulated disciplinary strategies fosters emotional regulation and reduces the risk of aggressive tendencies [24]. Parental modelling of hostility or aggression can further reinforce the use of aggressive responses in youth, shaping long-term behavioral patterns [25]. Together, these findings underline the central role of the family environment in the development and regulation of adolescent aggression.

4. Literature Review

Empirical evidence consistently shows that conflict between parents and adolescents is a robust predictor of adverse outcomes across developmental domains. Longitudinal research indicates that elevated parent-adolescent conflict is associated with greater risk for later depression in adulthood [26]. Conflict also undermines academic, mental health, and sleep outcomes among adolescents [27]. The dyadic process varies by sex: boys tend to manifest more externalizing behaviours (e.g., aggression, rule-breaking) whereas girls more often show internalizing responses such as sadness, anxiety or withdrawal in the context of relational discord [28].

In relation to behavioral adjustment, studies show that when adolescent-parent conflict is high, children display increased behavioral problems, including aggression, especially in the presence of weak parental bonding. For example, adolescents with poor parent-child relationships showed significantly higher physical aggression [9]. Parenting style and parental support emerge as key moderators: supportive, responsive, and autonomy-encouraging parenting is linked with fewer adjustment issues and higher self-esteem, whereas harsh, controlling or neglectful parenting increases risk for aggressive or maladaptive responses [29].

Cultural context importantly shapes the pattern and consequences of parent-adolescent conflict. For instance, in Chinese adolescent's higher levels of parent-adolescent conflict (and lower parental support) predicted greater adolescent risk-taking behavior, especially among those with lower self-control [30]. Moreover, the family environment-specifically family functioning and parent-adolescent relational quality-has been linked to adolescents' health behaviors (e.g., weight-related behaviors) and emotional wellbeing [31]. These findings underline not just the presence of conflict but the quality of relational dynamics (warmth vs hostility; autonomy support vs psychological control) as foundational to adolescent outcomes.

Together, the literature highlights a developmental cascade: parent-adolescent conflict emotional/behavioral dysregulation (e.g., aggression, depression, sleep problems) poorer adjustment across domains. Preventive and intervention efforts must therefore attend to family relational processes, parenting practices, and adolescent self-regulatory capacities during this sensitive transitional period.

5. Method

5.1 Research Design

A correlational research design was employed to investigate the relationship between parent-child conflict and aggression levels among secondary school students. This design was chosen to determine the strength and direction of the association between these variables.

5.2 Sample

The study utilized a purposive convenient sampling technique to select participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the high school student sample (N = 100).

Variables	f %
Gender	
Male	50
Female	50
Age	
14	59
15	41
Birth order	
First born	27
Middle born	47
Last born	26
Group	
Science	51
Arts	49
Family system	
Nuclear	76
Joint	24
Family monthly income	
<50000	46
>50000	54

The sample comprised 100 students, evenly distributed by gender (50 males and 50 females), aged between 14 and 15 years. Data were collected from three academies in Lahore: Rana Academy, Pak Asian Academy, and KIPS Academy.

Majority of students fall in 14 years age range. Majority of students are middle born. Majority of students is belonging to nuclear family system. Majority of students is belonging to monthly family income 50000-100000. Father occupation of mostly students is their personal business.

5.3 Procedure

Initially, permission to utilize the research instruments was obtained from the respective authors via email. Subsequently, formal approval was sought and granted by the administration and relevant authorities of the participating academies. Data collection was conducted at Rana Academy, Pak Asian Academy, and KIPS Academy, Lahore, with an equal representation of male and female students from each institution. Upon receiving institutional consent, participants were first asked to complete a consent form followed by a demographic questionnaire. Thereafter, the "Family Conflict Scale" and "Aggressive Behavior Scale" were administered. The instruments were administered individually within a structured group setting in the classrooms of the respective academies.

5.4 Statistical Analysis

Data were processed and analyzed using SPSS version 21.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the characteristics and distributions of the study variables. For inferential analysis, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, Independent Samples t-test, Regression Analysis, and One-Way ANOVA were employed to examine relationships and group differences. Additionally, the internal consistency of the research instruments was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha.

