

Relationship Between Parental Conflict Styles and Social Development of Adolescents in Selected Public Secondary Schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: The study examined how parental conflict styles influence adolescent social development in public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya. The target population was 5400 students from five public secondary schools in Kiambu Township. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 373 students through questionnaires and analyzed in SPSS. Regression results showed that validating conflict styles positively enhanced adolescent social development, while hostile styles had harmful effects. Avoiding and volatile styles showed no significant impact. The study concluded that validating approaches are beneficial, hostile ones are detrimental, and the other two have minimal influence. It recommended that family interventions promote validating conflict styles while discouraging hostile or volatile ones.

KEYWORDS: Parental Conflict Styles, Social Development, Adolescents, Public Secondary Schools, Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings go through major physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes throughout this crucial stage of human development. Significant social changes occur during adolescence, particularly in respect to how people manage their relationships with their parents, friends, romantic partners, and sexuality (Bala et al., 2019). The youth begin to develop their own values, beliefs, and sense of self during these periods. Adolescents actively shape their identities throughout this time, and these processes are closely linked to cognitive development and frequently involve stages of experimentation and self-discovery. Additionally, it is a crucial time in the development of a person's unique character and their following social development in youth (Bhuiyan, 2022). This steady acquisition of abilities, information, and behaviors that allow adolescents to interact with their peers and the larger social environment is known as adolescent social development (Sundram, 2020). Learning critical values, behaviors, and emotional control is part of this life-changing process, which eventually shapes their personality and capacity for constructive interpersonal interaction (Sundram, 2020). Additionally, it includes learning how to resolve conflicts, control one's emotions, and behave in a prosocial manner (Malik & Marwaha, 2022). The results of recent studies demonstrate that the cultural environment in which teenagers are raised shapes their worldview in addition to outside influences (Andrews et al., 2021).

Adolescents' general well-being is influenced by social development, which has a significant impact on how well they adjust to their families, communities, and educational institutions (Wanjao et al., 2023). Teenagers' ability to control their emotions, build positive connections, communicate effectively, and engage in prosocial activity are all influenced by their social development (O'Hara et al., 2021). Adolescent violence, antisocial behavior, and poor peer relationships have all increased in recent years (Karanja, 2021). Along with depression, there have also been more instances of psychological issues and emotional disengagement (Cao et al., 2022; Jeon et al., 2021). Low academic performance and emotional resilience have been linked to these social challenges, which in turn has been linked to mental health issues.

It is essential crucial to acknowledge that parental conflict in the household setting greatly influences how teenagers develop socially (Hess, 2022). The author makes the point that parents have a significant influence on how adolescents develop their values and character. As teenagers get older, they observe and absorb their parents' adult lifestyle model firsthand. Although it is well recognized that there are other factors influencing teenage social development besides the family environment, it is also widely acknowledged that parental conflict resolution has a significant impact (Njeru et al. 2021).

Whether they are angry, avoidant, explosive, or validating, parental conflict styles can either support or impede a child's social development. In the Kenyan setting, there is, however, no empirical data relating parental conflict types to the social development of adolescents. With a focus on public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya, this study aimed to examine the connection

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between parental conflict styles and adolescents' social development. Onsando et al. (2021) looked into the relationship between parental conflicts and juvenile criminality, although they only used data from young offenders in a correctional facility in Kenya. Wangila et al. (2023) evaluated the efficacy of intervention techniques and investigated the underlying causes of adolescent social health problems in Kenya. Their research focused on psychological challenges faced by Trans Nzoia County secondary school students. They did not specifically look at how various parental conflict types impact teenage social functioning, even though their findings connected these difficulties to dysfunctional homes marked by parental conflict. In order to close this gap, the current study examines different parental conflict styles, including avoiding, hostile, volatile, and validating, in order to better understand how they affect the social development of adolescents in a few public secondary schools in Kiambu, Kenya.

The social issues that teenagers face have been linked to a growing collapse of family structures (Andrews et al., 2021). Conflicts among families may arise as a result of the increased stress parents frequently face (Hosking, 2023). The increasing number of divorces, separations, and single-parent homes is indicative of this (Trivedi & Mohanty, 2019). As a result, a lot of kids are probably going to see their parents fighting (Awino et al., 2022). It is imperative that academics and researchers take the initiative to address these urgent issues by offering creative solutions that support children in overcoming these hardships and promote more positive family relationships.

