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Examining Parent-Child Conflict: A Structural Model for High School Students in Isfahan

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The primary objective of the present study was to formulate and empirically assess a model delineating the antecedents and consequences of conflict between parents and children.

Methods: The methodological framework employed was a multivariate correlational approach utilizing structural equation modeling techniques. The population of interest comprised all high school students residing in Isfahan, Iran. From this demographic, a sample of 320 students was extracted through a multi-stage cluster sampling methodology. The instruments employed in the research encompassed the Parent-Child Conflict Questionnaire, the Parental Conflict Scale, the Electronic Media Use Questionnaire, the Emotional Security Scale, the Children's Depression Inventory, the Internalizing Problems Questionnaire, and the Aggression Questionnaire. The proposed model underwent evaluation via structural equation modeling, leveraging the capabilities of SPSS and AMOS version 23 software.

Results: The findings revealed a direct influence of parental conflict and electronic media utilization on parent-child conflict, as well as a direct correlation of parent-child conflict with emotional security, depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggression; furthermore, emotional security was found to have a direct impact on depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggression. Additionally, the results indicated that parent-child conflict exerts an indirect influence on depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggression through the mediating role of emotional security.

Conclusions: Consequently, the enhancement of parental relationships coupled with the regulation of adolescents' electronic media consumption has the potential to mitigate parent-child conflict; in turn, such a reduction in parent-child conflict may lead to a decrease in depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggression among adolescents.

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Introduction

Adolescence is marked by a diminished dependence on parental figures, augmented engagement with peers and educators, a profound inclination towards self-articulation, and heightened behavioral autonomy alongside psychological independence. During this critical developmental phase, adolescents exhibit heightened susceptibility to psychological disorders and behavioral complications attributable to swift physical, psychological, and sociocultural transformations. Given that adolescents are in a state of increased vulnerability to mental health issues, the exacerbation of risk factors during this developmental stage can significantly impede healthy maturation (Aburezeq & Kasik, 2021). A pivotal factor that mental health professionals underscore in the emergence of psychological disorders and behavioral issues in adolescents is the discord between parents and children.

Parent-child conflict is defined as the discordance and opposition between parents and their offspring, characterized by the incompatibility of perspectives, objectives, and behaviors that are mutually antagonistic, arising from competing interests and divergences in aims and perceptions (Bakhshaei & Aazadi, 2020). In essence, parent-child conflict is employed to depict the evolutionary discord stemming from disparities in optimal parental investment in their child as perceived by both parents and children. Children predominantly encounter conflict with their parents when their fundamental needs, instincts, and aspirations remain unfulfilled (Ardyan et al., 2023). Additionally, the divergent values, expectations, inherent rights, and varied experiences of both parents and children contribute to the emergence of parent-child conflict (Sparkman, 2012). Nevertheless, the majority of familial conflicts that transpire between children and parents can be attributed to insufficient negotiation and dialogue competencies among family members, disagreements concerning rules and responsibilities, variances in values, inadequate problem-solving capabilities, substandard communication skills, distorted cognitive interpretations, deficiencies in the capacity to comprehend others' viewpoints, and a lack of adequate proficiency in managing anger, decision-making, and assertiveness (Aburezeq & Kasik, 2021). Moreover, parent-child conflict within the familial context can either be detrimental or beneficial. Such discord is deemed destructive when it precipitates anxiety in both parents and children, engenders violence and social turmoil, diminishes children's self-esteem, fosters social anxiety, and leads to a decline in children's adaptability within educational settings (Sparkman, 2012). Conversely,

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parent-child conflict may also possess constructive attributes, facilitating family members' self-awareness, enhancing their understanding of the diverse characteristics of others, identifying communication barriers within relationships, and bolstering their resolve and motivation to address these issues (Ardyan et al., 2023).

A salient factor contributing to parent-child conflict is parental discord. Parental conflict represents a significant adverse occurrence that may manifest within parental relationships, characterized by disagreements or aggression between parents concerning familial matters (Lu et al., 2020). There exists a plethora of contentions regarding the relationship between interparental conflict and parent-child conflict. Certain scholars assert a positive correlation between parental conflict and parent-child conflict, while others advocate for a negative association between the two phenomena. Based on the spillover hypothesis, parental discord can engender substantial emotional distress in both parents, thereby exhausting their emotional reserves and diminishing their sensitivity to the needs of their offspring. This discord consequently undermines parental social support for their children, thereby jeopardizing the parent-child relationship (Wang et al., 2022). However, in accordance with the compensation hypothesis, a negative correlation may exist between parental conflict and parent-child conflict. Specifically, in families characterized by elevated levels of parental discord, parents often endeavor to compensate by satisfying their emotional needs through their interactions with their children. In light of this, parental conflict may paradoxically fortify the bond between parents and children. Nevertheless, the findings of the majority of studies suggest that parents enmeshed in hostile and maladaptive relationships exhibit greater aggression towards their children (Sherrill et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018).

