

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Social Emotional Competency, Perceived Inter-Parental Conflicts and Psychological Flexibility among Students

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**Abstract:** The study aimed to measure the relationship among social emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflicts and psychological flexibility in students. Cross-sectional survey design was used in the current study. Target population for the present study were student of 11 to 17 years from Kharian, Gujrat and Bhimber Azad Kashmir. By using the probability sampling, two stage sampling technique was used to select the sample of 1000 students. Social Emotional Competency Scale (Kausar & Fatima, 2024), Inter-parental conflicts (Grych & Fincham, 1992) and Action and Acceptance Questionnaire (Hayes, 2004) questionnaires were used to collect the data. The findings indicated that there was a negative significant relationship between social emotional competency and perceived inter-parental conflict ( $r = .377^{**}$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .000$ ), and significant and moderate positive relationship between social emotional competency and psychological flexibility ( $r = .288^{**}$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .000$ ) were found. Findings provide insights into the complex interplay between family dynamics and individual well-being. This knowledge can be helpful in interventions, policies, and practices that support healthier family relationships and better mental health outcomes for individuals, particularly for children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** Social Emotional Competency, Perceived Inter-Parental Conflict, Psychological Flexibility, Adolescents

### Introduction

School students attend an educational institutions to receive formal instructions, acquire knowledge, and develop skills. They can make better decisions when they have a better understanding of the world, themselves, and future demands. This study aims to explore the relationship between social emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflicts and psychological flexibility in students, addressing a knowledge gap on how these variables interact. It benefits educators, teachers, parents, and students by enhancing understanding of interplay of adolescents' skill of social emotional competence in relation to parental mutual relationship and adolescents' psychological well-being. Over the last numerous years, both professionals and academics have focused on the social emotional competency of students. It is commonly acknowledged that self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skill, and ethical decision-making are between the most significant intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities that contribute to social emotional competence. These abilities are the most beneficial to cultivate in order to improve wellbeing and mental health, moral analysis, intellectual presentation, and accomplishment inspiration (Zins et al., 2004). Social emotional learning is the procedure of obtaining and using social emotional competence (consist of information, skill, & attitude), which is acknowledged as a crucial component of learning and human improvement (CASEL, 2020). In recent periods, investigators have progressively highlighted position of developing students' social-emotional competencies (SECs) in school (Clarke et al., 2015). Students who dominant these competencies are more likely to involve positively in education activities and remain strong

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when challenged (Wang & Eccles, 2012). They also tend to have optimistic relationships with teachers and peers (Hall & DiPerna, 2017) and display fewer behavioral problems while promoting prosocial behaviors (O'Connor et al., 2018). They also tend to achieve sophisticated grades and perform better, as designated by consistent test scores (Buckner et al., 2003). Students' social and emotional competency is their capacity to engage constructively with each other, positively express their emotions, and control their conduct. Self-esteem, self-confidence, the ability to make friends, self-control, perseverance, problem-solving, self-reliance, concentrate, endurance, effective announcement, compassion, and the ability to discern correct from incorrect are just a few of the abilities required for healthy social and emotional advancement. Each of these abilities is essential to a student's general welfare (Zins et al., 2020).

Importance in socio-emotional competency in learning have developed noticeably over last decade (Oberle et al., 2016) and there is currently a huge quantity of study show their optimistic and adaptive position at school. A number of studies have exposed that healthier socio-emotional competency is connected with improved school grade (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Across to a multiplicity of definition, a general idea is that social emotional competency is an umbrella term that subsume a diversity of social or emotional ability and/or behaviors (Semrud, 2007). Generally, students' social emotional competency is start developing and reinforcing in their early years of lives within the family circle. Hence, family environment and parental relationship towards each other and towards children are very important in the social and emotional development of students. If students experience healthy family environment with coherent interpersonal parental relationship, their personality development have positive effect. On the other hand, parental conflict negatively affects their social emotional development (Kong et al., 2024 & Narejo et al., 2023).

Conflicts are an inevitable aspect of family life (Brock & Kochanska, 2016). As a critical risk factor for children's psychological health, behavioral and emotional problems, social behavior and conflicts between parents have repeatedly been documented in the literature. Inter-parental conflicts are one of the most significant, parent-driven elements that harmfully affect the home settings of children and youngsters. Inter-parental Conflict (IPC) is the term used to describe troubles among parents, in spite of whether they be co-parenting jointly or individually. Even when the children are not involved, parental disputes can disturb children. Students and teenagers' mental health, stress levels, behavioral issues, and school performance all suffer when they witness or participate in parental conflict.

