

Perceived Parent-Adolescent Conflict and Social Competence: Moderating Role of Gender

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The study examined association between perceived parent adolescent conflict and social competence and whether gender of the adolescents moderated impact of parent-adolescent conflicts on their social competence. The sample of 120 college students (60 boys and 60 girls) who were living with both biological parents was recruited from the public colleges of Lahore. The Conflict Behavior Questionnaire and Social Competence Scale for Adolescents were administered to the participants. Results revealed that there was statistically significant difference between the mean scores of adolescent boys and girls on their perceived adolescent conflict with father ($t = 9.41, p < .001$) and with mother ($t = 2.66, p < .012$) however boys' conflict with their parents was stronger than that of girls. Interestingly, both boys and girls perceived their relationship with the parent of the opposite sex as more conflicting. Parent-adolescent conflicts negatively predicted social competence and gender moderated the relationship between mother-adolescent conflict and social competence of adolescents after statistically controlling for demographic variables i.e., age of adolescents, class and family system, unlike the case of father-adolescents conflict. Furthermore, adolescent girls scored significantly higher on social competence than boys ($t = 2.45, p < .016$). The findings have been discussed in regard to gender roles in the cultural environment /settings of Pakistan where a huge gender disparity exists between the sexes. As a developing country, changing family life-style due to urbanization and spread of education in Pakistan appears to bode well in negotiating gender discrepancies and viewpoints for adaptive parent-adolescent relationship. It can, in turn, boost social competence as well, among adolescents.

Keywords: Perceived parent- adolescent conflict, social competence, Gender effect ³

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Researches on family relations have focused on parent-adolescent relationship in the last three decades extensively. A considered opinion is that family issues and gender related matters create conflicts between parents and adolescents as the latter think parents are not giving them emotional support and autonomy they need. Adolescents generally complain that parents are rigid and overly critical on their offspring's behavior. The parents think, on the other hand, that their wards are not compliant enough (Onongha, 2015). Even in collectivist societies, Chinese adolescents justified conflicts on the same grounds as in individualistic societies and wanted autonomy in decision-making as a matter of personal jurisdiction, though they give in to parents by cultural and family ethos (Yau & Smetana, 2003). It is commonly said that adolescence begins in biology and ends in culture as the adolescents pass through various transitions from mid-adolescence to late adolescence.

The critical comments of parents about the life style and everyday behavior of their young sons and daughters make the youth doubtful about parental support and take it as interference in interpersonal relationships with family and friends (Razali, 2013). Conflicts occur more often between adolescents and their mothers in general and between mothers and daughters, in particular for gate-keeping (Laursen, 1995; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991) as adolescents remain in direct interaction with mother more than father across ages (Laurson & Richards, 1994). In other words, the perceived support and control from father has been relatively less impacting adolescents' adjustment (Laible & Carlo, 2004) compared to that of mothers because mostly mothers take charge of the adolescents as father is generally away to worksite. Parents' differentiated treatment of their offspring also remains a major development issue as parents express different concerns for the adolescents due to possibly different roles father and mother are called upon to play in raising the children (Collins & Russell, 1991).

Studies on family-organization have predicted that levels of parent-adolescent conflicts are moderated by several factors such as family structure, domain of decision, community and age of adolescents. For example, single parent family, nuclear and extended family system pose different challenges to parents as well adolescents within cultures. Family system theory of Minuchin (2002) has led to greater awareness on mutual influences of sub-systems within the family system and developmental issues of the young adolescents. For example, people in Pakistan mostly live in extended family system where adolescents live in

the supervision of their parents and grandparents in hierarchy of power system. The latter have a greater generation-gap in terms of beliefs, attitudes, values and social traditions (Triandis, 1995) causing conflictive family relations in joint family setting than in the nuclear families. Nevertheless, the joint / extended family system has strong cultural and ecological foothold in Pakistan as a traditional and Asian society.