There exists substantial empirical evidence indicating that adolescents residing in families marked by interparental conflict are at an escalated risk for the development of significant mental health issues and maladjustment (Ai et al., 2017; Harold & Sellers, 2018; Li et al., 2016; Xuan et al., 2018).

Another determinant that may influence parent-child conflict is the engagement with electronic media (Geng et al., 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2019). The term "use of electronic media" refers to an individual’s interaction with electronic devices, including mobile phones and computers (Clifford et al., 2020). As information technology has advanced rapidly, the popularity of electronic devices has surged. Concurrently, the captivating visual stimuli and effortless auditory elements of

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electronic media captivate the attention of children and adolescents, thereby heightening their exposure to such media (Brushe et al., 2022). Consequently, the engagement with electronic media is regarded as a risk factor for precipitating internal challenges in children and adolescents (Hinkley et al., 2014). Brunborg et al. (2014) identified that children exhibiting excessive addiction to video games demonstrate heightened emotional sensitivity and are more susceptible to experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. The profound immersion of children in virtual environments can supplant their engagement in societal and real-life interactions, resulting in feelings of isolation from interpersonal relationships and subsequently increasing the likelihood of social withdrawal among children and adolescents (Elsayed, 2021).

Parent-child conflict can yield numerous detrimental repercussions for both offspring and guardians. A significant outcome of parent-child discord is the diminished emotional security experienced by children and adolescents (Davies et al., 2023; Cheung, 2021). Emotional security constitutes a psychological state in which an individual perceives a reliable assurance of their emotional requirements being met, particularly the necessity for acceptance. The sensation of emotional security is contingent upon affection and empathy, acceptance, as well as the stability of interpersonal relationships (Rice et al., 2023). It is imperative to acknowledge that vulnerability is a prerequisite for the commencement of the intimacy process, and that vulnerability situated within a soothing and reassuring context catalyzes the development of emotional security (Yoo & Córdova, 2023). Córdova and Scott (2001), in an effort to enhance the empirical observation of emotional security within research frameworks, endeavored to articulate it in behavioral terminology. These emotions are intrinsic experiences that are gradually elicited through intimacy and emotional responsiveness between individuals, culminating in a sensation of tranquility and emotional security. Should the cumulative experiences within an intimate relationship be substantial, emotional security is likely to subsequently emerge (Manual, 2023).

Additional repercussions of parent-child discord for adolescents encompass the manifestation of depressive symptoms and internalizing difficulties (Lougheed et al., 2022; Cheung, 2021; Schudlich et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2016). Symptoms of depression comprise a spectrum of manifestations including melancholic or irritable mood, anhedonia, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, psychomotor agitation, fatigue or a deficit in energy, impaired concentration or indecisiveness, insomnia or hypersomnia, significant appetite reduction, weight loss, or a marked