The goal of the Kenyan educational system is to raise citizens who are independent and motivated by their values (Heto et al., 2020). This puts a lot of pressure on educators to use creative teaching strategies and to be knowledgeable about the local context. Teachers and other stakeholders can use this research to assist adolescents deal with the difficulties of parental conflict by offering them focused advice and support. They support students' overall growth in this way, which is consistent with the goals of the updated curriculum. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between parental conflict styles and the social development of adolescents, focusing on public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple studies reveal that parental conflict styles differ and that the difference have implications on adolescent social development. Ruturi (2019) found that volatile parental conflict styles contributed to antisocial behaviour, a finding consistent with Mihret et al. (2019) and Krisnana et al. (2019), who reported that conflict styles negatively affect discipline and academic performance. Similarly, Kuppens and Ceulemans (2018) highlighted the harmful effects of volatile parenting, which aligned with Dieme et al. (2021) and Yan et al. (2019), while Hosokawa and Katsura (2019) and Odudu et al. (2020) showed that the effects of conflict vary depending on gender. In addition, Laskoki et al. (2022), Hess (2022) and Siswandana et al. (2019), found that poor parental communication predicted delinquency, further confirming that conflict styles and communication breakdowns harm adolescent adjustment. These studies underscore that unresolved, hostile, or volatile conflict styles consistently produce negative adolescent outcomes.

Extant literature coalesce around the idea that emotionally supportive and validating parental communication fosters healthier adolescent development. Jorgensen-Well et al. (2021) and Huang et al. (2021) emphasized that open, supportive communication promotes positive attachment and identity development, while Kapetanovic and Skoog (2021) and Usonwu et al. (2021), highlighted that adolescents thrive in emotionally warm and respectful family environments. Ndugga et al. (2023) and Millanzi et al. (2023) also confirmed that approachable parenting and effective communication improved adolescent openness and responsible behaviour. Lorence et al. (2019), Lim (2020), and Tomlinson et al. (2023) added that indulgent parenting styles, when paired with emotional connection, reduced maladjustment. Similarly, Anyanwu et al. (2020), Dolev-Cohen and Ricon (2020), and Yazdi-Feyzabadi et al. (2019) linked permissive or conflictual parenting to risky sexual and drug-related behaviours. Overall, the body of research agrees that while hostile and volatile conflict styles are harmful, validating and supportive communication strengthens adolescent social and emotional well-being.

There is a consensus in literature that ineffective or unhealthy communication within the family negatively affects children's and adolescents' well-being. Coe et al. (2020) demonstrated that indirect or misdirected communication styles increase stress, externalizing behaviours, peer rejection, and victimization among children, a finding supported by Izzulhaq and Simanjuntak (2022) and Smith et al. (2019), who linked weak parental communication to poor social outcomes and adolescent depression. Similarly, Kimani (2019) found a strong correlation between parental conflict and alcohol misuse among youth in Nairobi, echoing Zuquette et al. (2019) and Hurley et al. (2019), who argued that conflictual parenting has a greater effect on binge drinking than parental alcohol consumption itself. Together, these studies emphasize that unresolved conflict and dysfunctional communication in families undermine children's emotional, social, and behavioural adjustment.

While parenting styles matter, their influence on specific risk behaviours may vary in strength. Chigbu et al. (2022) revealed only a weak positive relationship between parenting styles and adolescent sexual promiscuity, noting that other

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contextual or social factors likely play a stronger role. This conclusion aligns with Widman et al. (2019) and Smetana and Rote (2019), who found that active parental guidance promotes social adjustment. The collective evidence underscores that parental conflict, neglect, and poor communication consistently elevate risks such as depression, substance abuse, and social maladjustment, whereas supportive and involved parenting can serve as a protective factor. However, variations in strength of association across contexts highlight the need for further research to unpack the complex interplay between parenting, communication, and adolescent risk behaviours.

