

Impact Parental Conflict, Perceived Social Support, and Attachment Insecurity Among Emerging Adults in Pakistan

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The present study aimed to examine the relationships among conflictual relationship, perceived social support and insecure attachment among emerging adults in Pakistan. A cross sectional correlational design was used with a convenience sample of 173 emerging adults (age 18-25, $M=21.76$, $SD=1.96$) were recruited from three educational institutes in Lahore. The Perceptions of Interparental Conflict in Childhood Scale –Short Form, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and Attachment Style Questionnaire –Short Form were administered. Pearson correlations, hierarchical regression, independent samples t-tests and PROCESS Macro moderation analyses were performed. Parental conflict was significantly positively correlated with anxious attachment and negatively correlated with perceived social support. Bivariately, social support was negatively correlated with anxious attachment but it did not predict it when controlling for parental conflict. There were no significant relationships for avoidant attachment. There was no interaction effect between social support and parental conflict–attachment relationship. The findings are discussed based on the theory of attachment and socio-cultural context of Pakistan which is collectivistic in nature.

Key words. Parental Conflict; Perceived Social Support; Anxious Attachment; Avoidant Attachment; Emerging Adults; Pakistan

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Human development occurs in the relational environment of the family; it is within the context of these initial interactions that cognitive, emotional and social functioning is developed throughout the life span (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Parental conflict is one of the major stressors in the family system. While conflict is a normal part of intimate relationships, conflict that persists and is destructive has been recognized as a significant risk factor for children and adolescents' maladaptive developmental outcomes (Cummings & Davies, 2010). In this area there are two dominant theoretical frameworks which guide inquiry. Children's psychological reactions to interparental conflict are hypothesized to be related to their cognitive appraisals of the conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1990), such as perceived threat, selfblame, and coping efficacy. To complement this, Emotional Security Theory (EST; Davies & Cummings, 1994) suggests that children assess and control their emotional security by observing their parents' relationship, and that they feel less secure when they see a lot of conflict between their parents. Parental conflict negatively impacts a wide range of outcomes such as increased anxiety, depression, aggression, and difficulty with healthy attachments (Davies et al., 2015).

Based on Bowlby (1969/1982) and later on Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), attachment theory proposes that early caregiving experiences result in cognitive-affective internal working models (IWMs) of self and other, which shape interpersonal perception and behavior over the life course. It is stated that children facing destructive conflict with their parents are at risk for developing insecure attachment (anxious or avoidant) through relational strategies that can continue into emerging adulthood as children struggle to survive in the context of repeated interparental

conflict (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Parental conflict has been found across all studies to have a greater effect on anxious than avoidant attachment, with more research indicating that witnessing hostility rather than repression strengthens the attachment system (Smith-Etxeberria et al., 2020).

The different impact of parental conflict on anxious and avoidant attachment can be explained by observing how regulatory strategies develop in response to the stressful family situations. According to Emotional Security Theory, chronic exposure to unresolved parental conflict undermines children's confidence in the stability and safety of the family environment, thereby deregulating the attachment system and promoting insecure attachment representations. Children who repeatedly witness destructive interparental conflict develop heightened vigilance to interpersonal threat cues, emotional dysregulation, and seek more closeness and reassurance from others, which is a common trait of anxious attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Avoidant attachment in contrast is more likely to develop from a consistent pattern of parental rejection, unavailability or ignoring the child's emotional needs, such a situation leads to hiding needs of attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). As parental conflict fundamentally creates threat and insecurity rather than an emotional rejection, that is why parental conflict is more strongly related to anxious attachment. Studies also support this idea but it is not universally confirmed (Smith-Etxeberria et al., 2020).

Prior to this, social support (the sense of being cared for, valued, and connected to others who are obligated to provide support) has been postulated to counteract the developmental impact of parental conflict (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The Stress-Buffering Hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) states that perceived support is especially protective when dealing with stress. Positive, reliable relationships with peers, mentors and significant others can offer emerging adults corrective relational experiences that help to partially revise the negative IWMs, and minimize attachment insecurity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). At the same time, insecure attachment affects the perception of social support; anxiously attached persons perceive that support is needed and that it is not available, while avoidance attachment persons do not express attachment need and do not depend on social support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

The impact of these dynamics is heightened within Pakistan in a collectivistic cultural context. In Pakistani society family is the main and most culturally accepted source of social support (Jibeen, 2015). Therefore, a contextual contradiction may arise between the family's role as the source of interparental conflict and the family's role as the family expected source of emotional support, which can potentially decrease the emerging adults' sense of support availability and exacerbate the developmental consequences of interparental conflict exposure. Though there is literature in the international field, few studies have explored the perceived social support function in the relationship among parental conflict and attachment insecurity in Pakistan and none has explored this moderating factor.