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decline in activity desire, as well as diminished decision-making capacity, and suicidal ideation (Khan et al., 2020). Adolescent depression is associated with a decline in academic achievement and an escalation of risk-taking behaviors, which may culminate in suicidal tendencies. Empirical findings indicate that familial conflicts contribute to emotional development deficits during childhood and exacerbate the severity of depressive symptoms in adolescents (Smith et al., 2019). Adolescents exhibit a heightened vulnerability to internalizing issues such as anxiety and depression (Geng et al., 2023). Internalizing problems denote the internal struggles that individuals confront during social engagements, predominantly manifesting as emotional disorders like anxiety and depression, alongside difficulties in peer interactions, notably social withdrawal (Lougheed et al., 2022). Min et al. (2019) discerned those adolescents, confronted with numerous adaptive challenges, frequently internalize their difficulties, expressing them through social withdrawal. Insufficient cognitive capabilities in adolescents result in a diminished application of emotional regulation and coping strategies to manage stress, rendering them more susceptible to internalizing difficulties (Crespo et al., 2017). Consequently, maladaptive parental behaviors, characterized by hostility and punitive measures, may lead some adolescents to exhibit reduced independence, constrained attention spans, and heightened dependency, thereby potentially augmenting their vulnerability to depressive symptoms and social withdrawal (Xiao et al., 2021). Moreover, a further implication of parent-child discord is the elevation of aggressive tendencies among adolescents (Wang et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021). Aggression is conceptualized as an extensive spectrum of hostile behaviors aimed at others with the intention of inflicting harm. Such aggression may manifest in diverse modalities, encompassing physical aggression, verbal aggression, and the exhibition of anger and hostility (Wang et al., 2022). In accordance with the prevailing theoretical framework of familial dynamics, familial dysfunction, typified by marital discord and parent-child strife, heightens the propensity for various behavioral issues, including aggression (O'Hara et al., 2023). Certain empirical investigations corroborate that conflicts between parents and children engender a deficiency in communication and effective interaction, concurrently diminishing the levels of parental support and attachment. These alterations contribute to heightened psychological stressors among adolescents, subsequently amplifying the likelihood of aggressive behavior (Savage & Ellis, 2019). Additional research indicates that

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parent-child conflict may serve as a potential mediating variable for the disputes between parents and adolescent aggression (Wang et al., 2022).

Taking into account the aforementioned considerations and the detrimental ramifications that parent-child conflict inflicts upon children and adolescents, the current study endeavors to establish a model elucidating the antecedents and consequences of such conflict. Within this framework, parental discord and the engagement with electronic media are posited as precursors to parent-child conflict, while emotional security, depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggression are delineated as resultant consequences. Furthermore, it appears that parent-child conflict may exert not only a direct influence on depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggression, but also an indirect effect on these variables through the attenuation of emotional security.

Material and Methods

The architecture of the current investigation employs a correlational framework utilizing structural equation modeling, which constitutes a multivariate correlation technique. Structural equation modeling serves as an advancement of the general linear model, thereby facilitating the researcher in the simultaneous examination of a series of regression equations. The statistical population for this inquiry encompasses all second-grade high school pupils in Isfahan who were enrolled during the 2023 academic year. A total of 320 students were systematically selected as a sample from this population through a multi-stage cluster sampling approach.

Within the academic discourse surrounding structural equation modeling, numerous recommendations have been posited to ascertain an adequate sample size. For instance, Chin (1998) proposes a heuristic guideline of ten subjects per variable within the model. The minimum requisite sample size, as articulated by Anderson and Gerinberg (1988), is delineated as 150 subjects, whereas Chou and Bentler (1995) stipulate a threshold of 200 subjects. In this context, Hoyle and Kenny (1999) discovered that when the reliability of the assessments is notably high, a sample size of 50 individuals may suffice (Beshlideh, 2013).

Consequently, in the current study, accounting for the number of direct paths (13 paths), exogenous variables (2 variables), covariances (1 covariance), and error variances (9 errors), a total of 25 parameters was computed. In alignment with Kline's recommendations (Kline, 1998; cited in

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Beshlideh, 2013), a minimum of ten subjects is requisite for each calculated parameter to appropriately evaluate the model. With a sample size of the present study (320 individuals), approximately 13 subjects were allocated for each parameter, thereby affirming the sufficiency of the sample for model testing. In this investigation, 350 questionnaires were disseminated, yielding 337 returns. Among these, 17 questionnaires were dismissed due to incompleteness, resulting in a total of 320 usable questionnaires that comprised the final sample of the current study.

Measurement Instruments

Parent-Child Conflict Questionnaire: The present study employed the Parent-Child Conflict Questionnaire, constructed by Fine and Schwebel (1983), to assess parent-child conflict. This instrument contains 24 items and is utilized to evaluate the quality of parent-child interactions. Responses are quantified on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). In their research, Fine and Schwebel reported a reliability coefficient of 0.94 for conflict with fathers, 0.94 for conflict with mothers, and 0.94 for the combined measure. Parhizgar (2002) indicated a reliability coefficient for this questionnaire in his study, employing Cronbach's alpha method, with values of 0.93 for the father form and 0.92 for the mother form. In the current investigation, the reliability coefficient of this instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.89, which signifies an acceptable level of reliability for this questionnaire.

