

# Interaction between Type and Frequency of Parental Conflict and Level of Social Adjustment of Adolescents in Murang'a County

Muriithi Joel Kiambi

*PhD Postgraduate Student, Department of Psychology, Kenyatta University, Kenya*

**Abstract:** - Social adjustment problems are emerging problems among the adolescents across the globe. Despite evidence of parental conflicts in Kenyan families, there is scarce literature on the interaction between type and frequency of parental conflict and level of social adjustment of adolescents in Murang'a County. The first specific objective of the study was to establish the type and frequency of parental conflicts among adolescents in Murang'a County. The third objective was to establish the interactions between type and frequency of parental conflict and level of social adjustment of adolescents in Murang'a County. The study was guided by attachment theory. This study employed a descriptive survey design with a quantitative approach. The study target population was 108,774 secondary school students in Murang'a County. A sample size of 400 students was selected. Frequency of parental conflict and type of parental conflict was assessed using the Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale (CPIC) while social adjustment among the students was measured using Social Adjustment Scale. Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used for data analysis. On type of parental conflicts, the students reported perceiving both constructive and destructive parental conflicts with majority perceiving constructive conflicts. The study showed that 55.8% reported low frequency of parental conflicts while 24.8% reported high frequency. The study revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between type of parental conflicts perceived and social adjustment of the students. The Pearson ( $r$ ) correlation coefficient between parental conflicts and both offensive and delinquent behaviours were positive and significant at ( $r(257) = 0.241, P < 0.05$ ) and ( $r(260) = 0.171, P < 0.05$ ) respectively. However, the relationship between parental conflicts and pro-social was negative but not significant. The study recommended premarital education and counseling, couples counseling and community awareness creation on the harm of destructive parental conflicts to their entire family.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Parental Conflict, Social Adjustment, Offensive and Delinquent Behaviours

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *A: Background to the Study*

The purpose of the study was to establish the interaction between type and frequency of parental conflict and level of social adjustment of adolescents. Adolescent is a period at which individuals develop self-identities and is one of the most challenging periods in an individual's development

(Jayachandran, 2017). According to National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (2017), adolescents are more vulnerable than pre-school children since pre-school children are too young to fully comprehend the extent and probable outcomes of the conflict happening around them. Bolze, Schmidt, Böing, and Crepaldi (2017) defines adolescents as the developmental period of transition between childhood and adulthood, which begins at approximately 10 to 13 years of age and ends between ages of 18 and 22 years. Some adolescents do not negotiate these challenges positively and develop personal and social problems, which lead towards their maladjustment. Parental conflict varies depending on the frequency and type (Ernest-Ehibudu, Ijeoma, Obikoya, & Oluwatoyin, 2017). Social adjustment have different levels such as delinquency behaviours, offensive interpersonal behaviour or pro-social behaviour and varies depending on the gender of the adolescents (Jayachandran, 2017).

Stability of marriage is determined by the level of unity among family members (Wu, Wong, Yu, Fok, Yeung, Lam & Liu, 2016). However, more times than not conflicts are unavoidable in a marriage. Conflict within the family is a common contemporary phenomenon and greatly impact on the children in homes as seen among adolescents in United States of America (Lindblom, Vänskä, Flykt, Tolvanen, Tiitinen, Tulppala, & Punamäki, 2017). Conflicts in a marriage may result into undesired psychological issues. Parental conflicts take various forms depending on how conflicts between married individuals are expressed and managed. Jayachandran (2017) in a study in India classifies parental conflicts as either destructive or constructive. According to Jayachandran (2017), destructive parental conflict includes inter-parental aggression or violence, withdrawal during conflict, non-verbal conflict, inter-parental and parent-child verbal hostility, aggression by members directed towards objects, threats and conflicts about child related themes. On the other hand, Jayachandran (2017) defines constructive conflict as the one that exists when parents agree on how conflict can be resolved and how the conflict is not a serious threat and eventually can be worked out.

