Relationship between adolescents' perception of inter-parental conflict, the feeling of emotional security in their family, and academic achievement

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Abstract

Background: Inter-parental conflict affects adolescent behavior and has severe consequences for the emotional security and academic performance of adolescents. ***Aim***: This research paper aims to explore the relationship between emotional security and the perception of adolescents' inter-parental conflict and their academic achievement. ***Design:*** The study adopted the descriptive correlational design. ***Setting:*** Two schools for girls (El-Obour Secondary School for Girls and Asmaa Bent Abi Bakr Secondary School for Girls) are the only two governmental secondary schools in El-Obour city. ***Sample:*** A simple random sample (N=283) was taken from the above setting. ***Tools:*** Data collection depended on four tools: The first was a two-part structured interview questionnaire: Part I covered the students' socio-demographic data, whereas part II comprised the family's socio-demographic data. The second tool was the Children's Perception of Inter Parental Conflict (CPIC) Scale, the third tool was the security in the Family System Scale (SIFS), and the fourth tool was the Academic Achievement Scale. ***Results****: Less than half of the studied students had a moderate perception of inter-parental conflict, more than one-quarter had a low level of security in family, and more than half had an unsatisfactory level of academic achievement. ***Conclusion:*** Inter-parental conflict positively correlated with psychological well-being and academic achievement among students. ***Recommendation:*** Conducting periodical workshops for school students to help express their emotions and intervention programs for students and parents to enable them to be more adaptive.

Keywords: Academic achievement; Inter- parental conflict; Emotional security.

Introduction:

Adolescents are frequently exposed to inter-parental conflict (IPC), which represents an ordinary reason for stress and behavioral issues among adolescents. Several factors influence the family climate shared by parents and adolescents, but the perception of inter-parental conflict is the most influential. Because the connection between the father and mother represents the family's foundation, it affects the familial environment significantly. It negatively influences adolescent behaviors and the home setting, making adolescents more inclined to engage in risky behavior ***(Chaudhry& Shabbir, 2018).***

IPC is defined as expressing the negative effect between the father and mother. It is a continuum of parental behaviors that range from verbal disagreements to physical violence. Its aspects include resolution level, expression mode, intensity, interval, and frequency which are important for considering how inter-parental conflicts influence relevant parties. Many main factors cause inter-parental conflicts, such as addiction, heavy

work burden, in-law's interference, stepchildren, high expectations, children, household responsibilities, misunderstanding, infidelity, selfishness, intimacy and sex, and financial stress. However, the quality of marital relations is determined by the approach the husband and wife adopt to resolve conflicts *(Tolla, 2021).*

IPC may be constructive or destructive. Constructive conflicts are defined by cooperation, physical affection, support, problem-solving, support, physical affection, and seeking a resolution. In contrast, destructive conflicts are linked to positive outcomes for children conflict including behaviors, e.g., hostility, stonewalling, and physical and verbal aggression, stonewalling, or hostility to negative outcomes on emotional security, including externalizing and internalizing symptoms *(Warmuth et al., 2020).*

IPC represents a possible threat to the emotional security of adolescents in the family. The Emotional Security Theory (EST) reports that adolescents should experience security in the family. Therefore, maintaining a security feeling is a major objective for adolescents as it is usually associated with their adjustment and well-being. Responses to IPC are reported to be a function of family contexts. For instance, being prone to high levels of conflicts in the past deteriorates the sense of emotional security among adolescents and relates to sensitization and higher levels of reactivity to present conflicts. Adolescents with different emotional security levels are likely to react differently when confronted with IPC. Thus, adolescents in residential care (RC), who have been removed from their home environments for several reasons threatening the stability of their home environment, e.g., IPC, are likely to be more emotionally insecure and reactive to the same conflict scenarios than adolescents from community settings *(Davies et al., 2016).*

Students in families with high inter-parental conflict levels are prone to negative outcomes on emotional security, serious mental health issues, psychiatric disorders, and poor academic achievement *(Van Eldik et al.,2020).* Moreover, secondary school students (adolescents) are prone to externalizing problems, including delinquency, noncompliance, physical and verbal aggression, and internalizing problems, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Living IPC rises the risks of students' demonstration of weak interpersonal skills, poor social competence, and deficits in academic achievement **(Harold& Sellers, 2018).**

