Research Article/ Health

The Interparental Conflict in Selected Schools of Pokhara: Adolescents' Perspectives

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Abstract

Conflict is a natural part of family dynamics. Adolescents' perceptions of these conflicts can significantly impact their externalizing and internalizing behaviors. This study assesses how adolescents in selected schools of Pokhara perceive interparental conflict. To address this issue, a descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted to assess the perception of inter-parental conflict among adolescents using the children's perception of inter-parental conflict scale among 140 students from two schools in Pokhara by multi-stage sampling. The collected data was verified, analyzed, and arranged for accuracy. It was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient, and Mann Whitney U test. The finding shows that 52.9 percent were of the age group 12-14 years, where the mean age ±SD was (14.48 ±.877). More than half of respondents 53% have a moderate level of perception, whereas 23.5% have a high level, and the remaining 23.5% have a low level of perception of inter-parental conflict. There are significant positive correlations between the several subscales of the inter-parental conflict (p < .01). More than half of the respondents perceived interparental conflict at a moderate level. In addition, significant positive correlations were also found between the several subscales of the interparental conflict. The study provides a valuable information to identify how adolescents perceive inter-parental conflict, providing insights into their emotional well-being and behavioral patterns.

Keywords: Adolescents, emotional well-being, inter-parental conflict, family dynamics

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Introduction

Family dynamics, particularly the nature of the parental relationship, play a foundational role in shaping children's emotional, social, and psychological development. Among these dynamics, interparental conflict defined as frequent, intense, or poorly resolved disputes between parents has consistently emerged as a critical risk factor for adverse outcomes across childhood and adolescence. Such conflict directly undermines children's emotional security and attachment to parents, and indirectly disrupts warm and supportive parent-child interactions and impairs children's overall well-being (Hess, 2022; Yang, et al., 2022). Interparental conflicts can be constructive or destructive, depending on whether their impact on children's development is positive or negative (McCoy et al., 2013). Additionally, children raised in families marked by frequent parental conflict may exhibit various adverse outcomes, including increased aggression, defiant behaviors, disturbances in sleep patterns, and low self-esteem (El-Sheikh and Kelly, 2011). These may include increased aggression and oppositional or defiant behaviors, which can manifest both at home and in social settings such as school.

Furthermore, interparental conflict, its subjective perception and evaluation by children especially by adolescents affects self-esteem. In early adolescents aged 11 to 14 years, higher perceptions of interparental conflict were related to lower self-esteem (Shelton & Harold, 2007). Amato and Afifi (2006) also documented negative relations between interparental conflict, self-esteem, and well-being. The adolescence demonstrates lower trust and higher alienation in relationships with parents, higher frequency of problems with parents, and higher self-blame for interparental conflicts.

Exploring interparental conflict through children's perspectives is essential to identify which aspects of the conflict are most harmful and to understand whether boys or girls are more affected when children are drawn into parental conflicts, the negative consequences can be profound. The frequency of these conflicts and the way parents manage their disagreements play a critical role in children's adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2002). The study points out that situations where children are incorporated into conflict or used directly as targets of conflict are more vulnerable to internalizing and externalizing behaviors (McCoy et al., 2013). Hence, this research highlights the significant impact of parental conflict, particularly when involving children directly, on children's emotional and behavioral development.

In the context of Nepal, empirical evidence points to a strong link between family conflicts including parental disagreements over child-rearing and increased emotional and behavioral problems among school-aged children (Ma, et al., 2022). Limited research has been performed on the perception of interparental conflict among adolescents in Nepal. Children raised in families marked by frequent parental conflict with a high perception of parental conflict may exhibit various adverse outcomes, including increased aggression, defiant behaviors, disturbances in sleep patterns, and low self-esteem (Jose et al., 2021). Therefore, this has inspired the researchers to undertake a study to explore how adolescents perceive

interparental conflict.