Parental Conflict Scale: In the current investigation, the Parental Conflict Scale, conceived by Grych et al. (1992), was employed to assess the dimensions of parental conflict. This instrument comprises 19 items and evaluates the frequency, intensity, and resolution of conflict. Responses are quantified utilizing a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Grych et al. (1992) indicated a reliability coefficient of this scale in their study, determined through the Cronbach's alpha method, as 0.86. Wang et al. (2021) also reported a reliability coefficient of 0.88 for this scale in their research, employing the same statistical methodology. Furthermore, Yang et al. (2018) documented a reliability coefficient of 0.81 for this scale in their investigation using the Cronbach's alpha method. According to the findings of Salavati and Shokri (2015), a significant and positive correlation was identified between the conflict characteristics and Beck's Children's Depression, thereby supporting the convergent validity of this scale. Additionally, Qarabaghi and Vaqaei (2009) assessed the reliability of this scale utilizing the Cronbach's alpha method. In the

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present study, the reliability coefficient of this instrument was calculated through the Cronbach's alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.85, which signifies an acceptable reliability level for this questionnaire.

Electronic Media Use Questionnaire: In the current study, the Electronic Media Use Questionnaire formulated by Huang et al. (2020) was utilized to evaluate electronic media utilization. This questionnaire consists of 14 items and assesses the aspects of electronic media time management, interpersonal conditions, and health implications stemming from electronic media use. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents (strongly agree) and 5 denotes (strongly disagree). Huang et al. (2020) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.82 for this questionnaire in their research using the Cronbach's alpha method. Geng et al. (2023) similarly reported a reliability coefficient of 0.90 for this instrument in their study, applying the same reliability assessment technique. In the present investigation, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was measured using the Cronbach's alpha method, resulting in a coefficient of 0.87, which indicates an acceptable reliability level for this instrument.

Emotional Security Scale: In the present investigation, the Emotional Security Scale developed by Cordova et al. (2005) was utilized to assess emotional security. This scale comprises 21 items, with responses scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cordova et al. (2005) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.84 for this scale in their study, determined through the Cronbach's alpha method. Abbas Mofrad et al. (2021) also documented a reliability coefficient of 0.88 for this scale in their research, utilizing the same methodological approach. In the current study, the reliability coefficient for this scale was computed using the Cronbach's alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.81, which indicates an acceptable reliability level for this scale.

Children's Depression Inventory (CDI): The self-administered questionnaire known as the Children's Depression Inventory was conceptualized by Kovacs and Beck (1977) for the assessment of depressive symptoms in children and adolescents within the age range of 7 to 17 years. This instrument comprises 27 items that evaluate various facets of depression, including negative mood, interpersonal difficulties, inefficacy, anhedonia, and diminished self-esteem. Responses to the items are quantified utilizing a 3-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 0 (indicating "I do everything wrong") to 2 (denoting "I do most things well"). Kovacs and Beck

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(1977) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.80 for this instrument, determined through the application of Cronbach's alpha methodology. Dehshiri et al. (2008) further substantiated the reliability of this questionnaire, achieving coefficients of 0.82 and 0.83 through both the test-retest and Cronbach's alpha methods, respectively. Mokhtarnia et al. (2018) also contributed to the literature, reporting a reliability coefficient of 0.78 derived from the Cronbach's alpha analysis. In the current investigation, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was assessed via the Cronbach's alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.86, which signifies an acceptable level of reliability for this instrument.

Internalizing Problems Questionnaire (IPQ): For the purposes of the current study, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, as developed by Aaro et al. (2022), was employed to assess internalizing issues. This questionnaire consists of 21 items and evaluates three primary dimensions: externalizing problems, internalizing problems, and social behaviors. Responses are rated on a 3-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (for "not true") to 2 (for "certainly true"). Aaro et al. (2022) conducted an evaluation of the construct validity of the questionnaire through factor analysis, yielding validity indices of 0.83 for the externalizing problems scale, 0.80 for the internalizing problems scale, 0.77 for the social behaviors scale, and 0.83 for the overall questionnaire. Additionally, they calculated internal consistency reliability via Cronbach's alpha coefficient, reporting values of 0.72 for the externalizing problems scale, 0.69 for the internalizing problems scale, 0.68 for the social behaviors scale, and 0.81 for the total questionnaire. Geng et al. (2023) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.77 for this questionnaire, established through the Cronbach's alpha approach. Mahboobi et al. (2015) utilized both Cronbach's alpha and split-half methodologies to ascertain the reliability of this instrument among students, obtaining coefficients of 0.81 and 0.88 for the total questionnaire, respectively. Moreover, the correlation between this questionnaire and measures of children's depression was determined to be 0.80 and 0.85, respectively, thereby affirming the convergent validity of this instrument. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was derived using the Cronbach's alpha method, resulting in a coefficient of 0.80, which indicates an acceptable reliability for this instrument.

