Inter-Parental Conflict and Adolescent Withdrawal: Understanding Emotional and Behavioural Responses Among Teenage Girls

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Abstract

Persistent conflict between parents is a significant yet often overlooked factor that affects the mental and emotional stability of individuals of family system. This study examines how ongoing parental conflict affect mental health of the parents involved and shape broader family relationships. Findings suggests that constant conflict increases stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional burnout in parents, ultimately impairing their ability to communicate, co-parent effectively, and maintain nurturing connections with their children. Furthermore, these conflicts can destabilize the family environment, reduce trust and cooperation, and contribute to cycle of tension that affects every member of the household. Understanding the psychological consequences of parental conflict is essential for developing interventions that promote healthier family dynamics and prevent long-term relational harm.

Keywords: Parental conflict, mental health and family relationship

1. Introduction

Almost all the human being starts journey towards their whole life is from the family set up. But it may be the natural rule, that two individual can't be a whole in every aspects of the life. With so many differences they become unable to satisfy all the needs and requirements of marital life including their children and in-laws. As a result the little things of day to day life create friction between the couple and eventually it becomes "marital conflict" so called parental conflict. However, when parents experience persistent conflict, the family environment can shift from one of stability to chronic stress. Constant disagreements, weather related to finances, parenting styles, communication issues, or unresolved personal frustrations can erode marital satisfaction, diminish emotional resilience, negative impact parents mental health. Research consistently indicates that continuous conflict is associated with heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among parents, often leading to emotional exhaustion and decreased capacity for empathy. Beyond affecting the parents themselves, these tensions rippled outward, influencing communication patterns, co-parenting cooperation, and the overall sense of harmony within the household. As family members navigate an environment marked by tension and

unpredictability, relationships may become strained, contributing to misunderstandings, resentment and weakened familial bonds. This study seeks to explore the intricate relationship between sustained parental conflict, its psychological impact on parents and ies broader implications for family dynamics, highlighting the need for timely interventions and supportive strategies to foster healthier relational environment.

Literature review:

Parental conflict and mental health:

Studies say that chronic parental or marital conflict is strongly correlated with stress, depression and anxiety among parents. Emotional strain caused by disagreements can lead to lowered self- esteem, mood swings, sleep disturbances and long-term psychological stress. When conflicts are frequent and unresolved, the emotional health will deteriorate.

Impact on family relations:

 Constant conflict creates a toxic family environment that affects communication patterns, parent-child relationships, in-laws relationship, emotional engagement, behavioral fulfillment, decision making and after all smooth performance of the family life. Over time these strained dynamics shape a negative family culture in which, cooperation, trust and emotional bonding become difficult to maintain, and increased relational fragmentation. Studies indicate that children raised in high- conflict households may aggression, withdrawal, anxiety and struggle with emotional insecurity, behavioral problems, low self confidence or academic difficulties, may be for life long. It may weaken children's sense of emotional stability and low self esteem.

Theoretical Frameworks

. Family System Theory explains how conflict between two members affects the entire family unit.

. Social learning Theory suggests that conflict behaviors may be modeled and reproduced, especially by children who witness them.

. Cognitive Behavioral Theory highlights how negative thought patterns triggered by conflict reinforce emotional distress and maladaptive behaviors.

Methodology:

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to explore how adolescent girls perceive inter-parental conflict and how such experiences influence their emotional reactions and coping behaviours. A sample of teenage girls between the ages of 13 and 19 was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across varied socio-economic and family backgrounds. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire incorporating Likert-scale items that measured behavioural withdrawal, emotional irritability, psychological distress, and perceived family tension. The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity. Data collection was conducted in

a supportive and confidential environment, with informed consent obtained from all participants. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools, including frequencies, percentages, and bar charts, followed by interpretive analysis to understand the emerging behavioural patterns. Ethical considerations—such as voluntary participation, anonymity, and sensitivity toward respondents' emotional well-being—were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. This methodological approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how inter-parental conflict shapes the emotional and social coping mechanisms of adolescent girls.