Apart from the type of parental conflict (destructive or constructive), the frequency of the parental conflict also impacts on the adolescence social adjustment (Dar & Tali, 2014). According to Wu, Wong, Yu, Fok, Yeung, Lam and Liu (2016), evidence shows that parental conflict is more harmful to children if it occurs more regularly. Lindblom, Vänskä, Flykt, Tolvanen, Tiitinen, Tulppala, and Punamäki (2017) states that families experiencing more frequent inter-parental conflicts have children who are characterized by greater levels of distress, anger and feelings of insecurity. Further, Özmete and Bayolu (2013) notes that children's perception of the frequency of inter-parental conflict greatly contributes in predicting both cognitive functioning and conduct problems.

The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2017) revealed that 37% of women from former Central Province counties such as Nyeri, Kirinyaga, Murang'a and Kiambu county who had ever been married had suffered physical violence by a husband, 17% had suffered sexual violence, and 30% had suffered emotional violence. There is not study that has been carried out in Murang'a County to depict the association between the reported parental conflicts and social adjustment of secondary school students. Without empirical evidence such inference can only remain speculative. The current study was based on this evidence on the widespread of destructive parental conflicts in Kenya and the lack of empirical evidence on the effect of such conflict on social adjustment of children in Murang'a County.

#### *B: Statement of the Problem*

Cases of parental conflicts in Kenya are widespread as evidenced by persistent cases of domestic violence as reported by Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2017). Some parental conflicts (6.7%) in Kenya lasted for one year, 17.8% lasted for between two to five years while 75.5% of the conflicts between couples lasted for over five years (Kariuki & Aloka, 2015). Dangers of parental conflicts to students have been seen as fear in imagining that other students were talking about them, unwilling to freely mingle with other students regarding social events, keeping quiet and taking a long time to make friends with fellow students as well as perpetration of bullying in school (Onyango, Odhiambo, & Maito, 2017). If these issues are not addressed in time, it may give rise to social adjustment challenges among the students which may lead to security risks. Other negative consequences of parental conflicts among the adolescents include stress, sexual aggression and adolescent threatening behaviours, social aggression, psychosocial adjustment and negative self-expressiveness (Mathil & Shanker, 2016).

As parental conflicts are reported to be on increase, it is important to find out how parental conflicts influence adolescence social adjustment. The previous studies conducted in Kenya on parental conflict focused on prevalence and causes. This opened a research gap for a study to be conducted in Murang'a involving students in secondary

schools who are prone to social adjustment problems. This study sought to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between parental conflict and social adjustment of students in secondary school in Murang'a County.

#### *C: Purpose of the Study*

To establish the interaction between type and frequency of parental conflict and level of social adjustment of adolescents in secondary school Murang'a County, Kenya.

#### *D: Objectives of the Study*

1. To establish the frequency of parental conflict in families of students in secondary schools in Murang'a County.
2. To find out the types of parental conflicts in families of students in secondary schools in Murang'a County.
3. To examine the interaction between type and frequency of parental conflict and level of social adjustment of adolescents in secondary schools in Murang'a County.

#### *E: Research Hypotheses*

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between parental conflict and social adjustment of students in secondary schools in Murang'a County?

#### *F: Justification and Significance of the Study*

The study results will enable parents and educational stakeholders to understand the implications of parental behaviours of students' social adjustment. Specifically, study will help the education stakeholders to understand the status of parental conflicts in families in Murang'a County and seek to protect adolescents from adverse effects of parental conflicts by embracing constructive parental conflicts. Evidence shown by this study on the relationship between parental conflicts and social adjustment may help education stakeholders to devise ways of reducing the impact of parental conflicts on students for better psychological well-being.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *A: Attachment Theory*