Aggression Questionnaire: In the current investigation, the Aggression Questionnaire formulated by Buss and Perry (1992) was employed to quantify levels of aggression. This instrument comprises 29 items and assesses four distinct dimensions: physical aggression, verbal aggression,

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anger, and hostility. The responses are evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Chen and Qin (2020) documented the reliability coefficient of this instrument in their study, employing the Cronbach's alpha method, which resulted in a coefficient of 0.89. Similarly, Xie et al. (2020) reported the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire in their research, also utilizing the Cronbach's alpha method, yielding a coefficient of 0.87. The reliability of the Aggression Questionnaire within the Iranian context was assessed by Mohammadi (2006) through three different methodologies: Cronbach's alpha, test-retest, and split-half, which produced coefficients of 0.89, 0.78, and 0.73, respectively. Furthermore, the validity of this questionnaire was scrutinized through the lenses of convergent validity, concurrent validity, and factor analysis. The convergent validity of the Aggression Questionnaire was substantiated by calculating the correlation coefficients of the subscales with each other and with the overall questionnaire, which ranged from 0.37 to 0.78 and were statistically significant. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha method was employed to assess the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire, resulting in a coefficient of 0.83, indicative of an acceptable level of reliability for this instrument.

Results

Before conducting the main analysis, several preliminary analyses were performed to gain preliminary insights regarding the data. The descriptive findings, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score of the research variables, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive findings of the research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Parent-Child conflict	66.05	18.80	26	106
Parental conflict	53.01	8.25	21	67
Electronic media use	39.84	10.92	15	66
Emotional security	49.24	18.74	22	96
Depression symptoms	17.45	7.60	6	51
Internalizing problems	22.66	10.01	4	42
Aggression	75.64	21.25	41	120
Physical aggression	23.11	6.58	11	38
Verbal aggression	12.84	4.51	5	22
Anger	17.13	7.14	7	32
Hostility	22.55	9.46	9	38

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As the results presented in Table 1 show, the mean and standard deviation of the research variables are as follows: parent-child conflict (66.05 and 18.80), parental conflict (53.01 and 8.25), electronic media use (39.84 and 10.92), emotional security (49.24 and 18.74), depression symptoms (17.45 and 7.60), internalizing problems (22.66 and 10.01), and aggression (75.64 and 21.25). The mean and standard deviation of the aggression subscales are shown in Table 1. The correlation coefficients between the research variables are shown in Table 2.

As the results presented in Table 2 show, the correlation coefficients between parental conflict and parent-child conflict (r = 0.36), electronic media use and parent-child conflict (r = 0.36), parent-child conflict and emotional security (r = -0.41), parent-child conflict and depression symptoms (r = 0.31), parent-child conflict and internalizing problems (r = 0.34), parent-child conflict and aggression (r = 0.44), emotional security and depression symptoms (r = -0.32), emotional security and internalizing problems (r = -0.40), and emotional security and aggression (r = -0.37) are all significant. Other correlation coefficients are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients of the research variables

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Parent-Child conflict	-									
2	Parental conflict	0.36**	-								
3	Electronic media use	0.36**	0.29**	-							
4	Emotional security	-0.41**	-0.25**	-0.32**	-						
5	Depression symptoms	0.31**	0.19**	0.15**	-0.32**	-					
6	Internalizing problems	0.34**	0.25**	0.25**	-0.40**	0.22**	-				
7	Aggression	0.44**	0.25**	-0.39**	-0.37**	0.22**	0.34**	-			
8	Physical aggression	0.39**	0.28**	0.31**	-0.27**	0.28**	0.26**	0.75**	-		
9	Verbal aggression	0.36**	0.22**	0.29**	-0.33**	0.16**	0.32**	0.68**	0.44**	-	
10	Anger	0.35**	0.12**	0.30**	-0.30**	0.12**	0.18**	0.77**	0.46**	0.43**	-
11	Hostility	0.29**	0.16**	0.29**	-0.26**	0.13**	0.29**	0.82**	0.42**	0.42**	0.45**