These constructs have been studied separately by existing Pakistani researchers such as Akram & Batool (2018) who studied parental conflict and its effects on the personality development of adolescents and Khan et al. (2022) who studied the relationship between insecure attachment with reduced well-being of students of the universities and Jibeen (2015) who studied how social support acts as a protective factor for psychological adjustment. Thus, the present study is designed to explore the three constructs together in emerging adults (ages 18-25 years), a developmental period in which internalized attachment representations become more important for the construction of identity and functioning of close relationships (Arnett, 2023).

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A longitudinal study showed that, destructive interparental conflict was a predictor of emotional insecurity (Davies et al. 2016). In a study of 1,078 Spanish young adults, it is reported that unresolved interparental conflict was a stronger predictor of attachment avoidance and negative romantic relationship expectations than parental divorce itself and that the relationship between interparental conflict and attachment avoidance was moderated by maternal attachment security (Smith-Etxeberria et al. 2020). High conflict family environments were associated with insecure patterns of attachment in adulthood, especially when there were no corrective experiences in the family (Fraley and Roisman, 2019). Alsharari et al. (2024) also reported that high levels of interparental conflict were related to high levels of attachment avoidance and low levels of positive attitudes regarding marriage. In Pakistan, it is reported that the adolescents in high conflict homes exhibited significantly disturbed emotional and personality development (Akram and Batool, 2018).

In a prospective study of emerging adults, it was found that both anxious and avoidant attachment were negatively correlated with perceived social support and well-being in emerging adults, resulting in diminished ability to perceive and access available social support (Sirois et al. 2016). However, social support had a small but significant protective effect on mental health outcomes even after accounting for insecure attachment (Miller et al., 2018). In Stanton and Campbell (2014) study, buffering for health outcomes among highly anxious individuals did not occur when attachment anxiety was established. In Pakistan, the students who had insecure attachment levels in the university reported significantly lower levels of perceived social support (Saleem and Mahmood, 2013).

A study concluded that perceived social support and resilience were significantly correlated with higher interparental conflict in college students in India (Sharma and Kaur, 2020). Rivers et al., (2024) showed in three different samples (Brazilian, Indian, Nigerian) that the quality of their early relationships influenced their ability to access and utilize social support. In Pakistan's collectivist cultural context, the family originating conflict has an adverse impact on the perceived availability of social support and the family-based social support has a disproportionately strong protective impact compared to peer support as documented by Jibeen (2015). In the same vein, it is determined that an increase in interpersonal conflict in the family was significantly associated with acute stress, whereas parental support was negatively associated with this (Usman et al., 2024).

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between parental conflict and insecure attachment among emerging adults in Pakistan.
2. To investigate the relationship between social support and insecure attachment among emerging adults in Pakistan.
3. To explore the relationship between parental conflict and social support among emerging adults in Pakistan.
4. To examine the moderating role of perceived social support in the relationship between parental conflict and insecure attachment among emerging adults in Pakistan.

Hypotheses

1. Parental conflict will be significantly and positively associated with insecure attachment among emerging adults.
2. Social support will be significantly and negatively associated with insecure attachment among emerging adults.
3. Parental conflict will be significantly and negatively associated with social support among emerging adults.

4. The relationship between parental conflict and attachment will be significantly moderated by perceived social support such that the positive association between parental conflict and attachment will be weaker for emerging adults who have a higher level of perceived social support.

Method

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed to find the relationships between parent conflict, perceived social support, and attachment insecurity for emerging adults.

Participants

A non-probability convenience sample of emerging adults ($M = 21.76$, $SD = 1.96$) ranging from 18 to 25 years of age was recruited from across university networks and from direct outreach. A total of 250 were approached but 173 completed the questionnaire and fulfilled all the inclusion criteria. From these, 100 participants filled out the survey online using a self-administered Google Form that was sent to them through WhatsApp and 73 participants were recruited face-to-face on the university campus. The participants included from the University of the Punjab, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and Abwa Medical College, Lahore. The sample comprised 45 males (26.0%) and 128 females (74.0%), predominantly single (95.4%), students (80.9%), urban (87.3%), and of middle socioeconomic status (83.8%). Most of the respondents were from nuclear families (74.6%). The inclusion criteria of the study were: Currently enrolled in college or university, Age 18-25, and lived with both of parents during adolescence. Those who reported having a known psychiatric disorder, and those who reported to be in therapy for family/attachment-related issues were also excluded.