Attachment theory was developed by Bowlby in the year 1969. The theory explains how the human is motivated to develop relationships with others and to maintain a desired level of accessibility to attachment figures or significant others. According to the proponent of the theory, Bowlby (1988), the theory explains how long-term relationships between humans are formed and maintained, with the basic principle being that, starting right from infancy; children have a need to form a relationship with a primary caregiver for normal social and emotional development. Attachment theory argues that, parental relationship with a child has a strong influence on child development. At the early infancy stage, children have the capacity for mental representation of their

attachment figures and construction of ideas and expectations about relationships with both parents and significant others (Ernest-Ehibudu, Obikoya, and Oluwatoyin, 2017). The theory further states that the attachment behavioural system controls the attachment behaviours of children under emotional distress. Attachment theory argues that attachment figure who offers comfort, reassurance and contact facilitates development of the child's well-being, emotional regulation and fostering the expectation that close relationships provide safety and security (Akande, & Ikediashi, 2017). Therefore, close relationship with parents is an important factor in adolescent development, since this relationship functions as a template that is carried forward over time to influence the development of new relationships (Mathil & Shanker, 2016).

The theory is based on two main dimensions: 1) anxiety toward separation and abandonment and 2) avoidance of close relationships. The first dimension – anxiety towards separation and abandonment (also called the model of self) corresponds to the level of fear of rejection in a relationship or abandonment. This dimension is characterized by a lack of sense of self-worth. A person operating on this dimension strategically hyper-activates an attachment system that generally focuses on signs of threats in the relationship, and on the search for love and security. The second dimension – avoidance of close relationships (also called model of other) is characterized by a degree of emotional suppression, self-reliance, and discomfort with closeness and interdependence a person experiences. People operating in this dimension are characterized by expectations that the partner will be unavailable and non-supportive. The person operating in this dimension responds by strategically deactivating the attachment system in an effort to reduce negative emotional states and feelings of vulnerability to rejection (Godbout et al., 2009). In the context of the current study, the theory guided the study in regard to the relationship between parental conflict and social adjustment of adolescents in secondary schools in Murang'a County.

#### *B: Frequency of Parental Conflicts*

A study by Prueksaritanond, Tubtimtes, Pumkopol and Prueksaritanond (2015) studied the prevalence and consequences of spouse conflict in primary care. The purpose of this study was to identify the prevalence, the potential risk factors and the consequences of spousal conflict among patients consulting physicians in a primary care setting. Findings revealed that 83.9% of the sample had conflicts with their spouses during the previous 12 months. The conflict events occurred seldom and occasionally at 30.2%, while often (once or twice a month) and always (every week) at 59.1%. Orpin, Papadopoulos and Puthussery (2017) studied the prevalence of domestic violence among pregnant women in Nigeria through a systematic review of all published studies between April 2004 and June 2016. The prevalence of domestic violence during pregnancy in Nigeria ranged between 2.3% and 44.6% with lifetime prevalence rates ranging between 33.1% and 63.2%. The review suggested a

high prevalence of domestic violence in pregnancy among women in Nigeria and higher lifetime prevalence.

Deka (2017) carried out a study to examine the effect of inter-parental conflicts on adolescents in secondary schools in Dar Es Salaam and Coast Region of Tanzania. The study used survey research design. Measuring conflicts from their homes, 21.1% of the respondents indicated that the conflicts were intense and frequent while 74.4% of the respondents indicated that the conflicts were witnessed a few times. It was also noted that 4.4% of the respondents did not experience parental conflicts at their homes. The parental conflicts were seen to cause fear, depression, stress, loneliness, anger and nightmares. In the Kenyan context, Kariuki and Aloba (2015) carried out a study to examine factors leading to conflicts between parents in Kikuyu Sub County in Kiambu County. The study established that 51.1% of the couples always engaged in conflicts with their spouse, 26.7% of couples also cited that quite often they engaged in conflicts with their spouse while 13.3% of the cited that they rarely engaged in conflicts with their spouse. Only 8.9% of couples cited that they never engaged in conflicts with their spouses. The study further sought to establish the duration of the conflict and whereby the study established that 6.7% of the conflicts lasted for one year, 17.8% lasted for between two to five years while 75.5% of the conflicts between couples lasted for over five years. Most of these conflicts (82.2%) were found to lead to injuries.