To mitigate the undesirable influence of IPC on students, it is essential for parents and caregivers to seek help and support, such as counseling or therapy, to address their conflicts in healthier ways. Additionally, teachers and school counselors can show a vital part in recognizing students who may be struggling and providing them with the necessary support and resources. Creating a safe and nurturing environment both at home and at school is crucial for the well-being and development of students. IPC relates to discrepancy or physical violence between parents over family concerns and is a substantial negative change that can happen in inter-parental associations (Grych & Fincham, 1992). There is a clear relationship between social-emotional competency and perceived IPC among students. The nature of this relationship can vary from child to child, and it's influenced by various factors, including the intensity and frequency of conflict, the child's age and developmental stage, and the presence of supportive resources and interventions.

The ability to respond correctly to various situations and affecting strain in order to accomplish goals is a sign of psychological flexibility (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). An individual is required, for instance, to react promptly and properly to unpredicted and typical situations. Psychological flexibility was defined by (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010) in terms of self-control, self-regulation, and emotional regulation (Moilanen et al., 2010). These traits are linked to psychological capacity, which young people require to achieve their goals in a challenging environment. According to Hayes et al. (2011), there are six idiosyncratic fundamentals of psychological flexibility: acceptance, contact with the Present Moment, self as Context, diffusion, committed

action and values. Tentative the relationship between psychological flexibility, psychological outcomes, and communal implications has garnered more attention recently (Brassell et al., 2016). Positive outcomes such as adaptive psychological working, improved emotive comfort, and higher worth of life are associated with greater psychological flexibility (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Hayes et al., 2006). The relationship between social-emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflict, and psychological flexibility among students is a complex and multifaceted one. These three factors can interact in various ways, and their interplay can have a significant impact on a student's well-being and overall psychological functioning. Overall, the relationships among social-emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflict, and psychological flexibility are dynamic and can vary from one student to another. It's important to recognize that these factors are interconnected and can influence each other in different ways. Supportive interventions and programs that promote social-emotional learning, conflict resolution skills, and psychological flexibility can be valuable in helping students navigate these complex relationships and promote their overall well-being. Hence, the goal of the study is to measure the relationship among social emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflict and psychological flexibility in students. It further examined the moderating role of perceived inter-parental conflict in relationship of social emotional competency and psychological flexibility.

## **Methods Research**

### **Design and Participants**

The settings for the current study were public and private schools from Gujrat, Kharian and Bhimber Azad Kashmir. Cross-sectional survey design was used in the current study. Target population for present study were the students' age ranging from 11 to 17 years. The sample of the present study comprised of 1000 students from school government and private schools. The sample size was determined by using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1967) mathematical formula with 97% confidence interval.  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$  ( $n$ =Sample:  $N$ = Population:  $e$  = Margin of error). The sampling technique which was used to recruit participants was probability sampling technique. Two stage sampling technique was used. At stage 1, target population was divided into two stages: public and private schools/institutions. Further divide in terms of gender (boys & girls) at second stage. Students, both boys and girls, in age group of 11 to 17 years studying in government and private schools of Gujrat, Kharian and Bhimber Azad Kashmir were included in the current study. Students with any physical disability or mental illness were excluded from the sample. Ethical principles of informed consent and confidentiality were applied. Additionally, participants were informed about their rights of withdrawal from the study at any moment. Participants were not forced to disclose their identities.

### **Measures**

The measures of the present research consisted of five parts. First part included the consent form, second part was related to demographic information of students and the third part was consisted of Social Emotional Competency Scale. The fourth part consisted of Action and Acceptance Questionnaire and fifth part was related to Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale. Information on the purpose and importance of the ongoing research is included in the consent form. Participants in this section formally expressed their consent to participate in the research. The demographic form consists of demographic variables including age, gender, school type, residential area, family system, social-economic status, family monthly income, birth order and number of siblings. Social Emotional Competency Scale (Kausar, & Fatima, 2024) was used to measure the social emotional competency with 17 items. The items were rated on 4-point Likert scale. The 48-item Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict Scale (CPIC) is a self-report instrument developed for children and adolescents aged 11 to 17 years old to gauge their perceptions of parental disagreement and child modification (Grych & Fincham, 1992). Psychological flexibility was measured by using the final AAQ-II original form 10-item scale to a 7-item scale (Hayes, 2004). Urdu versions of all scales were used. The sample consisted of 1000 students (500=boys & 500 =girls) of 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> class. Participant's demographics profile of participants was as follows:

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of the Participants (n=1000)*

| Demographic profile | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| Age in Years        |           |         |
| 11 years            | 215       | 21.5    |
| 12 years            | 158       | 15.8    |
| 13 years            | 175       | 17.5    |
| 14 years            | 179       | 19.7    |
| 15 years            | 140       | 14.0    |
| 16 years            | 90        | 9.0     |
| 17years             | 25        | 2.5     |
| Gender              |           |         |
| Boys                | 500       | 50.0    |
| Girls               | 500       | 50.0    |
| Residential Area    |           |         |
| Rural               | 269       | 26.9    |
| Urban               | 731       | 73.1    |
| Family System       |           |         |
| Nuclear             | 545       | 54.5    |
| Joint               | 455       | 45.5    |
| School Type         |           |         |
| Public              | 500       | 50.0    |
| Private             | 500       | 50.0    |