Litreture Review

In a cross-sectional study by Parsa et al. (2014) conducted among 395 first-year students of the University of Medical Science in Hamadan, Iran who were between 17 to 19 years old. The study showed a majority (79.7%) of the respondents had a low perception of Inter-parental conflict at home. The negative value shows a negative relationship between inter-parental subscales and academic adjustment. The study concluded if inter-parental conflict increases the academic adjustment will decrease. Chaudhary and Shabbir (2018) conducted a study in Pakistan among 372 adolescents aged 14-15 years using a convenient sampling technique. The study revealed that inter-parental conflict (b= 0.63, t= 5.72, p=<.01) and optimism-pessimism (b=0.58, t= 5.91, p<0.01) are significant predictors of aggression in adolescents. The value of r^2 shows 46% variance is accounted for aggression by both pessimism and optimism and inter-parental conflict. This shows that high rates of aggression and inter-parental conflict indicated high levels of pessimism.

In addition, quantitative study was conducted on young Irish people aged between 18-30 of 697 individuals which consisted of 76 males (10%) and 621 females (89.1%) in Ireland. It was found that the three subscales of parental conflict used: intensity, frequency, and resolution do not predict negative romantic relationship satisfaction. The three predictor variables explained only (2.1%) of the variance between relationship satisfaction levels (Cupatela, 2019). This finding suggests that the intensity, frequency, and resolution of parental conflict have minimal predictive value for romantic relationship satisfaction in later life.

Moreover, Olatunji and Idemudia (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study in Nigeria among 394 adolescents aged 12-19 years which showed that all overall Inter-parental conflicts were interactively associated with aggression (p < .0001, R2 = .08). However, frequency (β = .13, p = .02) and intensity (β = .16, p = .02) associate with aggression while resolution (β = .02, p = .75), content (β = .003, p = .95), perceived threat (β = -.09, p = .16), coping efficacy (β = .11, p = .08), self-blame (β = .03, p = .68) and triangulation (β = .02, p = .69) did not. Thus, the study concluded that aggression is generally correlated with a higher degree of inter-parental conflict. A study entitled "Exploring family conflict dynamics" was conducted, in Norway employing a multi-informant approach to assess perceptions of conflict in 599 Norwegian families. The majority of the families involved only one participating child i.e. 424, while the rest had two or three participating children i.e. 175) which concluded that older siblings perceive interparental conflict more similarly to their parents than younger siblings do because older siblings have been exposed to more interparental conflict over time or because they are more mature and better understand interparental conflict, aligning their perception with their parents' view (Buchmann, 2021).

The study "Effects of inter-parental conflict on children's social well-being and the mediation role of parenting behavior" in Germany involving 1,157 children aged 7 to 16, concluded that interparental conflicts can affect children's experiences at school. Both the

frequency and intensity of interparental conflicts at home affect children's social well-being, underlining the need to address interparental conflict to help children develop positively (Hess, 2022). A study entitled "The relationship between inter-parental conflict, distress tolerance, and emotional dysregulation among adolescents in Islamabad Public School" among 348 adolescents revealed that the inter-parental conflict (55.19±8.24) and difficulty in emotional regulation (r=.181) significant highly positive relation. Whereas, difficulty with emotional regulation and distress tolerance significant highly negative correlation (r=.-466) (Hameed, 2023). Hence, with an increase in inter-parental conflict, there is an increase in emotional dysregulation and increase in emotional dysregulation decrease in distress tolerance.

The literature on inter-parental conflict highlights its significant impact on children's and adolescents' mental health. Research consistently shows that exposure to inter-parental conflict is linked to increased psychological distress, aggression, and difficulties in emotional regulation. Children and adolescents experiencing high levels of conflict between their parents often report more severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as lower academic adjustment and relationship satisfaction. The effects of inter-parental conflict are evident across various developmental stages, from childhood through young adulthood. It affects not only immediate emotional well-being but also long-term psychological outcomes. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing inter-parental conflict to mitigate its negative effects and promote healthier emotional and psychological development in adolescents.