#### *C: Type of Parental Conflicts*

George et al., (2016) studied the prevalence of domestic violence and its associated factors among married women in a rural area of Puducherry, South India. Results established that of 310 study participants, 56.7% of them reported some form of domestic violence, 51.3% reported psychological violence, 40% reported physical violence, and 13.5% reported sexual violence. A statistically significant association was found between illiteracy of women and domestic violence (AOR: 4.3, 95% confidence interval: 1.1–15.7 P: 0.03). Physical, sexual, psychological, and verbal abuses were the most frequent types of domestic violence reported in this review. Pregnant women between the ages of 20 and 30 years were the most common victims of domestic violence. Onoh *et al.*, (2013) studied the prevalence, pattern and consequences of intimate partner violence during pregnancy at Abakaliki Southeast Nigeria. Results established that out of the 321 booked pregnant women, 44.6% (143/321) reported having been abused in the index pregnancy. Verbal abuse (60.1%) 86/143 was the most common type of abuse and most pregnant women resorted to praying (31.5%) 46/146, crying (24.7%) 36/146, and begging (22.6%) 33/146 as their major reactions to IPV. Eleven (7.7%) 11/143 pregnant women were hospitalized while (21%) 30/143 sustained emotional and physical injury.

Wu, Wong, Yu, Fok, Yeung, Lam and Liu (2016) carried out a study to examine the parenting approaches and family functionality in Hong Kong. Majority of the non-addicted internet users indicated that their marriage was highly functional (82.1%), while majority of couples (38.4%) who were addicted to internet use indicated that their marriage was characterized by conflicts and was severely dysfunctional. Özmete and Bayoglu (2013) carried out a study to examine the both the frequency and intensity of parental conflicts in Ankara in Turkey. The study established that parental conflicts were based on household chores such as cleaning up homestead (Frequency=42.2%, mean=2.59), meals (frequency=39.4%, mean=2.52) and taking care of things (frequency=33.9%, mean=2.68). Other sources of parental conflict were found to be related to money expenditure (frequency=23.9%, mean=2.67) and family rules such as the right time to arrive home (frequency=33.9%, mean=2.48). The study concluded that parental conflicts varied in intensity and frequency between one family structures to another.

#### *D: Relationship between Parental Conflict and Adolescence Social Adjustment*

A study by Mathil and Shanker (2016) carried out a study to examine the effect of parental conflict on adolescents in the United States of America. The study revealed that 68.2% of the students faced inter-parental conflicts in their homes as a result of diverse causes. It was established that parental conflict was significantly related to feeling of depression and loneliness at a correlation coefficient of 0.18 and 0.31 and p-values less than 0.05. The study concluded that students from families whose parents were involved in inter-parental conflicts were more likely to face social adjustment challenges in their schools. Nan, Hongjian, & Esther (2017) examined the influence of parental conflict on coping tactics of adolescents in China. The study established that coping tactics such as conciliation, avoidance, and assertion behaviors increased with increase in frequency and intensity of parental conflicts. The study further established that avoidance was negatively related to the frequency of parental conflicts. Social adjustment challenges were observed with an increase in parental conflicts in families in China.

Parsa, Yaacob, Redzuan, Parsa, and Esmaeili, (2014) investigated the effect of parental conflicts on adolescents in Punjab in India. The study established that 50.8% of the students witnessed parental conflicts in their homes. The study further revealed that 36% of the conflicts were caused by lack of trust while 34% of the conflicts related to in-laws. The effects of the parental conflicts was related to feeling of emotional disturbance (frequency of 40.8%), feeling of inferior compared to other students (frequency of 38.8%), feeling of insecure (frequency of 48.3%) and 61.7% of the students felt anxious whenever they saw their parents conflicting. The study further revealed that the students from families facing parental conflicts struggled with social adjustment issues. Ernest-Ehibudu, Ijeoma, Obikoya, & Oluwatoyin (2017) carried out a study to examine the