Measures

Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Short Form (PIC-SF). The PIC-SF (Lassance et al., 2025) is an 8-item self-report measure of retrospective perceptions of interparental conflict related to frequency and intensity. Items are scored on a 6-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores reflecting more exposure to destructive conflict. The scale has an excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α ranging from .79 to .89) and cross-cultural validity, also among South Asian populations. In this particular sample, α is .93.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). MSPSS (Zimet et al, 1988) is a 12 item scale that measures the perceived social support from a significant other, friends and family. Items are scaled from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree, with the higher scores indicating higher perceived support. The scale has high internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$ to .94) and has been validated in Pakistani context. For this sample, $\alpha = .93$.

Attachment Style Questionnaire – Short Form (ASQ-SF). The ASQ – SF (Alexander et al., 2001) is a 29 item self-report inventory of adult attachment orientations. Two main dimensions (attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance) were used for the present study. The items are rated with a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Totally Disagree to 6 = Totally Agree), with higher scores on each dimension reflecting higher levels of attachment insecurity. The internal consistency and validation of the scale is good ($\alpha = .76$ to .85) and has been tested in diverse culture groups such as Asians. Overall $\alpha = .81$, avoidant subscale $\alpha = .73$, anxious subscale $\alpha = .84$ for the present sample.

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Procedure

The Research Committee of the Institute of Applied Psychology at Lahore, University of the Punjab approved the research protocol. Permission to use all three instruments was obtained in written form from the original authors. Data collected by both on-line and in-person methods during February 2026, for about two weeks. These participants were approached with a Google Form for online collection, and in person at common areas of the campus with permission of the faculty for in-person collection. The informed consent of each participant was obtained and anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw without penalty were ensured. The questionnaire booklet took about 15-20 minutes to fill out.

Ethical Considerations

Adhering to the APA Ethics Code, the following measures were implemented: formal permissions were obtained from instrument authors and institutional authorities; participants were fully briefed about the study and provided individual informed consent; anonymity was preserved and data confidentiality strictly maintained; and participants were informed of their unconditional right to withdraw.

Results

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the sample (N = 173)

Sample Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender				
Male	45	26.0		
Female	128	74.0		
Age			21.76	1.96
Education			15.34	1.61
Marital Status				
Single	165	95.4		
Married	7	4.0		
Divorced	1	0.6		
Employment Status				
Student	140	80.9		
Full time	17	9.8		
Part time	6	3.5		
Unemployed	10	5.8		
Birth Order				
First born	53	30.6		
Middle born	77	44.5		
Last born	38	22.0		
Only child	5	2.9		
Family System				
Nuclear	129	74.6		
Joint	44	25.4		
Family Background				
Urban	151	87.3		
Rural	22	12.7		
Socioeconomic Status				
Low	13	7.5		
Middle	145	83.8		
High	15	8.7		

Note. f = Frequency, % = Percentage, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2*Descriptive characteristics and reliability analysis of study variables (N = 173)*

Scales	M	SD	Range	Cronbach's α
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	56.49	16.72	12 - 84	.93
Perception of Interparental Conflict in Childhood Scale	13.41	5.00	8 - 32	.93
Attachment Style Questionnaire - Short Form	114.35	16.66	29 - 174	.81
Avoidant Attachment	64.17	10.27	16 - 96	.73
Anxious Attachment	48.23	11.08	13 - 78	.84

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha

The descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha values for all study variables are presented in the Table 2. All scales showed acceptable to very good range internal consistency in the present sample, supporting their suitability for subsequent analyses.