To test the proposed model of the study, the structural equation modeling method was used. The fit of the proposed model with the data based on the goodness-of-fit indices, including chi-square as an absolute fit index, is reported in Table 3. The larger the chi-square value from zero, the less the fit of the model. A significant chi-square indicates a significant difference between the assumed

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and observed covariances. However, since the chi-square formula includes the sample size, its value is inflated for large samples and usually becomes statistically significant. For this reason, many researchers examine chi-square relative to its degrees of freedom (relative chi-square) (Colquitt, 2001). In the relative chi-square index, values close to 2 and less are considered as a conventional criterion for model fit. Also, other important indices such as the Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), Bentler-Bonett Index or Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are also reported in Table 3. In these indices, a fit of 0.9 and above is considered acceptable. Another suitable index is the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) [9], based on which a value of less than 0.08 is acceptable, and for very good models, 0.05 or less is considered (Breso et al., 2007).

Table 3. Fit of the proposed model with the data based on goodness-of-fit indices

Fit indices	x^2	Df	x^2/Df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
Proposed model	81.560	31	2.631	0.951	0.913	0.889	0.927	0.928	0.894	0.072

As the results presented in Table 3 indicate, all the fit indices, including the relative chi-square ($\chi 2/df = 2.63$), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI = 0.95), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI = 0.91), Bentler-Bonett Index or Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.89), Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.93), Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.93), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.89), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.07), show that all indices have a good fit with the data. Table 4 shows the parameters related to the direct effects of the variables on each other in the proposed research model.

Table 4. Parameters of direct effects between research variables in the proposed research model

Paths	Beta	B	Std. Error	C.R	P
From parental conflict to parent-child conflict	0.275	0.627	0.119	5.271	0.001
From electronic media use to parent-child conflict	0.283	0.488	0.090	5.420	0.001
From Parent-Child Conflict to Emotional Security	-0.412	-0.411	0.051	-8.079	0.001
From Parent-Child Conflict to Depressive Symptoms	0.219	0.088	0.023	3.844	0.001
From Parent-Child Conflict to Internalizing Problems	0.217	0.115	0.029	3.932	0.001
From Parent-Child Conflict to Aggression	0.414	0.098	0.016	6.238	0.001
From Emotional Security to Depressive Symptoms	-0.230	-0.093	0.023	-4.038	0.001
From Emotional Security to Internalizing Problems	-0.308	-0.165	0.029	-5.592	0.001
From Emotional Security to Aggression	-0.268	-0.064	0.015	-4.241	0.001
From Aggression to Physical Aggression	0.678	1.000	-	-	-
From Aggression to Verbal Aggression	0.661	0.669	0.072	9.314	0.001
From Aggression to Anger	0.681	1.089	0.115	9.502	0.001
From Aggression to Hostility	0.629	1.335	0.149	8.987	0.001

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As the results presented in Table 4 show, the coefficients of all direct paths are significant. Furthermore, as the results indicate, the coefficients of aggression subscales in the proposed research model are relatively high and significant for the sample. In this model, the subscales of physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility play a significant role in measuring the construct of aggression with factor loadings of 0.68, 0.66, 0.68, and 0.63, respectively. As the results indicate, all direct paths are significant. This means that parental conflict and electronic media use have a significant direct effect on parent-child conflict; parent-child conflict has a significant direct effect on emotional security, depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression; and emotional security has a significant direct effect on depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression. An underlying assumption of the proposed model in this study was the presence of indirect or mediating paths. To determine the significance of the mediating relationships, the bootstrapping method was used with the Preacher and Hayes (2008. Table 5 shows the bootstrap results for the mediating paths of the proposed model in this study.

Table 5. Bootstrap results for intermediate paths

Paths	Data	Lower limit	Upper limit	P
Parent-child conflict → emotional security → depressive symptoms	0.0947	0.0499	0.1466	0.001
Parent-child conflict → emotional security → internalizing problems	0.1269	0.0706	0.1921	0.001
Parent-child conflict → emotional security → aggression	0.0943	0.0467	0.1477	0.001

As the results presented in Table 5 show, for the variable of emotional security as a mediator in the relationship between parent-child conflict with depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression, the lower and upper limits do not include zero. Therefore, these mediating relationships are significant, and parent-child conflict has a significant effect on depression symptoms, internalizing problems, and aggression through emotional security.