Duda and Podkowińska (2024) and Birchall and Choudhry (2022) are in concert that parental silence negatively affects children's development, particularly in undermining self-esteem and overall well-being. While both highlight the dangers of unaddressed issues between parents and children, Duda and Podkowińska (2024) emphasize the additional risks posed by modern digital exposure. The alignment between these two studies strengthens the argument that silence in parenting is detrimental, though the reliance on combined data by Birchall and Choudhry (2022) contrasts with the use of primary data in the present study, indicating some methodological divergence. Similarly, Nyabuto (2019), Cao et al. (2023), and Bonnaire et al. (2019) agree that parental communication styles directly shape adolescent development, though Nyabuto (2019) uniquely identified gender differences, with male adolescents exhibiting higher self-esteem. This partly diverges from the generalized emphasis of Cao et al. (2023) and Bonnaire et al. (2019), who highlight communication's universal importance without gender distinctions. These findings therefore align conceptually on the role of communication but diverge contextually in how gender moderates the outcomes, revealing gaps for further exploration.

In contrast, Weldon et al. (2019), Gao et al. (2019), and van Eldik (2020) focus on parental conflict and children's emotional responses, with all three agreeing that conflict behaviours harm children's social outcomes, albeit to varying degrees. Similarly, Yusuf et al. (2021), Cuervo (2023), Kroese (2021), and Mwarari et al. (2020) converge on the point that parental disharmony and abuse increase the likelihood of delinquency and hinder children's social development. These findings are consistent with Wami et al. (2021), Sher-Censor and Shahar-Lahav (2022), and Naicker et al. (2023), who confirm that unresolved marital conflicts and parents' unprocessed experiences negatively affect children's well-being. Collectively, these studies agree on the broad conclusion that unresolved conflict and disharmony in families harm children's development, even though differences in study settings, populations, and methodologies highlight both contextual and conceptual gaps.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A correlational study design was adopted. As Mekonnen (2020) points out, the correlational study design was chosen for its usefulness in examining naturally occurring interactions in realistic and real-life circumstances. This study design helped to focus the research on adolescents in authentic settings of public secondary schools, reflecting the complexities of their daily lives. This design avoids any deliberate incitement or escalation of conflicts by prioritizing the well-being of the participants. Furthermore, the relationship between parental conflict patterns and social development is expected to be complex due to the numerous contributing elements that are likely to influence it. Therefore, correlational research stands as one of the optimal approaches for unravelling these intricate associations between variables without attempting to establish causation as emphasized by Devi et al. (2022).

The research encompassed five schools situated in Kiambu County. The selected schools consisted of three girls' schools, namely Starehe Girls with 800 students, Loreto Kiambu with 1200 students, and Ndumberi Girls with 500 students. Additionally, two boys' schools were included, Kiambu Boys with 1500 students and Kanunga Boys with 1400 students. The selection of the schools was informed by the need to ensure gender representation, population diversity, and contextual relevance to the study (Geng & He, 2022). The inclusion of both girls' and boys' schools allows for the exploration of gender differences in resilience, sexual behavior, and psychosocial well-being. With a combined student population of 5,400, these schools offer a broad and varied sample, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings. The schools also differ in their socio-economic contexts and academic profiles, for example, Starehe Girls attracts students from diverse backgrounds across the country, while Ndumberi Girls primarily serves a local population (Gitari et al. 2024). This diversity ensures that the study captures a wide range of adolescent experiences within the county. Additionally, Kiambu County presents a relevant context due to its rapid urbanization and the associated social dynamics influencing adolescents today, such as exposure to technology, evolving family structures, and peer influence (Evans et al., 2021). A sample size of 373 students participated in the study.

Data was collected using Conflict Resolution Behavior Questionnaire (CRBQ), developed by Fonseca et al. (2021) and the Social Skills Scale (SSS), developed by Hamid et al. (2019). Inferential analysis delved deeper into the data to establish relationships between various variables. The data was collected using correlation and regression analysis, which explored the degree and nature of associations between the variables of the study.

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Pearson correlation technique was used to analyze the relationship between validating parental conflict style and social development. Table 1 presents the correlation between Validating Parental Conflict Style and Social Development among adolescents.