Ellis-Schwabe and Thornburg (1986) endorsed gender as a potent factor contributing to conflictual relationship with parents. The perceived gender superiority for boys affect parent-adolescent conflicts differently in South-Asian underdeveloped countries as in Pakistan (Ashraf & Najam, 2011) since boys are socialized to exercise more autonomy than girls. The former therefore demand more autonomy from their parents. This results in all the more conflictual behavior between parents and adolescents. On the other hand, in the Western context, parent-adolescents conflicts are not intense in degree as gender attributed characteristics are not so different or discriminatory across sexes (Marker, 2005). Given that parents and families exert an influential and persisting effect on the offspring's development especially during adolescence, studies have examined possible link between family factors, gender identity and adolescents' social behaviors mainly social competence and peer relations (Howes et al., 2017). Needless to say, gender attributions are culturally bound characteristics affixed to boys and girls. Child rearing styles, cultural ethos and conventions bear on issues related to child development and social functioning as family structure theory of Minuchin (2002) informs the researchers. He regards child rearing patterns as triadic rather than dyadic; parent, individual boy or girl offspring, and the family system.

Another demographic variable; 'age' is potential variable that influences parent-adolescent conflicts, particularly at the onset of puberty (Smetana, 1995). Age escalate these conflicts as demands for autonomy increase in the teens from within as well as due to peer pressure as adolescents expand their interaction with time. This directly facilitates or retards social development of the adolescence depending upon quality of family life. Parental conflicts take a toll of adolescents' social development and competence when they find parents not supportive of their relations with peers. The relationship between parental promotion of peer relations and development of social competence among adolescents was established by Adams and Larsen (2007).

Social competence is one of the outcome of parent-adolescence relationship. It is defined as effectiveness in social interaction, involving social skills, relationships, ability to take others' perspective concerning a situation, learning from ones past experiences, and applying that learning in social interactions (Rose-Krasnor, 2016). Social competence is the foundation upon which expectations for future interaction are built as the adolescents develop perceptions of their own behavior towards social adaptation with others, especially family and friends. Adolescents' quality of relationship helps in their successful adjustment in the society. When parents are supportive, relationships are strengthened creating enormous opportunities for the adolescents to enhance their social skills and benefit from the peers (Carolyn & Paterson, 1995). In fact, feeling social competence provides one a sense of personal growth that enables one adjust in one's social circle (Adel, 2004).

According to Shujja and Malik (2015) social competence is built up by characteristics such as social initiative, self-efficacy, and adaptability. However, nature of social competencies are culture specific (Shujja & Malik (2011). For instance, individualistic cultures that thrive in the Western capitalist countries value competition and assertiveness as vital characteristics for developing social competence and those who are weak in these dimensions lag behind others and remain at the lower rung of the society (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997). On the other hand, cooperation and accommodation with others including parents are considered as indicators of competence in the Asian collectivist societies (South Asia and Far East) and adolescents possessing such skills are esteemed and respected for such behaviors (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997). The individualistic / Western and collectivistic / Asian societies conceive and nurture gender roles differently corresponding to their societal ethos that might potentially moderate relationship between social competence of the adolescents and perceived conflicts with the parents. Females are more accommodating and less conflicting with parents compared to males in Asian family systems that protect male superiority values and privileges promoting patriarchal family system.

Objective of the study

The study aims to determine the gender differences in parent-adolescents conflicts to find whether or not gender of the adolescents moderates the relationship between degree of perceived conflictive relations with parents by the adolescents and social competence.

Rationale

Studies on this subject typically involve western families. Only limited studies are available on Asian families, hence the reason for conducting the present study. Gender disparity is very marked in the Asia sub-continent and it is of interest to find how well adolescents' gender influences their conflicting relations with parents and its impact on social competence of the subjects. McHale et. al. (2014) suggests, nonetheless that similar pattern of linkages are found between co-parenting (mother and father sharing responsibilities of rearing their offspring) and children development related issues e.g. social skills and social competence.

Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be gender differences in the degree of perceived parent adolescent conflict and social competence among adolescents.
2. Parent-Adolescents conflicts are likely to be inversely associated with social competence of the adolescents.
3. Gender is likely to moderate the relationship between perceived parent- adolescent conflict and social competence.

Method

Participants

A convenient sample of 120 collegiate students (60 boys and 60 girls) of Grade 12 was drawn from public sector colleges in Lahore. Students were recruited considering their co-parenting family setup. Adolescents having intact families i.e. living with both parents were approached. Adolescents raised by single parent (in case of death of one parent or divorce) were not included in the study. About 44% of the participants were living in joint-family system and the remaining 54 % lived in nuclear family system. Three participants did not report about their family settings; whether they were living in joint or nuclear family system. (See sample details in Table1).