Research Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was used to assess adolescents' perception of interparental conflict. The study was conducted in two secondary schools in ward 16 of Pokhara Metropolitan City, which has 33 wards and 20 secondary-level schools in ward 16 (13 public and 7 private). One public and one private school were randomly selected using the lottery method. The study included students from grades eight and nine, with a total sample size of 144, of which 140 data were collected. A probability multi-stage random sampling technique was applied.

A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection, consisting of two parts. Part I included background variables: age, sex, grade, religion, ethnicity, family type, number of siblings, birth order, parents' education, parents' occupation, and socioeconomic status, categorized using the modified Kuppuswamy scale (Joshi & Acharya, 2019). Part II used the children's perception of interparental conflict Scale by Grych and Fincham (1992), a 49-item tool measuring five dimensions with nine subscales: conflict properties (19 items), threat (12 items), self-blame (9 items), triangulation (5 items), and stability (4 items). Responses were scored as "True = 2," "Sort of True = 1," and "False = 0," with a total score range of 0–98. Items 1, 5, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 30, 32, 36, 40, and 42 were reverse-scored. Perception levels were categorized based on percentile scores (Jose et al., 2021): Low (<26), Moderate (26–38), and High (>38). The tool had a Cronbach's alpha reliability

score of 0.822 (Elatter et al., 2022). The scoring method, including reverse-coded items and categorized perception levels, demonstrates a reliable measurement tool with strong internal consistency

Administrative approval for data collection was obtained from school principals. Parental consent and student assent were secured before the data collection. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, and data were used solely for research purposes. After verification, data were coded and analyzed in SPSS version 16. Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, and standard deviation, inter quartile range) and inferential statistics (Spearman Rank Correlation and Mann-Whitney U test) were used to analyze the results.

Results and Discussion

Results

The collected data have been presented in the form of tables. They include the background characteristics of respondents, family background of the respondents, level of perceptions of interparental conflict among adolescents, and interparental conflict subscale scores. The following table shows the background characteristics of respondents.

Table 1

Background Characteristics of Respondents (n=140)

Variables	Number	Percent
Age (In Years)		
12-14	74	52.9
15-17	66	47.1
Mean ±SD 14.48 ±.877		
Gender		
Male	65	46.4
Female	75	53.6
Grade		
Eight	76	54.3
Nine	64	45.7
Religion		
Hinduism	129	92.1
Buddhism	8	5.7
Christianity	2	1.4
Kirat	1	0.7
Ethnicity		
Brahmin/Chhetri	56	40.0
Janajati	57	40.7
Dalit	27	19.3

Table 1 illustrates that 52.9% participants fell within the 12-14 age group, with an average age of 14±.87. Of those surveyed, 46.4% identified as male and 53.6 % as female. Additionally, 92.1% of respondents followed Hinduism, 5.7% followed Buddhism, and 0.7 % following Kirat. Also 40.7% were Janajati, 40% Brahmin/Chhetri and 19.3 % were Dalit.

The following table presents the family background of adolescents in terms of family type, parental education and occupation, and socioeconomic status as per the Modified Kuppuswamy's Scale.

Table 2

Family Background of the Respondents (n=140)

Variables	Number	Percent
Type of Family		
Nuclear	87	62.1
Joint	43	30.7
Extended	10	7.1
Number of Siblings		
None	17	12.1
One	60	42.9
Two	63	45.0
Birth Order		
First	73	52.1
Second	53	37.9
Third	14	10.0
Socioeconomic Status		
Upper class	7	5.0
Upper middle	72	51.4
Lower middle	43	30.7
Upper lower	18	12.9
Education of Father		
No Education	6	4.3
Basic Education	37	26.4
Secondary level	64	45.7
Above Secondary Level	33	23.6
Education of Mother		
No Education	8	5.7
Basic Education	65	46.4
Secondary level	57	40.7
Above Secondary Level	10	7.1