Table 1 Correlation between Validating Conflict Style and Social Development

		Social Development	Validating Parental Conflict Style
Social Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.175**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	370	370
Validating Parental Conflict Style	Pearson Correlation	.175**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	370	370

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between validating parental conflict style and adolescent social development ($r = .175$, $p < .01$, $N = 370$). This finding suggests that adolescents who perceived their parents as engaging in more validating conflict resolution strategies also tended to exhibit higher levels of overall social development. The results are consistent with Pezeshki et al. (2020) and Kosterelioglu (2018), who emphasize the positive impact of validating conflict styles on children's emotional and social well-being. The positive communication and empathy fostered through a validating approach can enhance adolescents' interpersonal skills and social integration, as reflected in their developmental outcomes (Kosterelioglu, 2018). These findings imply that encouraging validating conflict styles in family dynamics may be a key factor in supporting adolescent social development. A visual depiction of the relationship is presented in figure 1.

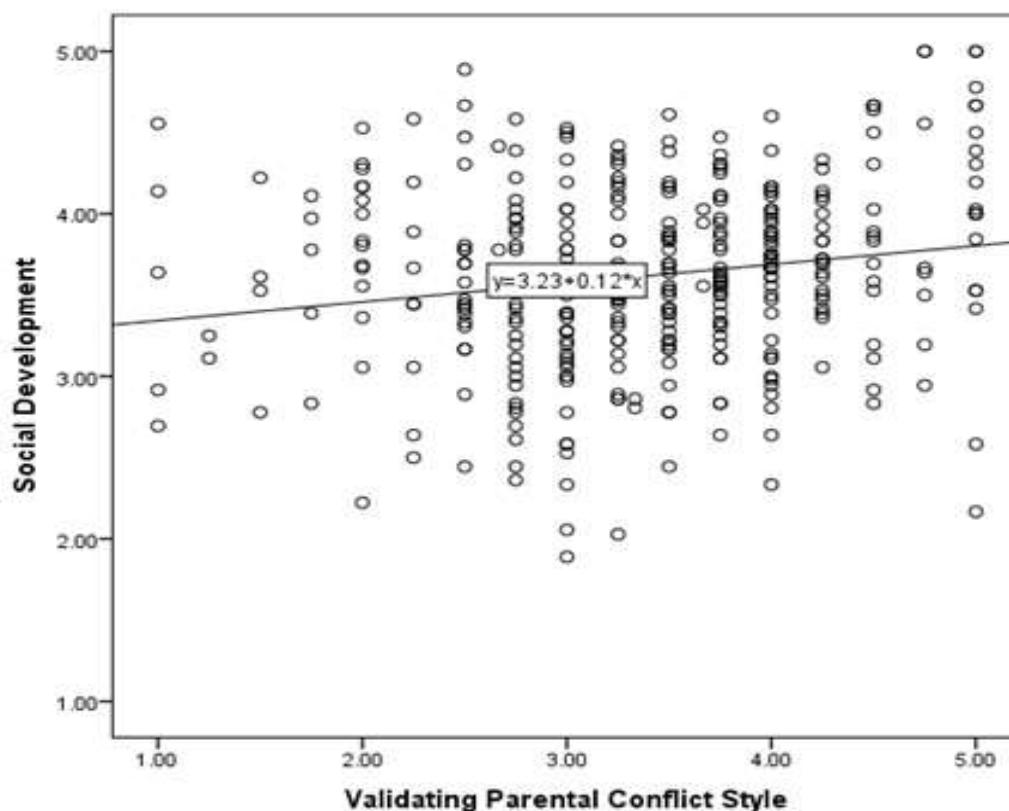


Figure 1 Validating Conflict style and Social Development Scatterplot

Table 2 presents the results of the correlation analysis between hostile parental conflict style and social development among adolescents in public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya.

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Table 2 Correlation Analysis between Hostile Conflict Style and Social Development

		Social Development	Hostile Parental Conflict Style
Social Development	Pearson Correlation	1	-.193**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
Hostile Parental Conflict Style	Pearson Correlation	-.193**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 revealed a significant negative correlation between hostile parental conflict style and social development ($r = -0.193$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of hostile parental conflict are associated with lower levels of social development in adolescents. This finding is consistent with Lovett (2020), who reported that parental hostility negatively affects children's social development, and Craft et al. (2021), who found that angry parental conflict styles lead to adverse child behavioral outcomes. The implication is that reducing parental hostility could significantly enhance adolescents' ability to develop positive social relationships and skills. A visual depiction of this relationship is presented in figure 2.