Table 1

Details of Demographic Variables (N=120)

Variable	Girls (n=60)		Boys (n=60)	
	f (%)	M(SD)	f (%)	M (SD)
Age		18.08(0.74)		
Gender	60 (50)		60(50)	
Class / College Year				
First year	10 (16.7)		12(20)	
Second year	50 (83.3)		48(80)	
Family system				
Joint	21(35)		25(42)	
Nuclear	37 (61)		34 (56)	
Not reported	02 (04)		01 (02)	
Father's education				
Matric	15(25)		10(17)	
Intermediate	21(35)		22 (36)	
B.A	09 (15)		20 (33)	
M.A / MSc	15 (25)		08 (14)	
Mother's education				
Matric	11(19)		10(17)	
Intermediate	5(25)		18(30)	
B.A	24(40)		22(36)	
MA/M.Sc	10(16)		10(17)	

Measures

Conflict Behavior Questionnaire This self-report scale, developed by Robin and Foster (1989) was used to assess adolescents' Parent-child conflict with 20-item each (Father and Mother Form). It identified family conflict or problems with parents such as argumentative issues, difficulties in communication, parental empathy, and general relationship with the parents. The responses on the questionnaire are answered on 5-point Likert scale; 1= *strongly disagrees* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Higher score indicates greater degree of conflict the respondent is facing with the parent. The questionnaire showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$) among adolescents (Manivel et al. 2013). However, the questionnaire was translated in Urdu in this study by

forward translation-backward translation methods. Next, a committee of five experts in the field of test-construction examined the two versions item by item and finalized the Urdu version for both Forms. Cronbach alpha of mother and father forms was .84 and .78, respectively in this study.

Social Competence Scale for Adolescents It was developed in Urdu by Shujja and Malik (2015). The 53 item scale loaded on six factors namely self-efficacy, self-confidence, sociability, leadership, adaptability, and social initiative. The authors posit that social competence is influenced by situational and cultural variations in addition to progressive developmental changes in adolescence. Items are rated on 4-point frequency scale; 1 = *Never*, 4 = *always*. High scores indicate higher level of social competence and vice versa. Cronbach Alpha value for the six factors ranged between .60-.87 and a value of .85 was reported for the overall scale (Shujja & Malik, 2015). The same was found as .82 in the present study.

Procedure

The grade 12 students were approached in the classroom to participate in the study after obtaining permission from the Principle of the colleges. They were briefed about the purpose of the study and their consent was sought for participating in the study if they have been living with their both parents. Mother-adolescent conflict scale, father-adolescent conflict scale and social competence scale were stapled together in order and administered in classroom group setting. They were told to return the questionnaires after filling them up completely and there was no time constraint. The participants were assured that this information provided by them would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. They were informed that they could withdraw from this study if they wanted so, any time. Demographic information about age, grade, father and mother's education, family system; joint (living with grandparents) or nuclear (living with parents and siblings only) was also obtained.

Results

The findings revealed that there were significant gender differences in perceived parent-adolescent conflicts. Adolescent girls and boys perceived conflict with the parent of the same sex significantly more than with that of the opposite sex (see Table 2). They had relatively less conflicting relation with the parent of the same gender.

Table 2

Perceived Mother and Father-Adolescent Conflict and Social Competence of College students

Variables	Girls	Boys	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Mother- Adolescent Conflict	59.90 (7.69)	43.98 (10.61)	9.4	.001	-19.26	-12.56	0.6
Father- Adolescent Conflict	49.4 (6.5)	54.21 (12.18)	2.66	.009	1.22	8.30	0.4
Social competence	139.2 (12.3)	145.4 (12.18)	2.45	.016	1.20	11.29	0.4

CI=Confidence interval LL=Lower limit; UL=Upper limit

Table 3

Relationship between Perceived Mother - Adolescent Conflict, Father-Adolescent Conflict and Social Competence (N= 120)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Mother- Adolescent conflict	--	.67**	-.44**
2. Father-Adolescent conflict	.57**	--	-.66**
3. Social Competence	-.73**	-.25*	--

Note. Upper diagonal for girls, lower diagonal for boys
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Adolescents' conflict with father and mother was strongly inter-correlated ($r = .68$) and there was an inverse association of social competence scores with the Father-adolescent conflict ($r = -.66$) and mother- adolescent conflict scores ($r = -.44$). Secondly, girls scored significantly less in social competence than boys (Table 2) that indicates that gender would potentially influence, as a moderator, relationship between parent-adolescent conflict and social competence of the adolescents. The moderation analysis run through PROCESS by Hayes (2013) is shown in Table 4 and 5 for mother- adolescent conflict and father-adolescent conflict, respectively.