An influential factor in future student success is academic achievement. A good understanding of the concept helps students resolve everyday problems without difficulty. It is influenced by various social, economic, and psychological factors. Parent conflict can directly or indirectly affect the academic performance of students. Students from conflicted families have fear, a distorted mind, lack of focus, and hopelessness. Furthermore, students may also develop poor memory, feel insecure, and struggle with future relationships, which can cause stress, anger, anxiety, and low performance at school and academic progress *(Ndayambaje et al., 2020).*

Management and resolution of IPC play a major role in reducing its negative effects. Promoting positive management strategies for resolving IPC remediates its adverse influences on children. Developing effective evidence-based early intervention and prevention programs is necessary if these destructive patterns and cycles across generations. So, the nurse can help students explore their feelings about conflict and its resolution, listen to students and families, encourage them to examine problems and choices, and enable them to handle personal situations. Including parents in treatment is essential because they should be educated on

the deleterious effects of IPC *(Sayied et al., 2019).*

Significance of the study

Worldwide, around 133 to 275 million children and adolescents witness violence in the home annually.

In Egypt there are no statistics on the rate of inter-parental conflict but one info-graphic study conducted by Al-Jazeera found that 47% of married, divorced, widowed women experienced domestic violence.

This paper adds to knowledge in this area by describing the Egyptian adolescents' perception of inter-parental conflict and the impact on their emotional security. The findings are transferable to other Arabic countries that share many Egyptian parents' cultures and values.

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In today's world, IPC is a typical phenomenon. It is a major social issue in developed countries and more prevalent in developing countries. From 133 to 275 million children and adolescents worldwide are exposed to violence in the home environment every year. Adolescents from homes with IPC are 5–7 times more likely than the general population to have emotional insecurity, distress in relationships, and impairment in academic achievements. From 3.3 to 10 million adolescents witness some type of IPC each year *(Liu, 2020)*. Adolescents' emotional security may be impaired by exposure to

destructive IPC. Accordingly, this research paper was conducted to examine the perspective of Egyptian adolescents on IPC and its influence on their emotional security and academic achievement.

Aim of the study

The paper aims to examine the relationship between emotional security associated with the perception of adolescents' IPC and academic achievement.

Research questions:
1-What are the levels of emotional security, IPC, and academic achievement?
2-What is the relation between emotional security associated with the perception of adolescents' IPC and academic achievement?

Subject and methods
I-Technical design:
Research design:
The paper adopted a descriptive correlational design.

Research setting:
The paper covered all secondary schools of El-Obour city, which is of the biggest new cities in Egypt. It was found that two schools for girls (El-Obour Secondary School for Girls and Asmaa Bent Abi Bakr Secondary School for Girls) are the only two governmental secondary schools in El-Obour city.

Grades of the first and second grades were included in the study, but the third grade was excluded because its students had no obligatory attendance.

Research subject:
Sample type:
The study used a simple random sample from the two secondary schools in El-Obour city.

Inclusion criteria:
1. The first and second secondary grades
2. Their age ranged from 15 to 18 years
3. Who accepted to be participants

Exclusion criteria:
1. Who refused to be participants
2. Who did not meet the inclusion criteria

Sample size:

After the student's approval to participate in the study, they were selected from two different grades from the two schools in one academic semester of 2021-2022. The total number of students in the two schools under study in the previous academic year was (2283).

Determining the size of the sample depended on adjusting the power of the test to 80% and the confidence interval to 95%, with an accepted margin of error adjusted to 5% and a known total of 283 students' by this equation:
- Type I error (α) = 0.05
- Type II error (B) = 0.2
- With the power of the test of 0.80

$$n = \frac{NP(1-P)}{\{(N-1)(d2/z2)+P(1-P)\}}$$

N= Community size

z= Class standard matching the significance level of 0.95 and 1.96

d= The error rate of 0.05

p= Ratio providing a neutral property = 0.50

The table shows the sample size in the different academic levels.

Groups		%	Sample Size
The first grade of the school understudy	1150	50.3%	150
The second grade of the school understudy	1133	49.7	133
Total	2283	100%	283

(Chow et al., 2007)

Tools for data collection:
conducted by these tools:

Tool (1): A structured interview questionnaire:

The authors built this two-part questionnaire based on the recent literature review and opinions of experts. They wrote it in simple, clear Arabic in the form of closed-ended questions.