influence of parental conflicts on the level of student social adjustment in secondary schools in Nigeria. The study established that established that there was a significant correlation between family conflicts and student social adjustment at a correlation coefficient of 0.394 and  $p < 0.05$ . The study further established that 51.8% of the variation on social adjustment of students in secondary schools in Nigeria was due to changes in level of parental conflicts in Rivers State in Nigeria. In the context of Ghana, Ubaidi (2017) focused on the effect of dysfunctional families and social support on the psychological wellbeing of adolescents. The study concluded that parental conflicts threatened the level of family unity to a large extent.

A study by Onyango, Odhiambo, and Maito (2017) studied the relationship between perceptions of inter-parental conflicts and involvement in delinquent behaviours among selected Kenyan adolescent students. Findings of the study showed that there existed significant and positive association between inter-parental conflict and adolescent students' engagement in non-illegal deviant behaviour. On the other hand, the study revealed that there were no significant association between adolescent students' perception of inter-parental conflict and their engagement in minor-illegal deviant behaviour. The study findings further revealed the existence of a significant and positive relationship between students' perceptions of alcohol use by parents and the adolescents' engagement in deviant behaviour. Kariuki and Aloka (2015) carried out a study to examine the relationship between parental conflicts and bullying among secondary school students in Kiambu County. The study established that there was significant relationship between parental conflict and being a victim of bullying in school ( $\chi^2(1)=26.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). It was also established that there was a significant relationship between parental conflicts and a student being a perpetrator of bullying in school ( $\chi^2(1) = 18.589$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). The study concluded that students from families whose parents are involved in parental conflicts face social adjustment challenges.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design with a quantitative approach. The study target population was 108,774 secondary school students in Murang'a County. A Stratified random sampling was applied to draw a sample size of 400 students. Standardized instruments were used to collect data from the students. The Social Adjustment Scale developed by Reda-Norton was used to measure social adjustment among the students while frequency of parental conflict and type of parental conflict was assessed using the Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale (CPIC). Data collected was coded and processed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Quantitative data collected was analyzed to generate descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages and mean. Correlations between parental conflicts and social adjustment of adolescence were established using Pearson's Product

## Moment Correlation Coefficients.

## IV. RESULTS

*A: Types of Parental Conflicts in Families of Students in Secondary Schools*

The first objective of the study sought to find out the type of parental conflict in families of students in secondary schools in Murang'a County as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of Parental Conflicts

Statement	Not True		True		No Response		Interpretation
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
My parents get really mad when they argue.	242	60.5	131	32.8	27	6.8	Constructive
When my parents have a disagreement, they discuss it quietly.	196	49	178	44.5	26	6.5	Constructive
When my parents have an argument, they say hurtful things to each other.	254	63.5	122	30.5	24	6.0	Constructive
When my parents have an argument, they shout at each other.	244	61	132	33	24	6.0	Constructive
My parents hardly ever shout when they have a disagreement.	143	35.8	233	58.3	24	6.0	Destructive
My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument.	260	65	115	28.8	25	6.3	Constructive
My parents have pushed or thrown each other during an argument.	281	70.3	95	23.8	24	6.0	Constructive

From the findings in Table 1, 60.5% of the students indicated as not true that parents get really mad when they argue, 49% indicated as not true that when their parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly, 63.5% indicated as not true that when their parents have an argument they say hurtful things to each other, 61% of the respondents indicated as not true that when their parents have an argument they shout at each other. It was also noted that 70.3% indicated as not true that their parents have pushed or thrown each other during an argument while 58.3% indicated as true that their parents ever shout when they have a disagreement. The findings in Table 1 show that the respondents perceived both destructive and constructive type of parental conflicts with majority (5 statements out of 6 statements) perceiving constructive compared to destructive conflicts (1 statement out of 6 statements). Those perceiving constructive conflicts,

characterized parental conflicts as generally devoid of violence, shouting among other aggressive acts. Conversely, those who perceived destructive conflicts associated parental conflicts with shouting, throwing of items and parents pushing and shoving each other during arguments.