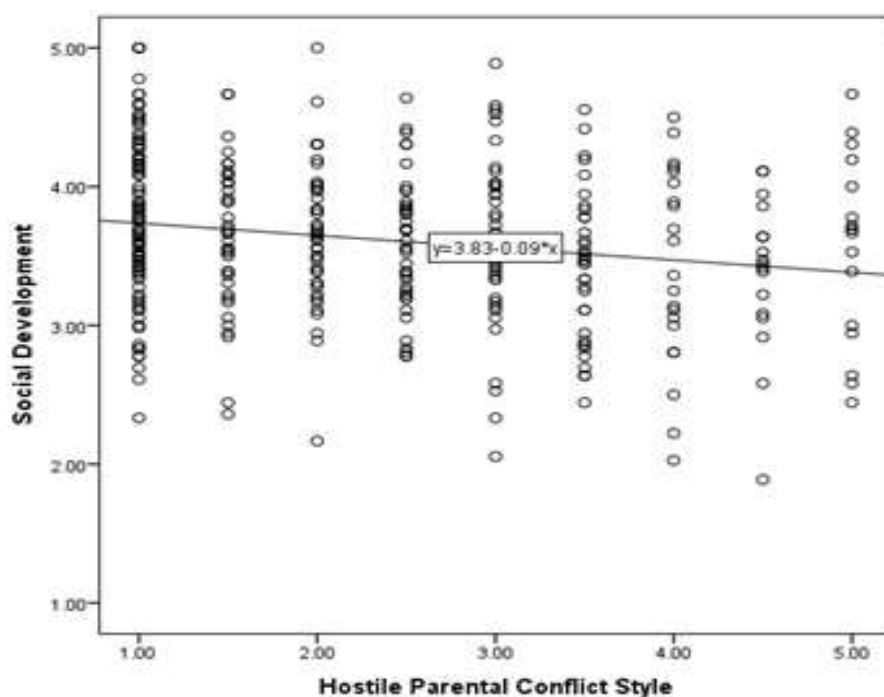


Figure 2 Hostile Parental Conflict and Adolescent Social Development Scatterplot

Table 3 presents the results of the correlation analysis between volatile parental conflict style and social development among adolescents in public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis between Volatile Conflict Style and Social Development

		Social Development	Volatile Parental Conflict Style
Social Development	Pearson Correlation	1	-.127*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	370	370
Volatile Parental Conflict Style	Pearson Correlation	-.127*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	370	370

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

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The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between volatile parental conflict style and social development ($r = -0.127$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that higher levels of volatile parental conflict are associated with lower levels of social development in adolescents. This finding aligns with studies by Laskoki et al. (2022) and Dieme et al. (2021), which linked ineffective parental communication and conflict to poor adolescent outcomes. The implication is that volatile conflict styles not only disrupt social development but may also hinder adolescents' ability to form and maintain healthy relationships. This association is visually illustrated in figure 3