ParI: Socio-demographic data of students included (age, sex, classroom, residence, birth order, and family size).

Part II: Socio-demographic data of the family included (parents' age, occupation, family income, level of education, type of family, number of rooms, and number of family members).

Tool (2): Children's Perception of Inter Parental Conflict (CPIC) Scale:

It is a self-report measure designed for adolescents aged 9-17 years. However, other studies argued that it is suitable until late adolescence and emerging adults aged 18–25**.** The scale was introduced by **Grych et al. (1992)** and modified by **Saber (2013)** to evaluate IPC from the children's point of view.

It comprises 48 items assessing conflict features (frequency, intensity, and resolution), perceived self-blame, perceived threat, triangulation, and stability. The items receive one of three responses: "True", "Sort of True", or "False", each of which receives a score from 1 to 3 (True = 3, Sort of true = 2, and False=1). There are 14 items reversed (1, 2, 6, 9, 13, 17, 20, 23.27, 28, 30, 36, 39, 47) true=1, sort of true =2, and false =3 with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived IPC. The scale received a score of 0.822 on the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

❖ **Scoring system:**

- Scores from (1 to 47) mean low perceived IPC.
- Scores from (48 to 83) mean moderate perceived IPC.
- Scores from (84 to 126) mean high perceived IPC.

Tool (3): Security in the Family System Scale (SIFS)

Forman and Davies (2005) developed this scale. It consists of 22 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). This scale assesses three emotional security/ insecurity patterns. The security scale evaluates the victim's trust in the family as a dependable protection and support source (7 items; for instance, I believe that family members will be around to help me in the future). The preoccupation scale evaluates concerns about the future well-being of the family and the person as a family member (8 items; for instance, I sometimes feel that something very bad is going to happen in my family). The disengagement scale evaluates the victim's trials to separate and reduce the importance of the family (7 items; For example, when something bad happens in my family, I wish I could live with a different family). The security, preoccupation, and disengagement scales scored Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0.87, 0.85, and 0.83, respectively.

❖ **Scoring system**
- Scores from (21 to 43) mean low emotional security.
- Scores from (44 to 65) mean moderate emotional security.
- Scores from (66 to 88)) mean high emotional security.

Tool (4): Academic Achievement Scale:

Cottrell (1999) developed this tool. It is a 10-item scale used to evaluate the students' academic achievement and level of memory skills. The items have two possible responses (apply=1 and not apply=2).

❖ **Scoring system**
- Scores between (5 -10) mean satisfactory academic achievement.
- Scores between (0-4) mean unsatisfactory academic achievement.

The scale scored 0.835 on Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

II-Operational design:

It comprised the preparatory stage, validity, and reliability of the content, pilot study, as well as fieldwork.

A. Preparatory stage:

It includes reviewing the relevant current, past, local, and international literature and theoretical background of different study aspects, such as journals, periodicals, internet sources, articles, and books, to build tools for collecting data.

Ethical consideration:

After explaining the study objectives, the participation consent was taken from the students. Before collecting data, the participants were informed about the nature and objective of the study and how the findings would be used. They were allowed to refuse to participate. They were told they had the right to draw at any study phase. Moreover, the participants were informed about the confidentiality of the information that would be employed for the study purposes only. The authors reported that participation was entirely voluntary and assured anonymity of the participants via data coding.

Pilot study

First, the authors developed the tools. Then, they applied the tools via a pilot study to 10% of the population before the field study to verify their clarity and feasibility and to calculate the timing of responding to the items.

Fieldwork (data collection procedure)

The authors paid visits to the schools' understudy from 9 am to 1 am, one day weekly for each school: almost 15-20 students/ day. To receive cooperation and support from class teachers, the authors illustrated to them the objective and significance of the study. They also illustrated the study objective to the participants. They distributed questionnaire sheets to the participants in the class, who were asked to fill these sheets separately. Each class interview lasted for 20 to 30 minutes during leisure time at the school. The authors collected data from early Jannuary2022 till late March 2022.