6. Results

This chapter is structured into multiple sections. The first section presents the correlation analyses conducted to examine the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The second section reports the findings of Independent Samples t-tests, which were employed to investigate gender-based differences. One-Way ANOVA was applied in two contexts: to assess the influence of birth order on aggression and to explore the effect of aggression on academic achievement. Furthermore, regression analysis was conducted to determine whether elevated levels of aggression predict higher levels of parent-child conflict.

- It was hypothesized that parent-child conflict would be positively associated with aggression. To test this hypothesis, Pearson's correlation analysis was performed.

Table 2. Inter-factor correlations between family conflict (overall, mother, father) and level of aggression among high school students

Variables	Family	Mother	Father	Level of aggression
Family	-	.841**	.760**	.748**
Mother	-	-	.713**	.676**
Father	-	-	-	.759**

Note: ** $p < .01$

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression examining the association between family conflict dimensions and adolescents' aggression (N = 100)

Model	B	SEB	β	R ²	F	p
	-17.012	4.462		.643	56.370	.000
Family(M,F)	6.146	2.112	.365			
Mother	.915	1.925	.056			
Father	7.535	1.662	.440			

Note: ** $p < 0.00$

Table 4. Gender differences in aggression scores among high school students (independent samples t-test, N = 100)

Variables	Boys	Girls	T	CI	
	M(SD)	M(SD)		LL	UL
Aggression	47.94 (9.457)	32.26 (9.146)	8.426	11.98	19.37

Note: * $p < .001$

Table 5. One-way ANOVA examining differences in aggression levels across categories of academic achievement (N = 100)

Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F
Between group	7485.461	2	3742.730	50.821
Within groups	7143.539	97	73.645	
Total	14629.00	99		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Table.2 showed that there was significant relationship between parent-child conflicts and negative form of aggression in high school children, while there was non-significant relationship between positive form of aggression and parent-child conflicts. There was no other significant relationship between variables. The results showed that the hypothesis was approved in negative form of aggression and disapproved in the positive form of aggression.

- It was hypothesized that children with higher level of aggression would have higher level of conflicts.

The result showed in table 3 that children with higher level of aggression must have higher level of conflicts. Aggression occurs as a result of family conflicts among high school children. There is a positive relationship between aggression level and family conflicts.

So, hypothesis that children with higher level of aggression have higher level of family conflicts was approved and this is a positive relationship.

- It was hypothesized that there is gender difference in parent-child conflict and level of aggression. To test the hypothesis one sample t-test was applied.

Table.4 showed that there was significant gender difference in Boys' and girls' level of aggression due to

family conflicts. Boys experience more overt aggression than girls. There was also gender difference on parent-child conflict. So hypothesis that there is a gender difference on parent-child conflict and level of aggression was approved. Result was highly significant.

- It was hypothesized that there is a negative relationship between academic achievements and level of aggression due to family conflicts.

Table.5 showed that there was a negative relationship between academic achievements and level of aggression due to family conflict. As aggression level increases, academic achievements become low. Children with A or A+ grades have only 23% aggression. While children with B or B+ grades have 31% aggression and children with C or below C grades have 46% aggression among them.

So, hypothesis that there is a negative relationship between academic achievements and level of aggression due to family conflicts was approved. Result was highly significant.

- It was hypothesized that there is a relationship between birth order and level of aggression due to family conflicts.

Table 6. One-way ANOVA assessing differences in aggression levels by birth order (first-born, middle-born, last-born) among adolescents (N = 100)

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F
Between groups	101.57	2	50.785	.339
Within groups	14527.430	97	149.767	
Total	14629.000	99		

Note: $p = NS$

Table.6 showed that there is no significant relationship between birth order and level of aggression due to family conflicts. Birth order does not have any effect on the level of aggression among children. So, hypothesis that there is a relationship between birth order and level of aggression due to family conflicts was disapproved. Result was non-significant.