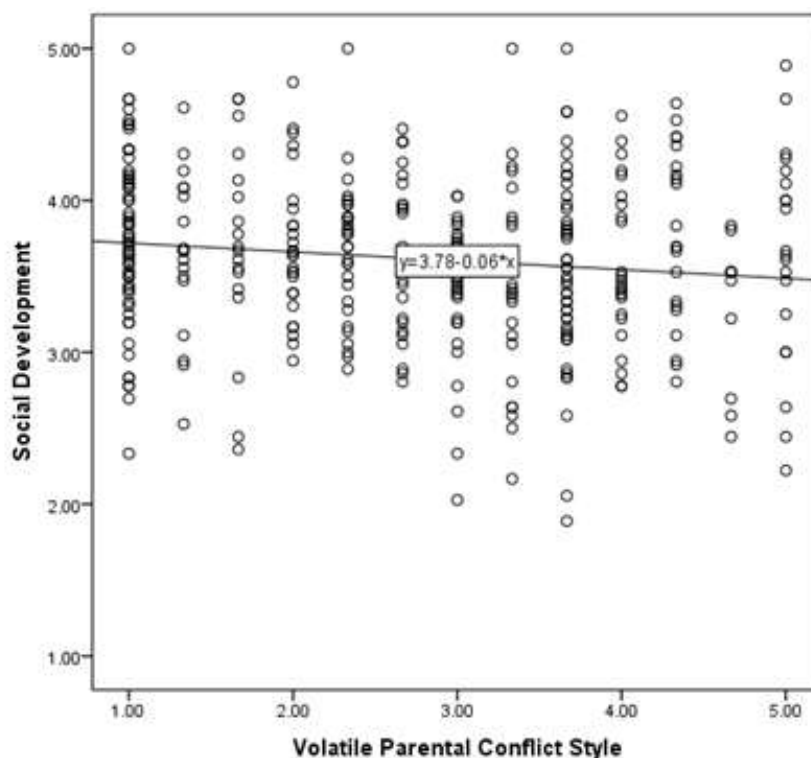


Figure 3 Volatile Parental Conflict and Adolescent Social Development Scatterplot

Table 4 presents the correlation analysis between avoiding parental conflict style and social development among adolescents in public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya.

Table 4 Correlation Analysis between Avoiding Conflict Style and Social Development

		Social Development	Avoiding Parental Conflict Style
Social Development	Pearson Correlation	1	-.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.463
	N	370	370
Avoiding Parental Conflict Style	Pearson Correlation	-.038	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.463	
	N	370	370

The analysis showed a weak and non-significant negative correlation between avoiding parental conflict style and social development ($r = -0.038$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that there is no meaningful relationship between the tendency of parents to avoid conflict and the social development of adolescents in the sample. This result contradicts findings from Gao et al. (2018) and Izzulhaq and Simanjuntak (2022), who identified that indirect parental communication could negatively affect social development in children. The current finding implies that avoidance alone may not significantly hinder adolescent social development but highlights the need to explore additional variables influencing this dynamic. This relationship is illustrated in figure 4.

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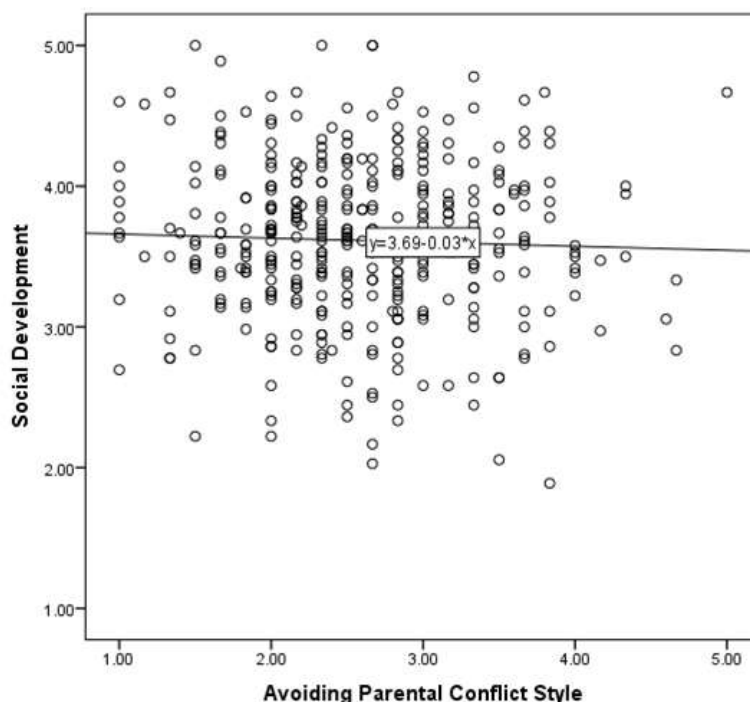


Figure 4 Avoiding Parental Conflict and Adolescent Social Development Scatterplot

Table 5 presents the regression analysis results of adolescent social development on parental conflict styles among adolescents in public secondary schools in Kiambu Township, Kenya.