Occupation of Father

Self-employed business	66	46.3
Private/Nongovernment	51	35.9
Government employee	18	12.9
Foreign Employment	5	5.5
Occupation of Mother		
Housemaker	86	61.4
Self-employed/business	37	26.4
Non-government employee	14	10.0
Government employee	3	2.1

Table 2 indicates that 62.1% of the respondents come from nuclear families, 52.1% are firstborn children, and 51.4% belong to upper-middle-class families. 45.7% of respondents' fathers and 40.7% of their mothers have secondary-level education. Additionally, 46.3% of the fathers are self-employed, while 61.4% of the mothers are housemakers.

The following table presents the levels of perception of interparental conflict among the respondents. The perceptions were categorized into three levels—low, moderate, and high—based on percentile scores. Specifically, scores below 26 were classified as low perception, scores between 26 and 38 as moderate perception, and scores above 38 as high perception, with the total possible score being 98.

Table 3

Level of Perception of Interparental Conflict among Respondents (n = 140)

Level of Perception	Number	Percent
Low (<26)	33	23.5
Moderate (26 to 38)	74	53
High (>38)		
Minimum -5, Maximum – 66		
Q1-26, Median-30.5, Q3-38, IQR - 12	33	23.5

Possible score 0-98

Table 3 shows that 53% respondents have a moderate level of perception, whereas 23.5% have a high level, and the remaining 23.5% have a low level of perception of interparental conflict.

Interparental Conflict Scale measures children's views of interparental conflict in nine subscales: frequency, intensity, resolution, perceived threat, coping efficacy, content, self-blame, triangulation and stability. The following table shows the overall inter-parental conflict subscales score.

Table 4

Overall Inter-parental Conflict Subscales Score among Respondents (n = 140)

Subscales	Median	Q1	Q3	Number	Percent
Frequency	5	23	6	21	15
Intensity	4	2.2	6	9	6.4
Resolution	4	4	6	16	11.4
Content	2	0	3.7	1	0.7
Perceived Threat	4	2	7	22	15.7
Coping Efficacy	6	4	7	29	20.7
Self-Blame	34	2	5	1	0.7
Triangulation	2.5	1	4	2	1.4
Stability	0	0	2	0	0

Table 4 shows that the highest perception of conflict (20.7%) was related to coping efficacy, followed by perceived threat (15.7%) and frequency (15%). The remaining 28% of the respondents had high perceptions in more than one subscale.

The following table illustrates the differences in adolescents' perception levels of interparental conflict across various demographic and socioeconomic variables. Factors such as age, gender, family type, parental education, occupation, and socioeconomic were analyzed in relation to how adolescents perceive conflict between their parents.

Table 5

Difference in Level of Perception of Interparental Conflict and Selected Variables

Variables	Number	Percent	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Age						
≤14	77	55	70.5	5217	2442	1
>14	66	45	70.5	4653		
Sex						
Male	65	46.4	67.21	4368.5	2223.5	0.325
Female	75	53.6	73.35	5501.5		
Birth order						
First Born	73	52.1	69.77	5093	2392	0.806
Not firstborn	67	47.9	71.3	4777		
Siblings						
Yes	123	87.8	70.07	8618	992	0.707
No	17	12.2	73.65	1252		

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Family Type						
Nuclear	87	62.1	72.96	6347.5	2091.5	0.312
Joint, Extended	53	37.9	66.46	3522.5		
Father's Education						
Illiterate	6	4.3	70	423	402	1
Educated	134	95.7	70	9447		
Mother's Education						
Illiterate	8	5.8	63.81	510.5	402	1
Educated	132	94.2	70.91	9359.5		
Socioeconomic Status						
Upper	7	5	47.57	333	305	0.091
Others	133	95	71.71	9537		

Test statistics= Mann Whitney U test; significant at p < 0.05

Table 5 illustrates that there was no statistically significant difference in the level of perception and selected background variables of the respondents.