Table 1 indicated the frequencies and percentages of all the participants according to their residential area and family system. The majority of the sample (73.1%) belonged to urban area whereas the rural area is less frequent (26.9%). Above table also depicts that the majority of responded (54.5%) lived in nuclear family system as compared to participants (45.5%) living in joint family system. Public sector has respondent's equivalent to 50.0% in the sample and private sector has also same participant's equivalent to 50.0%. It also indicated frequencies and percentages of categories of participants' age and gender. Majority of the participants (21.5%) were of 11 years, 15.8% of participants were 12 years, 17.5% of participants were 13 years, 19.7% were 14 years, 14.0% were 15 years, 9.0% of participants were 16 years, and 2.5% of participants were 17 years. The table also indicated that participation of females 'and males 50.0% in the sample are equally distributed. The both categories are based on their total proportion in the target population.

**Results**

Results are presented using descriptive and inferential statistics. First of all, reliability of scales was computed using alpha reliability analysis. The relationship among social emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflict, and psychological flexibility in students was identified using the correlation coefficient. The effect of social emotional competence on perceived inter-parental conflict, and psychological flexibility among students were also measured using linear regression analysis.

**Table2**  
*Reliability of Scales*

| Variables | No. of items | Cronbach's alpha |
|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| SECS      | 17           | .862             |
| CPIC      | 48           | .810             |
| AAQ-II    | 7            | .824             |

SECS=Social Emotional Competency Scale  
CPIC= Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale  
AAQ= Action and Acceptance Questionnaire

Table 2 presents psychometric properties of scales used in the study. Cronbach's alpha value for each scale was described in Table 2. Alpha reliability of Social Emotional Competency is .862, Perceived Inter-parental conflict is .810 and Action and Acceptance Questionnaire is .824. Results revealed that SECS, CPIC and AAQ-II exhibited high level of internal consistency in the current sample.

**Table 3**

*Results of Normality Test of Data (n=1000)*

| Scales | Kolmogorov-Smirnov | Shapiro-Wilk | Skewness | Kurtosis | Sig. |
|--------|--------------------|--------------|----------|----------|------|
| CPIC   | .077               | .956         | -.310    | 3.03     | .000 |
| AAQ-II | .052               | .987         | -.151    | -.601    | .000 |
| SECS   | .080               | .981         | -.479    | -.044    | .000 |

Table 3 indicated the results of normality tests. The p-value for Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test is .000 for SECS, CPIC and AAQ-II. The findings indicate that scores on all of the 3 scales are significant stating that our data is not normally distributed. Moreover, for all the variables, values of skewness and Kurtosis indicated that the data is non-normal.

**Table 4**

*Spearman Rank-Order Correlation among SEC, PIC and PF in students (n=1000)*

|                                   | Perceived Inter-Parental Conflict | Social Emotional Competency | Psychological Flexibility |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Social Emotional Competency       | -                                 | -.539**                     | .321**                    |
| Perceived Inter-Parental Conflict | -                                 | -                           | -.186**                   |
| Psychological Flexibility         | -                                 | -                           | -                         |

Note\*\*p<.00

Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to examine the relationship between social emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflict and psychological flexibility among students. The results indicated that there was strong negative and significant correlation between perceived inter-parental conflict and social emotional competency ( $r = .539^{**}$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .000$ ), and significant negative correlation between perceived inter-parental conflict and psychological flexibility ( $r = .186^{**}$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .000$ ). Results of above table showed that there was significant and moderate positive correlation between social emotional competency and psychological flexibility ( $r = .321^{**}$ ,  $p\text{-value} = .000$ ).

**Table 5**

*Regression Analysis for SECS, CPIC and PF (n=1000)*

| Variables | $\beta$ | S.E  | T    | P    | 95%CI        |
|-----------|---------|------|------|------|--------------|
| Constant  | 21.32   | 2.61 | 8.16 | .000 | (16.20,26.4) |
| SECS      | .330    | .038 | 8.72 | .000 | (.256,.404)  |
| CPIC      | .015    | .030 | 8.72 | .003 | (-0.43,0.74) |

Table 5 indicated that the social emotional competency and perceived inter-parental conflict play a 10.3% role in the variation of psychological flexibility among students. Value of beta (.330) shows that social emotional competency has positive correlation with psychological flexibility and there is significant negative relationship between perceived inter-parental conflict and psychological flexibility ( $p\text{-value} = .000$ ). Moreover, value of beta for perceived inter-parental conflict (.015) shows that perceived inter-parental conflict has negative correlation with psychological flexibility as  $p\text{-value}$  (.003) indicated.