III- Administrative design

Formal approval for carrying out the study was obtained based on a letter from the Dean of the Faculty of Nursing, Ain Shams University, to the principals of schools in the above-mentioned settings, requesting their cooperation and permission. In this letter, the study's title, objective, and expected outputs were included. All authorized personnel were provided the needed information about the study's objective and importance.

IV- Statistical analysis

The authors used the distribution of the percentage and number to organize, revise, score, tabulate, and analyze the data. Then, they statistically analyzed the data on the computer by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (V. 25) using percentages and frequencies for qualitative descriptive data, Chi-square for relation tests, standard deviation and mean for quantitative data, and person correlation coefficient (r) for correlation analysis. Furthermore, they determined the significance degree. They considered the difference as highly statistically significant when p-value < 0.01, the difference as statistically significant only when p-value < 0.05, and the difference as non-statistically significant when p-value p > 0.05.

Result:

Table (1): illustrates that below two-thirds of the participants (60.1%) are aged 15 to less than 17 years, with a mean age of 16.67 ± 1.05. Regarding their family size, about three-quarters (74.6%) have small families. Regarding students' birth order, almost half of them (47.7%) are first, while 20.5% are second. Less than two-thirds (60.4%) are from urban areas.

Table (2): concerning family data, shows that the mean age of the fathers of the studied students is 42.47 ± 4.99, while the mean age of their mothers is 37.7 ± 3.13. Regarding the level of education, nearly half (48.4%) of the fathers and (41.7%) of the mothers have an intermediate level of education. As for occupation, most fathers are employed (87.3%), while nearly three-quarters (70.3%) of the mothers are unemployed/housewives. The table also reveals that the majority (92.9%) are married while 2.1% are divorced. As for family income, more than three quarters (77.7%) have enough income. For the type of family, most of them (83.0%) have a nuclear family. More than three quarters (73.5%) have from 1 to 4 rooms, and 77.4% have less than 5 persons in the family.

Figure (1): shows that less than half of the participants (42.4%) have a moderate perception of IPC, more than one-third (35.0%) have a high perception, and 22.6% have a mild perception.

Figure (2): shows that more than one-third of them (39.2%) have a high level of emotional security in the family system, 32.0% have a moderate level of emotional security, and nearly one-third (28.8%) of them have a mild level.

Figure (3): shows that less than two-quarters of them (44.3%) have a satisfactory level of academic achievement, while more than half of them (57.7%) have an

unsatisfactory level of academic achievement.

Table (3): illustrates highly statistically significant negative correlations between the studied students' perception of IPC and emotional security and academic achievement, with a p-value of (0.001**). There is a highly statistically significant positive correlation between emotional security and academic achievement, with a p-value of (0. 001**).

Table (1): Frequency distribution of the participants based on the socio-demographic data (n=283).

Socio-demographic data of the students	N	%
Age		
15 < 17 years	170	60.1
17 < 19 years	113	39.9
x S.D 16.67±1.05		
Family size		
Small family size	211	74.6
Large family size	72	25.4
Student birth order		
First	135	47.7
Second	58	20.5
Last	90	31.8
Residence		
Urban	171	60.4
Rural	112	39.6
Classroom		
First	215	75.9
Second	68	24.03

Table (2): Number and percentage distribution of the participants based on family data (n= 283).