The table presents the relationship among children's perceptions of interparental conflict across various subscales, including frequency, intensity, resolution, content, perceived threat, coping efficacy, self- blame, triangulation, and stability. These subscales provide a multidimensional understanding of how children interpret and are affected by conflict between their parents. By analyzing these subscales collectively, the table highlights patterns and interconnections in how children experience and process interparental conflict.

Table 6

Relationship among Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Subscales

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Frequency								
2. Intensity	.384**							
3. Resolution	.358**	.435**						
4. Content	.182*	.47	.228**					
5. Perceived Threat	.403**	.303**	.204**	.348**				
6. Coping Efficacy	.327**	.313**	.165	.320**	.384**			
7. Self-Blame	.259**	.146	.159	.286**	.121	.295**		
8. Triangulation	.294**	.146	.219**	.115	.084	.155	.335**	
9. Stability	.383**	.346**	.406**	.214*	.251**	.327**	.359**	.420**

*Test statistics Spearman Rank Correlation *p<0.05(2 tailed); **p<0.01(1 tailed)*

Table 6 shows the correlation analysis indicating several significant positive correlations between the subscales. Notably, there is a significant positive

correlation (p < .01) between intensity with frequency (r = .384), resolution (r = .435), and coping efficacy (r = .313). Perceived threat is also positively correlated (p < .01) with frequency (r = .403), intensity (r = .303), content (r = .348), and coping efficacy (r = .384). Numerous characteristics, such as frequency (r =.383), intensity (r =.346), resolution (r =.406), and coping efficacy (r =.327) have a significant positive correlation with stability (p < .01).

Discussion

This study is conducted to assess the perception of interparental conflict where, out of 140 respondents, 53 percent have a moderate level of perception, whereas 23.5 percent have a high level, and the remaining 23.5 percent have a low level of perception of interparental conflict. A result was found lower in a study conducted by Elsayed et al., (2022) in Egypt, where a maximum of participants 42.4 percent reported a moderate level of perception followed by 35 percent with a high level of perception and 22.6 percent reported a mild level of interparental conflict. Likewise, the study's finding is also supported by another study (Elatter et al., 2022). Another study in Bangladesh revealed 64% of students had a medium level, 18% of the students with a low level, and the remaining 18% with high level of perception (Islam et al., 2018) the score was slightly lower than the current study.

A study done in China by Li et al., (2022) showed a contrasting resemblance with 50.1% of adolescents having high perception and 49.9% having low perception. A contradictory finding was also revealed in a study by Atia et al., (2014) in Egypt where 93.7% of adolescents reported a low perception of interparental conflict. The study's

findings are different from the survey conducted in Iran, among 395 adolescents where 79.7% of adolescents reported a low perception of interparental conflict (Parsa et al., 2014). These differences may be attributed to variations in the research setting and sample size.

The study also revealed that the higher perception was related to coping efficacy 20.7 % followed by frequency 17.9%, and perceived threat 15.7%. A high perception regarding the coping efficacy of adolescents may be related to mental awareness and reaching out to friends. The finding contrasts with the study done by Atia et. al., (2014) found that the highest perception of conflict was that related to the perceived threat 27.4%, triangulation 14.2%, coping efficacy 12.0%, and content 10.6%. A study done in Australia also revealed a dissimilarity with the highest perception of interparental conflict related to self-blame (Elemary et al., 2016). The correlation analysis indicates several significant correlations between the variables. Frequency showed a significant positive correlation with Intensity (r = .384, p < .01) and Stability (r = .383, p < .01), indicating that higher frequency events tend to be associated with higher intensity and perceived stability. Intensity was significantly positively correlated with Resolution (r = .435, p < .01) and Coping Efficacy (r = .384, p < .01). Resolution exhibited significant positive correlations with Content (r = .228, p < .01) and Stability (r = .406, p < .01), indicating that successful resolution is associated with clear content communication and perceived stability over time. Perceived Threat showed positive correlations with frequency (r = .403, p < .01), intensity (r = .303, p < .01), and coping efficacy (r = .320, p < .01), suggesting that higher

threat perceptions are linked to more frequent and intense events, as well as efforts to cope effectively.