7. Discussion

This investigation sought to examine the association between parent-child conflict and aggression among adolescents in high school. It was posited that greater conflict within the parent-child relationship would correspond with elevated levels of adolescent aggression. The study's results lend support to this hypothesis, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between parent-child conflict and overt or negative forms of aggression.

Recent empirical work corroborates these findings. For instance, Ali Lakhdar et al. [9] demonstrated in a large sample of Pakistani school-going adolescents that those reporting poor parent-child bonding exhibited approximately double the prevalence of physical aggression compared to peers with strong bonding. Similarly, Chaudhry et al. [8] found that adolescents' perceptions of inter-parental conflict significantly predicted aggression, with the effect moderated by dispositional optimism/pessimism. Further, studies identified a link between adolescents' evaluations of parent-child relationships and conflict-behavior: weaker perceived relationships were associated with elevated conflict behavior among 14- to 15-year-olds [17].

In contrast, the present study found no significant association between parent-child conflict and more constructive or relational ("positive") forms of aggression. This pattern aligns with emerging literature suggesting that family relational strain may more readily trigger overt externalizing behaviors rather than relational or indirect aggression.

Regarding gender differences, our findings indicate that male adolescents exhibited higher levels of aggression in the context of parent-child conflict than their female counterparts. This gender disparity is consistent with research emphasizing that male adolescents tend to display more overt aggressive behaviors, arguably due to differential socialization and familial dynamics.

In terms of academic outcomes, these data revealed a negative relationship between aggression and academic

achievement: higher levels of aggression were associated with lower academic performance, while adolescents demonstrating lower aggression achieved better academically. This underscores the broader systemic impact of aggressive behavior beyond immediate relational dynamics.

With respect to birth-order effects, the current study did not find empirical support for the hypothesis that first-born, middle-born or last-born status moderates the conflict-aggression link. That is, birth order did not emerge as a significant predictor of aggression in the context of parent-child conflict. Given the paucity of robust evidence in this domain, the null finding here remains consistent with the mixed outcomes in existing literature.

7. Implications

These findings reinforce the vital role of parent-child relational quality in shaping adolescent behavioral adjustment. Interventions designed to mitigate adolescent aggression should prioritize reducing parent-child conflict, enhancing relational communication, and strengthening self-regulatory capacities in youth—particularly those experiencing elevated relational strain. The absence of association with relational aggression suggests a need to differentiate forms of aggression in both research and practice, tailoring interventions accordingly.

8. Conclusion

This study examined the association between parent-child conflict and aggression among high school adolescents in Lahore, Pakistan. Consistent with existing literature, the findings demonstrated a significant positive relationship between parent-child conflict and overt or negative forms of aggression, suggesting that adolescents who perceive higher levels of relational conflict at home are more likely to display observable aggressive behavior. However, no significant association was found between family conflict and constructive or positive forms of aggression, indicating that familial strain may be more strongly linked to externalizing tendencies rather than socially regulated expressions of aggression.

Gender differences also emerged, with boys reporting significantly higher levels of aggression and parent-child conflict than girls. These results support previous research emphasizing gender-specific socialization practices and differential behavioral responses to familial

stress. Additionally, aggression was negatively associated with academic achievement, with students who performed poorly academically reporting higher aggression levels, highlighting the broader educational consequences of conflict-related behavioral dysregulation. Birth order, however, did not significantly predict aggression in this sample.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the importance of relational dynamics within the family system in shaping adolescent behavioral adjustment. Interventions aimed at reducing adolescent aggression should prioritize improving parent-child communication, strengthening emotional regulation capacities, and supporting parental warmth and consistency. Given that the study did not identify associations with constructive aggression or birth order, future research may benefit from differentiating aggression subtypes and exploring more nuanced family interaction patterns.

9. Limitations and Future Implications

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design and a small purposive sample, causal inferences cannot be drawn, and generalizability is limited. Future research should incorporate longitudinal or experimental methods, larger and more diverse samples, and potential mediators such as temperament, peer influence, or emotion regulation. Nonetheless, the consistency between the present findings and prior regional studies indicates that parent-child conflict remains a salient relational factor associated with overt aggression during adolescence in South Asian school contexts.

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