| Father's data	N	%
Age		
35 < 40 years	44	15.5
40≤45 years	178	62.9
45 years and more	61	21.6
x̄ S.D 42.47±4.99		
Educational level		
Illiterate	19	6.7
Read and write	13	4.6
Basic education	24	8.5
Intermediate education	137	48.4
High education	85	30.0
Postgraduate studies	5	1.8
Occupation		
Employed	247	87.3
Unemployed	36	12.7
Mother's data		
Age		
30 < 35 years	29	10.2
40≤45 years	196	69.3
45 years and more	58	20.5
x̄ S.D 37.7±3.13		
Educational level		
Illiterate	24	8.5
Read and write	21	7.4
Basic education	19	6.7
Intermediate education	118	41.7
High education	93	32.9
Postgraduate studies	8	2.8
Occupation		
Employed	84	29.7
Unemployed/ housewife	199	70.3
Family marital status		
Married	263	92.9
Widowed	14	5.0
Divorced	6	2.1
Family income		
Not enough	52	18.4
Enough	220	77.7
Enough and more	11	3.9
Type of family		
Nuclear	235	83.0
Extended	48	17.0
Number of family members		
<5	219	77.4
>5	64	22.6
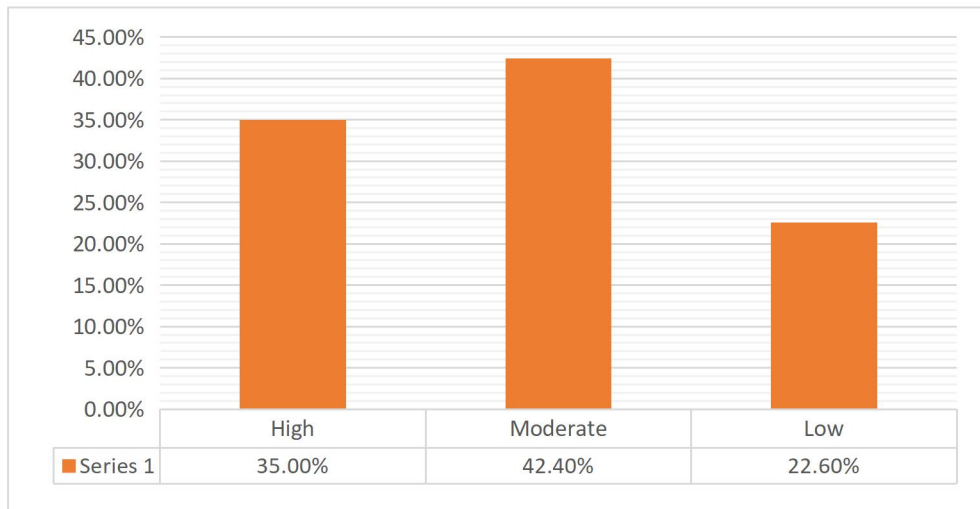
Figure (1): Percentage distribution of the participants based on the total perception of the IPC scale (n=283)
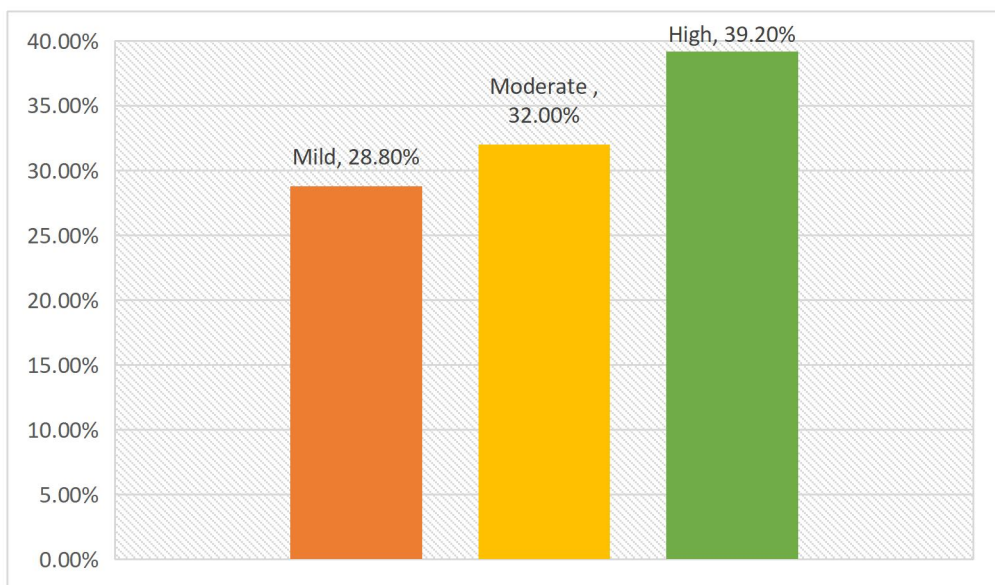