Table 4

Adolescents' Gender as a Moderator between Perceived Mother Adolescent Conflict and Social Competence (N = 117)

Variables	Social Competence		
	ΔR^2	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>
Step 1	.36		
1 Age		.004	.07
2 Family system		-.17	.15
3 Perceived Mother Adolescent Conflict		-.77***	.10
4 Gender		.25**	.10
Step 2	.02		
3 X 4		-.23*	.10
Total R^2	.38		
<i>F</i>	13.3***		

Note: Gender, 0= girls, 1= boys, Family system, 0= joint, 1= nuclear
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 revealed that perceived mother-adolescent conflict negatively predicted social competence; $B = -.77$. Gender moderately predicted social competence $B = .25$. However, interaction of perceived mother adolescent conflict and gender was significant, suggesting that gender moderated the relationship between perceived mother adolescent conflict and social competence.

Figure 1 shows that boy and girl adolescents had low social competence when they perceived high mother-adolescent conflict. Further, boys had low social competence, compared to girls, at low to medium score of perceived mother-adolescents conflict.

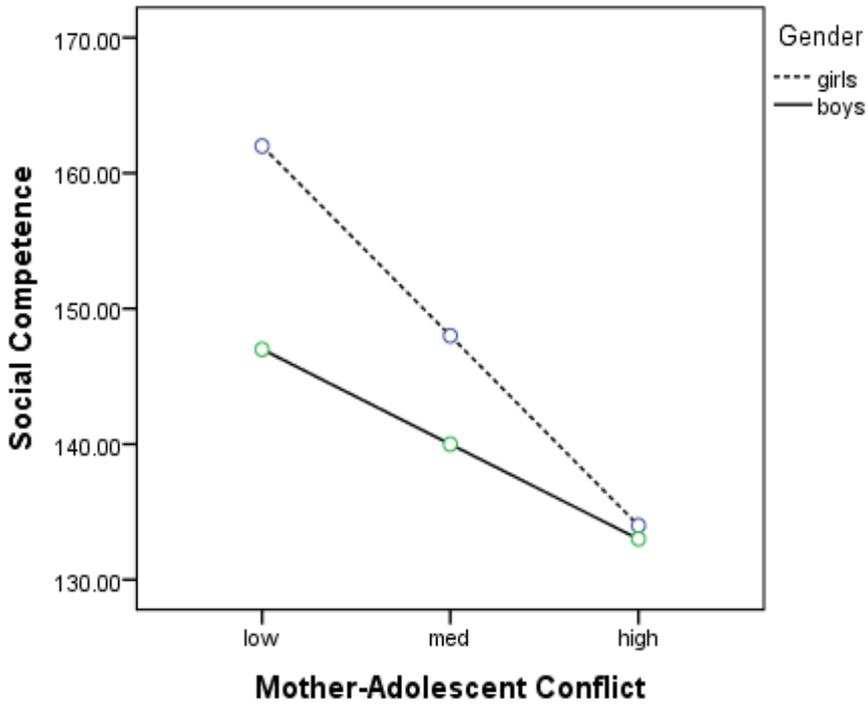


Figure 1 Impact of gender on mother-adolescent conflict and social competence

Table 5

Adolescent's Gender as a Moderator between Perceived Father Adolescent Conflict and Social Competence (N = 117)

Variables	Social Competence		
	ΔR^2	β	S.E
Step 1	.32		
1 Age		.04	.07
2 Family system		.04	.16
3 Perceived Father Adolescent Conflict		-.46***	.09
4 Gender		-.33**	.08
Step 2	.01		
3 X 4		.12	.09
Total R^2	.33		
F	11.1***		

Note: Gender, 0= girls, 1= boys, Family system, 0= joint, 1= nuclear
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 5 indicates that the effects of age, and family system was insignificant, however the perceived father adolescent conflict and gender were found to be significant negative predictors of social competence though less than in the case of mother-adolescent conflict (see Table-4). Furthermore, interaction of perceived father adolescent conflict and gender was not significant, suggesting that gender did not moderate the relationship between perceived father adolescent conflict and social competence. It may be recalled that discrepancy of conflict between boys and girls was greater with mother than the father.