Discussion

The objective of the current investigation was to evaluate a theoretical framework regarding the precursors and repercussions of conflicts between parents and children. To achieve this goal, parental discord and the utilization of electronic media were identified as precursors of parent-child conflict, while emotional security, symptoms of depression, internalizing difficulties, and aggressive behaviors were recognized as its repercussions. The findings

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indicated that both parental discord and the use of electronic media exert a significant direct influence on the dynamics of parent-child conflict. This observation aligns with the outcomes of previous empirical investigations (Li et al., 2016; Sherrill et al., 2017; Ai et al., 2017; Xuan et al., 2018; Harold & Sellers, 2018; Zhang et al., 2017; Sadeghi et al., 2019; Geng et al., 2023). In elucidating this observation, it is posited that, according to the spillover hypothesis, interparental conflict engenders emotional turmoil for both parents, thereby depleting their emotional reserves and diminishing their responsiveness to their children's needs. This reduction in parental social support can thereby jeopardize the integrity of the parent-child relationship (Wang et al., 2022). Conversely, children who engage with electronic media more frequently exhibit heightened emotional sensitivity; moreover, their extensive engagement in virtual play predisposes them to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. The immersion of children in digital environments may supplant their involvement in authentic social interactions, consequently fostering feelings of disconnection from interpersonal relationships, which in turn augments the propensity for social withdrawal among children, leading to various parental challenges and escalating parent-child conflict (Geng et al., 2023). As the empirical findings elucidated, parent-child discord exerts a substantial direct influence on emotional security, symptoms of depression, internalizing difficulties, and aggressive behaviors. This conclusion aligns with the outcomes of previous scholarly investigations (Cheung et al., 2016; Schudlich et al., 2019; Cheung, 2021; Xu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Lougheed et al., 2022; Davies et al., 2023). In elucidating this observation, it may be posited that when parents engage in profound discord with their offspring, confrontations and disputes between them proliferate, thereby leading children to perceive their familial relationships as unstable. Under such circumstances, the fulfillment of emotional necessities (notably the need for affection) and the individual’s sense of security diminish, resulting in a diminished perception of emotional security. Conversely, when parent-child conflict is minimal, the child experiences an enhanced sense of emotional security and is more apt to perceive love, empathy, acceptance, and stability within their parental relationships, thereby feeling emotionally secure in a serene and reassuring environment (Davies et al., 2023). When parents

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exhibit support towards their children and the parent-child relationship is characterized by security, the incidence of depression in children is markedly lower compared to scenarios marked by familial tension and discord in the child-parent relationship. Depression encompasses a broad spectrum of manifestations, arising from a multitude of factors, including elements within the home environment that contribute to the child's depressive symptoms: disputes between parents, the dynamics between parents and the child, a deficiency in familial closeness, the extent of parental encouragement, parental expectations, socio-economic challenges, etc., alongside the sense of security within the home environment (Schudlich et al., 2019), which constitutes a significant factor in the parent-child relational dynamics.

The caliber of familial relationships may be comparatively diminished in households where parent-child conflicts are prevalent, intense, coercive, and unresolved. Such families, characterized by conflicted relationships, may exhibit deficient communication and problem-solving competencies, which are correlated with the child's internalizing difficulties. Conflicted relationships may contribute to the emergence of internalizing issues in children, as a hostile familial context may instigate or exacerbate such problems. Internalizing difficulties can manifest as irritability, which may subsequently increase the likelihood of contentious interpersonal interactions (Lougheed et al., 2022).

Based on the principles of attachment theory, it can be posited that parents engage in both emotional communication and exchange with the child through various verbal and nonverbal modalities. The primary emphasis of this theoretical framework is on the capabilities of parents and their responsiveness to the child's needs, which encompass security, warmth, and sensitivity. Consequently, parents are able to cultivate a healthy and high-quality interaction with their child by fostering a nurturing relationship characterized by verbal and nonverbal expressions of acceptance, demonstrating responsiveness and commitment to the child's needs and values, employing a positive and emotionally resonant tone, and eschewing behaviors such as humiliation, overt criticism, and blaming the child. When a child perceives that they are understood, they experience a profound sense of belonging and affection, which in turn deepens their love for their parents; they internalize their parents' values and norms, articulate their feelings and challenges, and seek guidance and encouragement from their parents in

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situations of conflict. Furthermore, in the context of close interactions between parents and children, the child's behavior becomes readily observable, thereby enabling parents to gain a deeper understanding of their child's behaviors and emotions, facilitating the provision of necessary guidance when required, while concurrently reducing the likelihood of aggression in these children (Xu et al., 2021).