Figure (2): Percentage distribution of the participants based on total security in the family system scale (n=283)
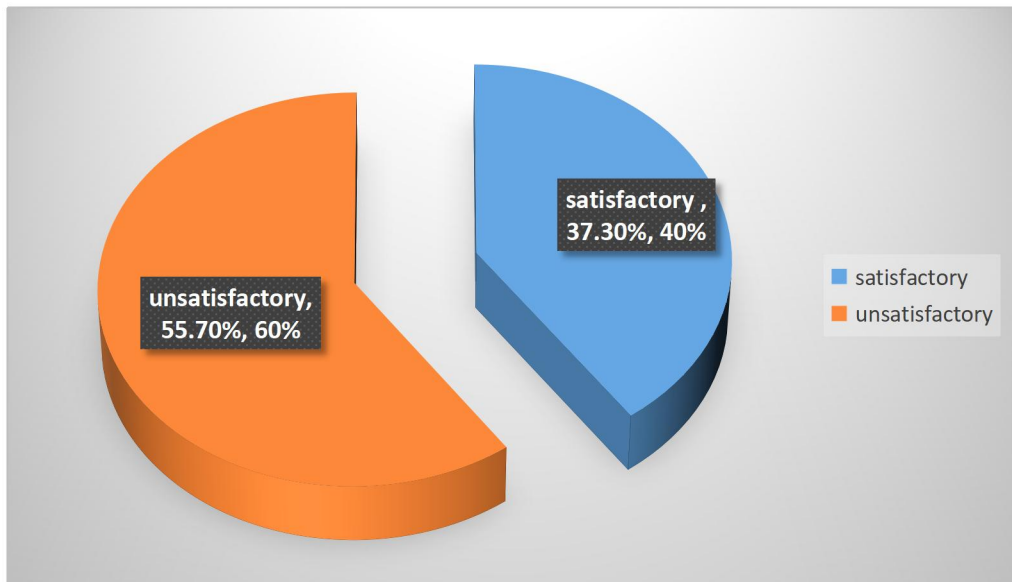
Figure (3): Distribution of the participants based on total academic achievement (n=283)

Table (3): Correlation between the total perception of IPC, total emotional security, and total academic achievement among the studied students' .

Variables	SIFS		Academic	achievement
	R	P- value	R	P- value
IPC	-.599	.001**	-.815	.000**
SIFS			.785	.000**
Academic achievement				

Discussion

IPC is a prevalent feature of family life that continues to influence puberty. The house's physical and psychological structure can have an impact on teenage attitudes and behavior shaped by what they see, hear, and encounter at home. As a result, the home setting has an impact on adolescents' emotional security and academic achievement. IPC represents an important long-term risk factor for internalizing and externalizing disorders, such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, aggression, antisocial conduct, poor academic achievement, substance abuse, criminality, and suicidality. Poor social relationships are associated with various negative consequences for adolescents, including worse cognitive skills,

a higher risk of school withdrawal, a high risk of psychiatric problems, and suicide (**Hooshmandi** *et al.,* **2020).**

Concerning the socio-demographic properties of the participants, less than two-thirds are aged 15 to less than 17 years, with a mean age of 16.67 ± 1.05. This finding was achieved because the researchers chose the first and second grades of the secondary school. This finding agrees with **Muritthi (2019)** that students had a mean age ± S.D. of 16.9±1.03. From the researchers' point of view, this age group was able to realize parental conflicts and form a picture of these conflicts and consequences. This finding agrees with **Elemary et al. (2016)** that the

mean age of studied students was 15.5± 0.83years.

Regarding family size, nearly three-quarters of the studied students have small families. This result agrees with **Hess (2020)** that most studied students had a small family size. As for the birth order of the studied students, almost half of them were the first child. This result agrees with *Sayied* **et al. (2019)** that most participants were ordered first. Concerning sex, the results showed that more than two-thirds were females, which disagrees with **Ghaduary and Shoppir (2018)** that half students were males.

Concerning family data, nearly two-thirds of the fathers aged 40-45 years old with a mean age of 42.47±4.99. This result agrees with **Fozard and Gubi (2020)** that the mean age of the fathers was 43 ±1.03, whereas more than two-thirds of the mother's ages ranged from 35-40 years, with a mean age of 37.7 ± 3.13. It also agrees with **Hess (2021) t**hat their mean age was 41 ±1.03.