Table 3*Pearson product moment correlation among covariates and study variables (N = 173)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender ^a	-								
2. Age	.34***	-							
3. Education	-.22**	.50***	-						
4. Family System ^b	-.05	.11	.03	-					
5. Family Background ^c	-.01	.09	.02	.22**	-				
6. Parental Conflict	.05	.08	.04	-.17*	.05	-			
7. Social Support	-.08	.06	.06	-.15	.02	.28***	-		
8. Avoidant Attachment	.15	-.04	.07	-.08	.13	.07	-.01	-	
9. Anxious Attachment	.11	.00	.00	-.01	.00	.35***	.22**	.37***	-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$, ^a1 = male, 2 = female; ^b1 = nuclear family, 2 = joint family; ^c1 = urban, 2 = rural.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlations for the Study variables and Demographic covariates are displayed in Table 3. Of the primary study variables, parental conflict was significantly negatively correlated with perceived social support ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$), meaning that increased parental conflict was related to decreased perceived social support. Parental conflict was also significantly and positively related to anxious attachment ($r = .35$, $p < .001$). Anxious attachment was significantly negatively correlated with perceived social support ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$). Neither parental conflict nor social support was significantly correlated with avoidant attachment. Family system was significantly negatively correlated with parental conflict ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$), which meant that the participants from nuclear families reported high level of parental conflict as compared to those from joint families.

Table 4*Hierarchical regression analysis to establish the predictors of avoidant attachment (N = 173)*

Predictors	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2	LL	UL
Step 01				.04	.04		
Constant	30.10	11.46				7.48	52.72

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Age	-.30	.48	-.06			-1.24	.64
Gender ^a	3.70	1.88	.16			-.01	7.41
Education	.86	.56	.13			-.25	1.96
Step 02				.04	.00		
Constant	29.29	11.50				6.58	51.99
Age	-.34	.48	-.06			-1.28	.61
Gender ^a	3.57	1.89	.15			-.15	7.30
Education	.86	.56	.13			-.25	1.96
Parental Conflict	.14	.16	.07			-.17	.45
Step 03				.04	.00		
Constant	28.69	11.86				5.27	52.11
Age	-.34	.48	-.07			-1.29	.61
Gender ^a	3.59	1.89	.15			-.15	7.33
Education	.85	.56	.13			-.26	1.96
Parental Conflict	.15	.16	.07			-.18	.47
Social Support	.01	.05	.02			-.09	.11

Note. $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; ^a1 = male, 2 = female.

To find the predictive relationship of parental conflict and social support with avoidant and anxious attachment by controlling demographic variables, hierarchical regression was used. Results for avoidant attachment (Table 4) indicated that neither demographic variables, parental conflict, nor social support significantly predicted avoidant attachment at any step (all models $p > .05$, $R^2 = .04$ throughout).

Table 5

Hierarchical regression analysis to establish the predictors of anxious attachment (N = 173)

Predictors	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2	LL	UL
Step 01				.01	.01		
Constant	15.94	12.50				-8.74	40.62
Age	.22	.52	.04			-.81	1.25
Gender ^a	3.05	2.05	.12			-1.00	7.09
Education	.08	.61	.01			-1.13	1.28
Step 02				.13***	.12***		
Constant	11.47	11.83				-11.88	34.82
Age	.03	.49	.01			-.95	1.00
Gender ^a	2.34	1.94	.09			-1.49	6.17
Education	.06	.58	.01			-1.07	1.20
Parental Conflict	.75***	.16	.34***			.44	1.07
Step 03				.14***	.01		
Constant	16.15	12.10				-7.74	40.04
Age	.06	.49	.01			-.91	1.03
Gender ^a	2.21	1.93	.09			-1.60	6.03
Education	.10	.57	.02			-1.03	1.23
Parental Conflict	.68***	.17	.31***			.35	1.01
Social Support	-.08	.05	-.12			-.18	.02

Note. $p < .05$; $p < .01$; $p < .001$; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; ^a1 = male, 2 = female.

For anxious attachment (Table 5), demographic variables in Step 1 were non-significant, $F(3, 169) = .74$, $p > .05$, $R^2 = .01$. Adding parental conflict in Step 2 yielded a significant model, $F(4, 168) = 6.14$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$ ($\Delta R^2 = .12$, $p < .001$), with parental conflict as a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$). Adding social support in Step 3 did not significantly improve model fit ($\Delta R^2 = .01$), and social support was not a significant predictor. Parental conflict remained significant ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$).