*B: The Frequency of Parental Conflicts in Families of Students in Secondary Schools*

The second objective of the study sought to establish the frequency of parental conflicts in families of students in secondary schools in Murang'a County. Descriptive statistics for the parental conflict scores was done in order to establish the measure of parental conflict frequency on average from the diverse responses given by the respondents as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Parental Conflict Scores

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Parental Conflict Score	322	0.00	12.00	5.15	2.64	0.13

To obtain the mean in score for parental conflicts, for a 'true' response, a score of two was awarded, 'sort of true' response a score of one and 'not true' response a score of zero for each of the six items. Therefore the maximum score was 12 and minimum score was 0. From Table 4.6 the mean score for respondents was 5.15 and in respect to the findings, a mean score of 5.15 is below the score of 6.0 in a scale ranging from 0-12. Likewise, a standard deviation of 2.64 in a scale of 12 points is considered low and therefore there was high level of

consensus in regard to the six items measuring the frequency of parental conflicts. In respect to this, it was concluded that the students perceived low frequency of parental conflict.

*C: Correlations*

Pearson Correlation was used to establish the relationship between parental conflict mean scores and social adjustments as shown in Table 3

Table 3: Correlation between Parental Conflict Mean Scores and Social Adjustments Mean Scores

		Parental Conflicts	Pro-Social Behaviours	Offensive Interpersonal Behaviours	Delinquency Behaviours
	Pearson r	1			
<b>Parental Conflicts</b>	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	322			
<b>Pro-Social Behaviours</b>	Pearson r	-0.104	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.092			
<b>Offensive Interpersonal Behaviours</b>	N	265	328		
	Pearson r	0.241*	-0.177*	1	
<b>Delinquency Behaviours</b>	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.003		
	N	259	288	318	
<b>Delinquency Behaviours</b>	Pearson r	0.171*	-0.116*	0.600*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.006	0.046	0.000	
	N	262	295	293	321

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Relationship between parental conflict scores and the pro-social behaviour scores among students in secondary schools in Murang'a County was found to be negative ( $r=-0.104$ ), weak (in the range of  $|0|<r<0.300$ ). In regard to relationship between parental conflict and offensive interpersonal behaviours, the study found out that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r=0.241$ ) between parental conflict and offensive interpersonal behaviours among students in secondary schools in Murang'a County. The study further found out that there was a weak positive correlation ( $r=0.171$ ) between parental conflicts and delinquency behaviours among students in secondary schools in Murang'a County. Interpersonal behaviours and delinquency behaviours among students in secondary schools in Murang'a County were related negatively to pro-social behaviours at correlation coefficients of  $-0.177$  and  $-0.116$  respectively. In addition, the study found out that both offensive interpersonal behaviours and delinquency behaviours among students in secondary schools in Murang'a County were positively related ( $r=0.600$ ). In totality, the Pearson correlation coefficient results revealed that there was indeed a relationship between parental conflicts and social adjustment among the secondary schools students in Murang'a County.

#### D: Conclusion of the Study

The study concluded that students perceived both destructive and constructive type of parental conflicts with majority perceiving constructive compared to destructive conflicts. The study further concluded that parental conflict was related to delinquency behaviours, offensive interpersonal behaviour and pro-social behaviours of students in secondary schools in Murang'a County.

#### E: Recommendations of the Study

The study recommends that guidance and counseling teachers

to assess and identify social adjustment challenged students due to parental conflicts and offer professional intervention. The study also recommends parental sensitizations on parental counseling with the aim of minimizing parental conflicts effect on children. This could take the form of creating awareness of destructive conflicts and constructive parental conflicts as well as its preventive measures.

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