Table 5 Regression of Adolescent Social Development on Parental Conflict Styles

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.236 ^a	.056	.045	.54941

a. Predictors: (Constant), Volatile Parental Conflict Style, Validating Parental Conflict Style, Avoiding Parental Conflict Style, Hostile Parental Conflict Style

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	6.494	4	1.623	5.378	.000 ^b
1 Residual	109.875	364	.302		
Total	116.368	368			

a. Dependent Variable: Social Development

b. Predictors: (Constant), Volatile Parental Conflict Style, Validating Parental Conflict Style, Avoiding Parental Conflict Style, Hostile Parental Conflict Style

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.479	.170		20.420	.000
Avoiding Parental Conflict Style	.011	.041	.014	.263	.793
1 Validating Parental Conflict Style	.089	.035	.136	2.569	.011
Hostile Parental Conflict Style	-.072	.028	-.158	-2.562	.011
Volatile Parental Conflict Style	-.008	.028	-.018	-.292	.770

a. Dependent Variable: Social Development

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The model summary indicates that the independent variables (volatile, validating, avoiding, and hostile parental conflict styles) explained 5.6% of the variance in adolescent social development ($R^2 = 0.056$), with a standard error of 0.54941. The ANOVA results show that the overall model was statistically significant ($F(4, 366) = 5.378, p < 0.01$), indicating that parental conflict styles collectively influence adolescent social development. The coefficients table reveals that validating parental conflict style had a positive and statistically significant effect on adolescent social development ($\beta = 0.089, p < 0.01$), while hostile parental conflict style had a negative and significant effect ($\beta = -0.072, p < 0.01$). Avoiding parental conflict style ($\beta = 0.011, p > 0.05$) and volatile parental conflict style ($\beta = -0.008, p > 0.05$) did not show significant effects on social development. These findings align with the idea that validating conflict styles promote healthier outcomes for children, whereas hostile styles have detrimental effects (Mansuori et al., 2022). However, the non-significant effects of avoiding and volatile styles partially contradict the literature by Behmani and Singh (2018) which suggests that volatile styles, if managed constructively, could enhance emotional resilience.

V. CONCLUSION

Parental conflict styles have differential impact on adolescent social development. The study confirms that a validating parental conflict style is positively associated with the social development of adolescents. Parents who engage in respectful, open communication during conflicts create a supportive environment that fosters healthy emotional and social growth in their children. This positive relationship supports the idea that validating conflict styles have beneficial outcomes for adolescents' social well-being and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, promoting validating conflict resolution strategies among parents could be crucial in enhancing the social development of adolescents.

Hostile parental conflict styles have a negative impact on adolescent social development. When parents engage in harsh, aggressive, or critical behaviors during conflicts, adolescents are likely to internalize these negative patterns, which hinder their ability to form positive social connections. The study underscores the importance of reducing hostile behaviors within family conflict interactions, as they create a toxic environment detrimental to children's emotional and social well-being. Parents should be encouraged to adopt healthier communication strategies to support their children's social development.

Although a negative correlation manifested between volatile parental conflict style and adolescent social development, it was not statistically significant in the regression analysis. This suggests that while volatile conflicts may provide opportunities for children to develop resilience and problem-solving skills, the potential benefits are dependent on how these conflicts are managed. If not carefully controlled, volatile conflicts may lead to detrimental effects, such as emotional instability. It is important for parents to manage volatile conflicts constructively to prevent them from becoming disruptive to their children's social development.

While avoiding parental conflict style may create temporary peace within the family, it deprives adolescents of learning important conflict resolution skills and communication strategies. Over time, this lack of exposure to healthy conflict resolution can hinder their ability to form healthy social relationships. Therefore, it is essential for parents to engage in more open communication and problem-solving strategies to support the development of their children's social skills.

This study has made a significant contribution to knowledge by clarifying the differential impact of various parental conflict styles on adolescent social development. It demonstrates that a validating parental conflict style has a positive effect, fostering healthier social development in adolescents through open, respectful communication. In contrast, hostile and volatile conflict styles were found to have negative effects, with adolescents exposed to these behaviors showing poorer social outcomes due to internalized negative communication patterns. It has revealed that avoiding parental conflict style has no significant effect on adolescent social development.

As the study only included adolescent perspectives, it would be valuable to include parental perspectives in future research. Parents play a critical role in shaping their children's social development, and understanding their views on conflict management could offer more insight into the dynamics of family relationships. By incorporating both adolescent and parental viewpoints, future studies could provide a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of how different parental conflict styles influence adolescent social development.

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