Table 6

Moderation analysis via PROCESS macro for social support as moderator between parental conflict and avoidant attachment (N = 173)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Outcome: Avoidant Attachment						
Constant	42.95	.82	52.67	< .001	41.34	44.56
Parental Conflict	.15	.16	.92	.36	-.17	.47
Social Support	.01	.05	.19	.85	-.09	.11
Parental Conflict * Social Support	-.01	.01	-.95	.34	-.03	.01

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error

Table 7

Moderation analysis via PROCESS macro for social support as moderator between parental conflict and Anxious attachment (N = 173)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
					<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Outcome: Anxious Attachment						
Constant	27.51	.82	33.59	< .001	25.89	29.13
Parental Conflict	.70	.16	4.23	< .001	.37	1.02
Social Support	-.09	.05	-1.79	.07	-.19	.01
Parental Conflict * Social Support	.01	.01	1.25	.21	-.01	.03

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error

Two moderation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 1 were conducted to explore whether perceived social support played a moderating role between parental conflict and attachment insecurity. The interaction between parental conflict and social support was not significant for avoidant attachment ($B = -.01$, $SE = .01$, $t = -.95$, $p = .34$) or anxious attachment ($B = .01$, $SE = .01$, $t = 1.25$, $p = .21$) (see Tables 6 and 7). There was no support for H4; and social support was not a significant moderator of the relationship between parental conflict and either dimension of attachment insecurity.

Table 8: Additional Analysis

Independent sample t-test to compare parental conflict, social support, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment in men and women

Variables	Men (n = 45)		Women (n = 128)		t(171)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Parental Conflict	13.02	4.89	13.55	5.05	-.60	.547	.11
Social Support	58.71	16.63	55.70	16.75	1.04	.301	.18
Avoidant Attachment	40.60	10.31	44.07	10.14	-1.97	.051	.34
Anxious Attachment	25.27	11.34	27.91	10.95	-1.38	.169	.24

Table 9: Additional Analysis

Independent sample t-test to compare parental conflict, social support, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment in nuclear and joint family systems

Variables	Nuclear (n = 129)		Joint (n = 44)		t(df)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Parental Conflict	13.02	4.89	13.55	5.05	-.60	.547	.11

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Social Support	58.71	16.63	55.70	16.75	1.04	.301	.18
Avoidant Attachment	40.60	10.31	44.07	10.14	-1.97	.051	.34
Anxious Attachment	25.27	11.34	27.91	10.95	-1.38	.169	.24

To compare the gender and family system differences, independent samples t-tests were conducted (Tables 8 & 9). It showed that there are no significant gender differences for parental conflict, perceived social support, avoidant attachment or anxious attachment (all $p > .05$), though women descriptively indicated slightly higher scores for avoidant and anxious attachment than men. In the family system dimension, the participants from nuclear families reported a significantly higher level of family conflict than the participants from joint families, $t(130.16) = 2.96$, $p = .004$, Cohen's $d = .40$ (small to medium effect). The results reported no significant differences between families in terms of social support, avoidant attachment, or anxious attachment.

Discussion

The aim for this study was to explore the relations between parental conflict, social support perceived by emerging adults and attachment insecurity in Pakistan and test the moderation of social support between parental conflicts and attachment insecurity in emerging adults. The results provide a theoretically consistent picture that is congruent and builds on previous research.

The partial support of H1 was given. Parental conflict was a strong positive predictor of anxious, but not avoidant attachment. This is a differential pattern that aligns with EST (Davies & Cummings, 1994) which suggests that witnessing a direct threatening interaction with parents triggers hyperactivating attachment patterns. The interpersonal threat cues that children take in when they are exposed to chronic interparental conflict lead to greater vigilance, and the greater interpersonal threat cues lead to greater attachment signaling associated with anxious attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This is consistent with Smith-Etxeberria et al. (2020) as avoidant attachment was not strongly linked to deactivating strategies; rather, these are linked to a rejecting and cold type of caregiving. In Pakistan these findings add to the work of Akram and Batool (2018) in the field of adult attachment.

H2 was also partially supported. Social support significant negative correlation with anxious attachment at the bivariate level, consistent with the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), but did not independently predict anxious attachment after controlling for parental conflict. This suggests that the protective association between social support and anxious attachment is partly accounted for by shared variance with parental conflict: individuals from high-conflict households tend to perceive lower social support, weakening social support's independent predictive role. This pattern aligns with Sirois et al. (2016) and Saleem and Mahmood (2013). The absence of a significant association between social support and avoidant attachment is theoretically coherent, as avoidantly attached individuals suppress attachment needs and resist emotional dependency regardless of available support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

H3 was fully supported. Parental conflict was significantly negatively associated with perceived social support. This association may be understood through two complementary mechanisms. First, in Pakistan's collectivistic context, family constitutes the primary source of social support (Jibeen, 2015); when the family simultaneously functions as the source of conflict and the expected provider of support, a fundamental contradiction emerges that undermines perceived support availability (Usman et al., 2024). Second, the negative IWMs of others developed through repeated conflict exposure may generalize beyond the family, leading individuals to perceive peers and friends as comparably untrustworthy (Bowlby,

1973). These findings replicate Sharma and Kaur (2020) and Rivers et al. (2024) in a Pakistani sample.