Discussion

Parent-adolescent conflict and social competence variables were investigated to find whether or not gender moderated the relationship between them. It was found that boys perceived more conflict with mother than with father, whereas girls perceived more conflict with father. Thus direction of adolescents' conflicts with mother and father was found to be differentiated between boys and girls that could likely be indicative of gender-based different patterns of interaction and socialization the adolescents have had from their parents. These results supported our contention that gender of the adolescent could moderate relationship between their perceived parent-adolescent conflicts and social competence.

The analysis further supported that gender moderation likely influenced (see table 4) social competence of the adolescents; In the case of boys, social competence was more attuned to conflict with mother ($r = -.73$) than with father ($r = -.25$), but it was the other way round for girls ($r = -.44$ versus $r = -.66$) attesting consistent gender overtones on both the variables of interest; the parent-adolescent conflict and social competence. Adolescents' gender moderated the relationship between conflict with the parent and social competence uniformly for both boys and girls at level of high conflict with mother in lowering social competence score however, boys' score dipped lower than that of girls at medium to low level of maternal conflict (Fig 1). Thus conflict with mother hit boys harder than girls. Collin and Russell (1991) and Forehand et. al. (1990) argue that mothers are more involved in parenting their adolescents than fathers and as a consequence they come into conflict with adolescents more often. Similar findings were reported by Li Ping et. al., (2017) who held that adolescents had less intense conflicts with fathers. This is truer in the context of the present study as well since fathers, in a traditional society as in Pakistan, remain on the job most of

the time as the sole bread earner, leaving adolescents largely to the directions of mothers.

One more explanation for the findings would be considering the sociocultural context where boys during their transition as adolescents encounter a shift in seeking power and dominance in becoming more independent than girls, in keeping with their gender role identity (Steinberg, 1981) and have higher resilience for expression of autonomous behaviors than girls (Laursen, 1993; Irene et.al. 2009). In this vein, boys were more susceptible to conflict with mother as more controlling and gate-keeping parent. Triandis (1995) contended that parent-adolescent relationship are infused with the attitudes, norms, shared beliefs, values and traditions of a given culture. For example, practices of socialization for girls focus on interdependence among family members, valuing obedience in the name of family harmony as Asian cultures expect female adolescents to be more positively functional members of the family.

Boys scored higher than girl adolescents on social competence in this study. Interestingly, adolescents' conflict with mother, unlike that with fathers, interacted with gender of the adolescents moderating influence on social competence. In conservative societies like Pakistan, boys are raised as a more privileged gender and are favorably accommodated by the father. This might have raised boys mean scores on social competence compared to girls.

Limitations

The parent-adolescent conflicts were measured through a Western scale; the score may not be reflective of the family systems in Pakistan which is strongly rooted in patriarchy and superiority of the male as a mainstream culture fact. However, participants of the study came from urban schooled population who were likely to have somewhat less rigid gender perspective and were motivated for egalitarian society and harmony between men and women folks.

Secondly, this study is based on self-report of the adolescents only. Parents' reports of conflict were not obtained due to limitations of resources and time.

Conclusion

Mother-adolescent conflicts of the college students were greater than father-adolescent conflict however the mother-adolescent conflict and gender were significant predictors of social competence among adolescents. The gender of the adolescents moderated the relationship between their perceived mother adolescent conflict and social competence. Interestingly, adolescents had relatively greater conflicts with the parent of the opposite sex. The study is reflective of the gender disparity in Pakistan linked with adolescents conflicting relationship with parents and its associated developmental impact on their social competence.

Implications

This research bears important implications about parenting adolescents and the consequent conflict or harmony within the family. It sounds meaningful to say that in developing societies such as Pakistan where gender discrepancy is decreasing due to education and multiculturalism of the growing urbanized society in Lahore metropolis, the parent-adolescent conflicts parallel the more developed societies since the results of this study are similar to those in other countries.

This study may further create awareness among parents to take on the perspective of adolescents and revisit their parenting role towards parent-adolescents conflicts and their ill effects. This is likely to enhance social competence of the adolescents as well.

Second, comparative studies are called for among adolescents hailing from families with different degree of gender sensitivity such as in rural areas to learn about their dissonance in parent-adolescent relationship. Perhaps government can legislate on obvious gender issues towards supportive of a more harmonious and happy family relationship.

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