**Table 6**

*Moderating Effect of Psychological Flexibility in the relation between SEC and CPIC among Students (N=1000)*

| Variables                   | B    | S.E   | T     | p   |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|-------|-----|
| Constant                    |      | 2.610 | 8.169 | .00 |
| Social emotional competency | .019 | .030  | .520  | .00 |
| SECS X AAQ-II               | .311 | 0.38  | 8.72  | .00 |

**Model 1:**  $R^2 = .103$ ,  $F = 57.36$ ,  $df1=2$ ,  $df2=997$ ,  $p=.00$

Table 6 indicated that psychological flexibility played a significant moderating role in the relationship between social emotional competency and psychological flexibility ( $F(57.36) = 390699$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Findings revealed that both the predictive variables as well as their interaction had a significant effect among students.

**Discussion**

The current study focuses the children experiences related to their familial aspects of lives. Through the sample of 1000 students (boys = 500, girls=500) with age range of 11 to 17 years from government and private schools, study highlighted the importance of positive experiences related to inter- parental relationship in the development of their own social and emotional aspect of personality. Study further explored the role of well-developed social emotional component in increasing their psychological flexibility which later helps them to adapt in the society more effectively.

Results indicated significant relationship among social emotional competency, perceived inter-parental conflict and psychological flexibility in children. Davies et al., (2018) reported that when children perceived conflicting relationship between their parents, it triggers different types of social issues in their own lives. Similarly, Butt et al. (2014) reported that experience of inter-personal conflicts in their parental relationship not only causes social problems in the children’ behaviors but it also hinders in their healthy emotional regulations. They further elaborated that such type of negative experiences in children’s live can lead towards mental health issues among children and become risk for their future lives. Harold and Sellers (2018) also confirmed that children’ emotional, social, behavioral and academic are the domains which can show adverse effect in their future life in reaction to parental conflicting relationship. Hess (2022) reported that when children experience increased inter-parental conflict their emotional development effects adversely and their own social emotional behaviors become impaired.

While relating the phenomena with Pakistani culture, generally the influence of extended families is playing rule in inter-parental conflicts and children are not getting enough space and cannot develop secure emotional attachment with their parents, hence their negative experiences set a negative stage for their social and emotional competent behavior in future. Children’ behaviors such as empathy, self- regulation and adaptive coping behaviors undermine because of their insecure emotional experiences. Some time they start coping their parental conflicting styles in their own social behaviors.

Psychological Flexibility is one of the phenomena which enables a child to function actively according to the situation and adapt with the requirements in a way that results the purposeful behavior. This psychological flexibility is strongly effected by his abilities to manage his emotions, understands other emotional perspectives and regulate his own responsible decisions and social emotional competencies. In case of adverse inter-parental conflicting experiences, children social emotional competencies cannot be developed or flourished hence he becomes psychologically inflexible. Thus psychological inflexible behaviors hinder his social emotional adjustments and adapted behaviors in society. Results of the current study also indicated that children social emotional competency is positively associated with their psychological flexibility but perceived inter-parental conflicts negatively correlates with social emotional competency and psychological flexibility hence damage their positive competencies and skills. Giani et al. (2025) reported that



children living in families where they experience high level of inter-parental conflicts, their own psychological difficulties arise and they tend to develop psychologically mal-adapted behaviors. Their psychologically flexible behaviors start impairing

The findings revealed that adolescents living in a family environment characterized by high levels of perceived inter-parental conflicts exhibit a wide spectrum of psychological difficulties, either emotional or behavioral, partially mediated by their psychological inflexibility (Giani et al., 2025). Kausar et al., (2022) reported that there is strong negative correlation between children' perception of inter-parental conflicts and their psychological needs. As a result of victim of parental conflicts, they, fails to achieve psychological autonomy, understanding of other emotional perspective and social emotional competencies.

Study has some limitations as the sample is only collected from a small region, hence findings cannot be generalized. Sample form other cities of Pakistan may enhance the results reliability and generalizability. Based on the findings of the current study, counseling programs for parents as well as for children may be planned. Parental awareness sessions on importance of their inter-parental harmony for their children' social, psychological and behavioral competencies are the need of time.

## **Conclusion**

Research on perceived inter-parental conflict, social-emotional competency, and psychological flexibility is significant because it provides insights into the complex interplay between family dynamics and individual well-being. This information can guide behaviors, policies, and interventions that promote improved mental health outcomes for children and teenagers. Strong social-emotional learners handle difficulties well and report fewer negative outcomes from parent-child disputes. Even in demanding familial settings, psychological adaptability helps children' preserve emotional equilibrium.

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