Additionally, the finding of the study conducted in South Africa where the highest mean score in the subscales is of perceived threat 6.92 and on correlation analysis frequency showed a positive correlation with intensity (r = .21, p < .01) and a negative correlation with resolution (r = -.28, p < .01). Intensity was positively correlated with content (r = .79, p < .01) and perceived threat (r = .38, p < .01), but negatively correlated with Perceived Threat (r = -.54, p < .01). Resolution had a strong positive correlation with content (r = .71, p < .01) and coping efficacy (r = .55, p < .01), while showing a negative correlation with perceived threat (r = -.47, p < .01). Content was significantly correlated with Resolution (r = .51, p < .01) and Coping Efficacy (r = .28, p < .01). Perceived Threat was positively correlated with Coping Efficacy (r = .43, p < .01) and negatively correlated with Self-Blame (r = -.34, p < .01). Coping Efficacy had positive correlations with Self-Blame (r = .27, p < .01) and Triangulation (r = .46, p < .01). Self-Blame showed significant positive correlations with Triangulation (r = .34, p < .01) (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021). In the current study, coping efficacy was positively correlated with stability (r = .327, p < .01), indicating that effective coping strategies contribute to perceived stability over time. Self-Blame showed positive correlations with frequency (r = .259, p < .01), perceived threat (r = .286, p < .01), and triangulation (r = .295, p < .01), suggesting that higher levels of self-blame are associated with more frequent events, increased threat perceptions, and involvement of third parties in conflict situations. Triangulation exhibited positive correlations with stability (r = .335, p < .01), suggesting that third-party involvement in conflicts is associated with perceived stability over time. Stability itself showed positive correlations with several variables, including resolution (r = .359, p < .01), indicating that events perceived as stable tend to involve successful resolution strategies.

The study found no significant differences in adolescents' perceptions of interparental conflict when analyzed against various background variables, including age, sex, birth order, number of siblings, family type, parental education, and socioeconomic status. This suggests that these demographic and familial factors do not substantially influence how adolescents perceive conflict between their parents. A study in Islamabad also revealed no significant difference between the level of perception and sex (Hameed, 2023). Similarly, a survey conducted in Pakistan by Khan (2023) reported comparable results, finding no significant differences in children's perceptions of interparental conflict based on socioeconomic status and age. These consistent findings across different cultural contexts indicate that perceptions of interparental conflict may be shaped by factors beyond basic demographic characteristics.

Conclusion and Implications

The study concluded that more than half of respondents have a moderate level of perception of interparental conflict. Among the subscales of the interparental conflict, the highest perception was related to that of coping efficacy followed by frequency. The study found no significant differences between the level of perception and selected variables. There are several significant correlations

between the subscales of the interparental conflict. To address these findings, schools should promote awareness through parent-teacher meetings, counseling, and stress management programs to develop students' coping mechanisms. Collaborative efforts between schools and families can mitigate the effects of interparental conflict and enhance adolescents' emotional well-being. Moreover, parents should address disagreements and resolve conflicts privately without involving their children. It will foster a more positive and supportive family environment, ultimately contributing to students' emotional stability and academic success.

The study provides valuable baseline information on interparental conflict and offers insights into how adolescents perceive it, shedding light on their emotional well-being and behavioral patterns. Furthermore, parents will stay informed about their children's academic progress and behavior through parent-teacher meetings, which will strengthen collaboration between home and school.

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