Findings and Discussion:
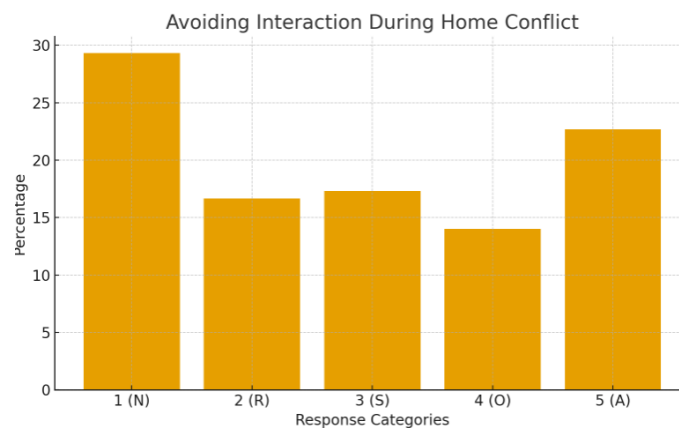
The findings reveal varied patterns of avoidance among respondents when faced with tension or problems at home. A combined 36.67% of participants—those who selected 'Always' (22.67%) and 'Often' (14.00%)—indicated a high tendency to withdraw from interacting with others during family conflict, suggesting that a significant proportion of teenagers cope with household stress through social withdrawal. In contrast, 17.33% reported 'Sometimes', reflecting moderate avoidance that fluctuates depending on the intensity of the situation. A smaller segment, 16.67%, selected 'Rarely', indicating low avoidance and pointing to stronger emotional resilience or alternative coping strategies that do not involve withdrawal. Notably, the largest share of respondents, 29.33%, chose 'Never', suggesting that nearly one-third remain socially engaged despite stress at home and do not rely on withdrawal as a coping mechanism. Overall, the data illustrates a clear diversity in coping responses, ranging from consistent withdrawal to complete resilience.

Feeling Irritated After Witnessing Conflict at Home
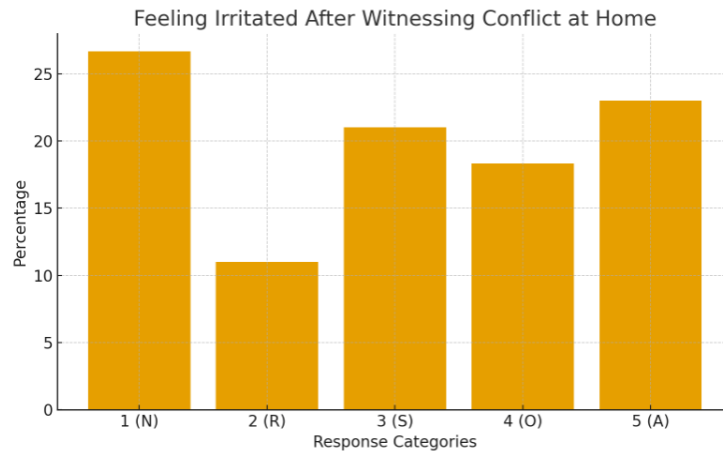
The chart presents the distribution of responses to the statement "I often feel irritated or short-tempered after witnessing arguments or conflict at home." The findings show a varied emotional response among participants. A notable 26.67% of respondents selected 'Never', indicating that over one-fourth do not experience irritation even when exposed to parental conflict, suggesting stronger emotional regulation or detachment. In contrast, only 11.00% chose 'Rarely', showing that a small portion experiences irritation infrequently. A sizable 21.00% reported 'Sometimes', reflecting moderate emotional sensitivity where irritation arises depending on the intensity or frequency of conflict. Meanwhile, 18.33% selected 'Often', showing that nearly one-fifth of the participants frequently feel irritated after witnessing conflict at home. Importantly, 23.00% chose 'Always', indicating that almost one-fourth consistently experience strong emotional disturbances when exposed to arguments. When combined, the 'Often' and 'Always' categories (41.33%) highlight that a large proportion of respondents appear emotionally impacted by household conflict, demonstrating heightened vulnerability and stress reactivity in conflict situations.