Moreover, drawing from the framework of observational learning theory, it can be asserted that in instances of conflict within the family environment, particularly between parents who exhibit aggression towards one another, children subsequently acquire and emulate these behaviors, resulting in increased aggression in their interpersonal relationships (Wang et al., 2022).

The results indicate that emotional security exerts a significant direct influence on symptoms of depression, internalizing issues, and aggressive behavior. This finding aligns with the outcomes of prior research (Keller et al., 2011; Davies et al., 2023; Schudlich et al., 2019; Cheung, 2021). In elucidating this finding, it can be articulated that individuals endowed with emotional security possess inner feelings and experiences that have been cultivated over time through intimacy and emotional responsiveness; thus, they experience a sense of calmness, and their levels of depression are markedly lower compared to individuals with diminished emotional security. When the cumulative experiences over time are enriched by an intimate relationship, emotional security is fostered, and the onset of depression is mitigated (Manual, 2023). Individuals who possess emotional security confront their feelings with ease and are less likely to encounter difficulties in peer interactions, such as isolation, during social engagements; in other words, they tend not to internalize their problems but instead articulate them with others. Regardless of the level of distress these individuals may experience, they do not disregard their emotions and possess adequate cognitive capabilities that facilitate the development of emotion regulation and coping strategies, rendering them less susceptible to the manifestation of internalizing issues (Cheung, 2021).

When an individual possesses the relative autonomy to attain a state of mental tranquility, which is derived from their assurance in fulfilling their needs and aspirations, coupled with the

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certainty that they are not under threat from others; the fulfillment of personal needs and desires engenders a sense of self-esteem, self-assurance, self-confidence, and social acceptance. Each of the emotional, cognitive, and expressive needs is regarded as a significant value, and it concurrently enhances the individual's capabilities in confronting and resolving challenges as well as managing aggressive behaviors (Davies et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that parent-child conflict exerts an indirect influence on the manifestation of depressive symptoms, internalizing issues, and aggressive behaviors through the lens of emotional security. In elucidating this observation, it can be articulated that when parents demonstrate a lack of support towards their offspring and the parent-child dynamic lacks security, in comparison to scenarios devoid of familial tension and conflict, where the child's relationship with their parents is harmonious and characterized by emotional security; the attainment of emotional security is facilitated through a rigorous process, leading to reduced levels of depression among children.

Dysfunctional familial relationships may undermine children's propensity for effective communication and problem-solving competencies; however, within children who harbor expectations pertaining to themselves and their relationships, along with distinct patterns of early relational experiences that foster specific engagement approaches with individuals and objects, and who have developed the capacity to experience emotional security, there is a reduced incidence of internalizing problems. Individuals possessing the trait of emotional security exhibit a greater tolerance for frustration. This trait encapsulates an individual's response to the pressures exerted on their desires and the impediments that arise against their aspirations; thus, an individual endowed with elevated emotional security is more likely to articulate their issues and exhibit fewer internalizing problems. Families characterized by heightened parent-child conflict exhibit diminished capability in imparting appropriate social behaviors to their children. Furthermore, children raised in such environments are more inclined to perceive interparental interactions as suitable behavioral models for their interactions with others. Consequently, in familial settings where relational quality is marred by negativity and conflict, the discord permeates to the child and influences their behaviors, resulting in adjustment difficulties. Numerous behavioral disorders are prevalent in families

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where an aggressive atmosphere prevails, and communications are perceived as threatening to children. However, in instances where these children lack the requisite emotional security, the conflict escalates, leading to an increase in aggressive manifestations.

One of the significant limitations of this research was that the data collection was exclusively reliant on the perceptions of adolescents, without the inclusion of parents as respondents; furthermore, it is plausible that additional mediators may emerge from contextual factors (such as institutional frameworks and policy environments) rather than solely from intrapersonal or interpersonal dynamics; in light of the findings acquired, it is recommended that subsequent studies incorporate these variables to assess internalization, externalization, and issues concerning youth health. Additionally, the critical importance of imparting knowledge to parents regarding the impacts of optimal parenting styles can mitigate the risks to youth mental health stemming from parent-child discord and has various implications for mental health professionals, coaches, and social workers who play a pivotal role in facilitating effective parenting practices to promote the mental health and emotional well-being of adolescents.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of University of Hormozgan.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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