H4 was not supported. Social support did not moderate the relationship between parental conflict and either dimension of attachment insecurity. Several explanations are offered. First, attachment representations consolidated through years of chronic conflict may be sufficiently entrenched by emerging adulthood to resist moderation by cross-sectional perceptions of social support; Bowlby (1973) proposed that IWMs operate largely outside conscious awareness and are relatively stable, a finding corroborated longitudinally by Fraley and Roisman (2019). Second, Pakistan's collectivistic cultural structure means that high-conflict family environments simultaneously threaten attachment security and erode the primary available source of compensatory support, substantially constraining the buffering potential of social support. This aligns with Stanton and Campbell's (2014) finding that social support did not buffer outcomes for sufficiently entrenched anxious attachment. Third, the present sample ($N = 173$) may have been underpowered to detect small interaction effects, which typically require samples of 300 or more (Aiken & West, 1991).

The finding that nuclear family structures were associated with significantly higher parental conflict than joint family structures highlights an important culturally specific ecological factor. In Pakistan's collectivistic extended-family configurations, the presence of grandparents and other relatives introduces informal social monitoring and regulatory functions that may temper the intensity of spousal disagreements — functions structurally absent in nuclear households (Jibeen, 2015). The absence of corresponding differences in attachment insecurity across family systems may reflect compensatory developmental processes operating between childhood conflict exposure and data collection in emerging adulthood.

Conclusion

The second strongest predictor of anxious attachment insecurity was parental conflict, which is in line with EST's description of how experiencing conflict with parents triggers hyperactivating attachment patterns. At the bivariate level, perceived social support was significantly and negatively correlated with anxious attachment, but not when controlling for parental conflict, nor when added with parental conflict to the prediction of anxious attachment, as it did not moderate the relationship between parental conflict and attachment. This suggests that cross-sectional perceptions of support are not enough to override the developmentally established relationship between parental conflict and IWM, and therefore are not predictive of anxious attachment. The association of joint family systems with lower exposure to conflict is a culturally specific ecological finding. The findings indicate the importance of early family environments as a basis for attachment representations that persist beyond the early years into emerging adulthood, and the potential and limitations of social support as a protection in Pakistan.

Implications

In practice, interparental conflict histories need to be routinely screened during intake and attachment-focused case conceptualizations need to be targeted at hyperactivating attachment strategies when working with emerging adults. Modalities that are indicated for this population include evidence-based approaches like Attachment Based Therapy and Emotion Focused Therapy. It is important that University counseling centers focus on attachment sensitive training. Institutional level, peer connection, peer mentoring and community belonging, as components of university-based initiatives, are intervention points that are easy to access and can offer corrective relational experiences. The double association of nuclear family structures and increased parental conflict also points to a specific at-risk context in which conflict management and co-parenting interventions developed in the community and tailored to the culture are needed.

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This study, theoretically, is a contribution towards cross-cultural generalizability of attachment theory as the hoped for associations predicted by attachment theory were replicated in a Pakistani sample while culturally specific moderating conditions were identified. The null moderation finding is contrary to a simple extension of the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis to attachment development, which posits that more social support is sufficient to produce consolidated IWMs.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causal relationships among the variables, and future studies should use a longitudinal design following children from childhood to emerging adulthood. Retrospective assessment of parental conflict is prone to recall bias, and future research should include observational and/or prospective data. The sample was largely female (74%) and was only from urban institutions in Lahore, limiting generalisability, and other studies should include gender balanced and geographically wide samples. The convenience sampling method and sample size ($N = 173$) might be insufficient to have statistical power to identify small interaction effects. All the variables were measured by self-reported measures and are therefore vulnerable to social desirability effects, especially in the Pakistan context where disclosure of family conflicts is seen as highly undesirable and shameful. Finally, further research is needed to explore emotion dysregulation and self-blame as potential mediators between parental conflict and insecure IWMs, and to assess the efficacy of attachment-based interventions for altering insecure IWMs over time using increased perceived social support.

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