Withdrawal from Friends or Family Due to Home Stress
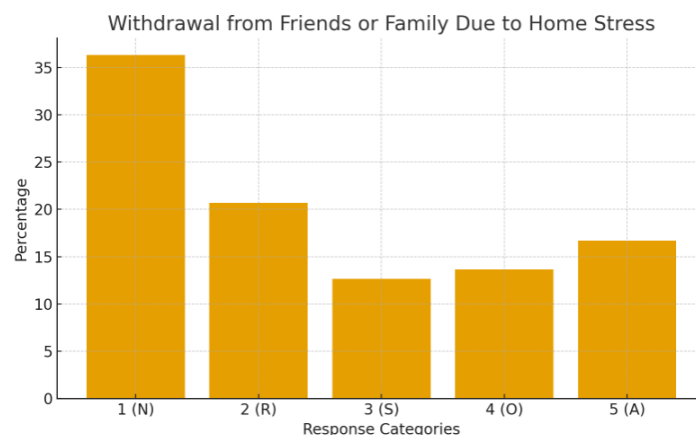
The distribution of responses to the statement "I pull away from friends or family when stress at home becomes overwhelming" reveals varied patterns of emotional withdrawal among the participants. A substantial 36.33% of respondents selected 'Never', indicating that more than one-third do not isolate themselves even when household stress intensifies, which may reflect stronger social coping mechanisms or supportive relationships. Another 20.67% chose 'Rarely', suggesting occasional but not frequent withdrawal. Meanwhile, 12.67% reported 'Sometimes', representing individuals who respond inconsistently, depending on the level of stress at home. In contrast, 13.67% chose 'Often', showing that

a notable portion frequently distances themselves during stressful periods. Furthermore, 16.67% of respondents selected 'Always', highlighting that nearly one-sixth consistently withdraw from social connections as a coping response to home-related stress. Overall, although a large segment of respondents avoid withdrawal, a considerable proportion—particularly those in the 'Often' and 'Always' categories—demonstrate a tendency toward social isolation when confronted with overwhelming household tensions, indicating emotional distress and vulnerability.

Conclusion:

The findings of the study highlight diverse behavioural and emotional responses among adolescents when confronted with family conflict and household stress. The analysis of avoidance behaviour shows that 36.67% of respondents displayed high levels of withdrawal—selecting *'Always'* or *'Often'*—indicating that a considerable proportion of teenagers cope with tense home environments through social disengagement. A moderate proportion (17.33%) reported withdrawing *'Sometimes'*, suggesting that their reactions depend on the intensity of the conflict. Meanwhile, 16.67% of participants indicated low avoidance (*'Rarely'*), and the largest group (29.33%) reported *'Never'* withdrawing, reflecting emotional resilience and the ability to maintain social interactions despite household disturbances. These patterns demonstrate a broad spectrum of coping strategies, ranging from consistent withdrawal to strong resilience.

Emotional reactivity to conflict was also evident in participants' responses to feeling irritated after witnessing arguments. While 26.67% reported *'Never'* feeling irritated—signifying effective emotional regulation—only 11.00% experienced irritation *'Rarely'*. A moderate 21.00% indicated irritation *'Sometimes'*, highlighting conditional emotional sensitivity. Notably, 18.33% selected *'Often'* and *23.00%* chose *'Always'*, illustrating that 41.33% of respondents experience frequent or constant irritability as a reaction to parental conflict. This high emotional reactivity underscores the psychological vulnerability of many adolescents within conflict-prone households. Patterns of social withdrawal during periods of overwhelming stress further reveal varied coping responses. Over one-third (36.33%) *'Never'* distanced themselves from friends or family, suggesting the presence of supportive networks or adaptive coping mechanisms. Another 20.67% withdrew *'Rarely'*, while 12.67% did so *'Sometimes'*, indicating inconsistency depending on stress levels. However, 13.67% reported frequent withdrawal (*'Often'*) and *16.67% indicated constant withdrawal (*'Always'*), signifying that a notable proportion of adolescents resort to social isolation as a stress response. These findings point toward significant emotional distress and highlight the need for targeted interventions to support adolescents experiencing high levels of family-related stress.

Family Systems Theory explains that conflict between parents disrupts the entire family environment, influencing children's emotions, behaviours, and interactions; this is reflected in the withdrawal and irritability patterns observed among many respondents. Social Learning Theory further clarifies how adolescents may model and internalize conflict behaviours they witness at home, leading to replicated emotional reactions such as anger, avoidance, or distress. Additionally, Cognitive Behavioral Theory helps interpret how repeated exposure to conflict can trigger negative thought patterns, reinforcing emotional vulnerability, stress reactivity, and maladaptive coping mechanisms such as isolation.

Together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate how inter-parental conflict shapes adolescents' psychological well-being and behavioural responses, emphasizing the need for supportive interventions, family counselling, and strategies that strengthen positive coping among young individuals.

Overall, the study reveals a complex interplay of emotional reactions and behavioural coping strategies among adolescents living in conflict-affected households. While many exhibit resilience, a substantial proportion show signs of emotional strain, irritability, and withdrawal, underscoring the importance of supportive interventions, counselling, and family-based conflict mitigation strategies.

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