Regarding the level of education, almost half of the fathers and mothers had intermediate education. The authors argue that the level of education affected the level of conflicts. This finding agrees with **Muritthi (2019)** that half of the participants had a secondary level of education. Concerning occupation, most fathers were employed, but nearly three-quarters of the mothers were unemployed/ housewives. This result agrees with **Low (2021)** that more than three-quarters of the fathers were employed, while nearly half of the mothers were unemployed.

Regarding family income, more than three-quarters of the participants had enough income. The authors argue that nearly three-quarters of the students have small families. This result agrees with **Fozard and Gubi (2020)** that most

participants had enough income. Regarding the family type, most participants had a nuclear family. This result agrees with **Ghaduary and Shoppir (2018)** that nearly two-thirds of the participants had enough income.

Concerning the perception of IPC, the results of this study revealed that less than half of the studied students had a moderate perception of IPC, while more than one-third of them had a high perception of IPC, and nearly a quarter had a mild perception of IPC. The author argues that sophistication is higher among adolescents than children, making them more sensitive to subtle relationship issues and more perceived as potential allies by parents. This result agrees with **Kumar and Mattanah (2017)** that nearly two-thirds of the participants encountered IPC for different reasons. In contrast, this finding disagrees with **Bochere (2018)** that most participants have a low perception of IPC, but some participants encountered a moderate perception of IPC. The authors argue that adolescents perceive more threats and higher levels of internalizing and externalizing issues when encountering frequent IPC.

Regarding emotional security, the current finding revealed that more than a third of the participants had a high level of emotional security, nearly one-third had a moderate level of emotional security, and more than one quarter had a mild level of emotional security. The authors argue that when feeling security is intact, adolescents are confident in the motivation and ability to maintain stability among family members. Thus, they possibly allocate existing resources toward adaptive development. This finding agrees with **Asanjarani et al. (2021)** that the impact of IPC on adolescents' emotional security is moderated. From the researchers' point of view, adolescents feel insecure when the family atmosphere is disturbed by conflicts among parents.

Regards academic achievement, the present result revealed that more than two-quarters of the participants had an unsatisfactory level of academic achievement, while less than half of them had satisfactory academic achievement. The authors argue that this finding was because the exposure to a destructive IPC may stress that adolescents are vulnerable to maladjustment, disruptions, and mood dysregulation, and affect academic achievement. This finding agrees with **Islam et al. (2018)** that academic achievement is negatively affected by IPC**.** The authors argue that this finding can be related to students' fear, distorted mind, losing focus, and hopelessness. Furthermore, students may also develop poor memory, feel insecure, and struggle with future relationships, which can cause stress, anger, anxiety, and low academic achievement.

Concerning the correlation between the perception of IPC, emotional security, and academic achievement of the students, the results demonstrated a highly statistically significant negative correlation between these variables. At the same time, a positive correlation was found between emotional security and academic achievement. From the researchers' point of view, adolescents strongly affected by IPC in their families can develop symptoms of depression. The greater the conflict is, the more serious the symptoms become. Continuous conflicts between the parents affect psychologically, especially in their thinking and perception of the future. Students who witness quarrels or fights in their families may get depressed, leading to poor concentration in school and affecting their academic performance**.** This finding agrees with **Karimipour et al. (2016) and Asanjarani et al. (2021),** which revealed statistically significant associations between the overall score of IPC, psychological well-being, and academic achievement.

Conclusion

According to the results, the authors concluded the need for educating parents to solve conflicts constructively to maintain a feeling of security among the family members. IPC correlated negatively with the emotional security and academic achievement of adolescents. In contrast, emotional security and academic achievement correlated positively.

Recommendations

- Counseling intervention programs for adolescents about conflict management techniques and how to adjust more to the marital debate of their parents.
- Periodical workshops for school students on coping strategies among adolescents with IPC to enhance their emotional security.
- Increasing community awareness through educational messages via mass media
- Health care workers need
- to work closely with adolescents and need to address their
- psycho-emotional health needs in future health care policies
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- Cooperation of health care specialists with adolescents and addressing the adolescents' psycho-emotional health needs in health care policies in the future.

- Conducting psycho-educational training programs focused on reducing parental stress and teaching parents the methods of coping effectively with their conflicts.

- Elevating social awareness of the challenges encountered by parents to promote their social support.

- Further studies on a large number of students on their behavioral and emotional problems in adolescence.

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