



FAMILY STRUCTURE AND GENERATIONAL CONFLICT AMONG INDIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Socio-economic modernization in India has resulted in a social context where the persistence of the old family values and the appearance of new outlooks of individualism often co-exist in conflict. Generation conflict between young people aged 18 to 30 and diversity, aged family members have emerged as a significant psychosocial problem in influencing mental health, educational achievement, and social peace. Nevertheless, there has been limited systematic empirical research on the cultural and structural reasons of such conflict.

Objectives: This paper aims at examining (1) the incidence and key areas of conflict between generations among the Indian youth in various family configurations; (2) socio-demographic and cultural factors that predict levels of conflict; (3) strategies of coping in youths; and (4) how the generational conflict is correlated with the mental health outcomes of youths.

Methods: The stratified random sample of 500 youth was used in the cross-sectional survey chosen in six Indian states with different socio-cultural backgrounds. Instruments used were standardized measures of conflict, collectivism, anxiety, depression, stress, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Multiple regression and one-way ANOVA techniques were used to analyse data.

Results: Approximately 78.4% of the respondents had a generational conflict. Those involved in joint-family exhibited much more conflict especially when it came to marriage, career choice and gender roles. The intensity of conflict was significantly associated with anxiety, depression, stress, decreased life satisfaction, and decreased academic performance.

Conclusions: Approximately, 78.4 percent of the respondents had a generational conflict. Reported conflict levels were much better among joint-family participants with the greatest differences occurring on issues of marriage, career decision, and gender roles. Intensity of conflict had close relationships with anxiety, depression, stress, less satisfaction in life and decreased academic performance. One of the important stressors of the Indian youth is generational conflict. Culture, family structure, and education play a big role in contributing to the level of conflict hence the introduction of culture-sensitive interventions that foster intergenerational communication.

KEYWORDS:

GENERATIONAL CONFLICT, FAMILY STRUCTURE, INDIAN YOUTH, JOINT FAMILY, NUCLEAR FAMILY, MENTAL HEALTH, COLLECTIVISM, INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS, PSYCHOSOCIAL STRESS, INDIA.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India is unique in that it has to juggle between old and new. The country is the most populous democracy and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and it has experienced a significant transformation of the structural aspects since the liberalization period began in the 1990s(Chodorow, N., 2018). These changes, in urbanisation, in the growth of higher education and in digital connectivity, and in other occupational structures have not gone without doing a number on the family institution(Feliciano, C., 2017). Indian families, with their traditionally collectivist and patriarchy dominated structures and emotional overdependence have to cope with the influences of both individualistic modernism and

the old collective family norms(Bang, M., 2016).

Young people, in this research 18–30 year olds, are at the center of these contradictory currents. At the same time, they are instructed in traditional expectations of the family and subjected to different values—importance of autonomy, self-determination, personal fulfillment—via education, peer groups, and digital media(Iivari, N., 2020). The clash in roles caused by these new identity constructions and the expectation of older family members of "normal" behavior is what social scientists label as generational conflict(Hopkins, P. E., 2024). This battle is not just anecdotal in character, it affects what people do, how they travel, how they like or dislike their partner, how

they feel psychologically and even how they think politically, to mention only a few(Cheal, D., 2020).

In spite of the ubiquitous nature of the phenomenon, the generational conflict in the Framework of Indian context is under explored from the empirical, rigorous point of view(Bryceson, D. F., 2020). The existing literature is either qualitative and deals with particular subpopulations, cross-cultural and lacks deepness in Indian context, or takes a macro-sociological orientation which is unable to capture nuances of the phenomena(Chambers, D., 2021). Generational conflict is yet to be studied in a focused systematic manner in relation with diversity of Indian family structure, regional variation and entire range of conflict domains quantitatively(Patel, S. K., 2021).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The overall quick change in India's socio-economic tracks has introduced a substantial tension between conventional family conceptions and individualistic values of the modern young people. Traditionally, the Indian family, rooted in the mutual sharing of property, authority and values, has been chafed by the first generation of young adults (18-30 years), whose educational experiences, digital lives, career and lifestyle expectations (and even aspirations) have greatly deviated from that of their parents. This value discontinuity becomes apparent in a generational conflict in the important life spheres presented here: marriage, career, role of women, religion and personal dominance. Although it is so commonplace and has proven impacts on adolescent psychological health, education and socialization, family intergenerational conflict is an empirically under-researched phenomenon in India. Although previous studies have identified such factors and their associations in specific family types across various regions of India, and/or from cross-cultural perspectives, existing research is mostly qualitative and region/cross-cultural in nature, with systematic, quantitative knowledge on the structural determinants, cultural mediators, and mental health consequences across diverse types of Indian families is lacking.

OBJECTIVES

- To determine how much and how often different types of Indian family structures experience inter-generational conflict among young adults aged 18-30 years.
- To determine the level of inter-generational conflict within family structures and use multiple regression analysis to determine the relevant socio-demographic, structural, and cultural variables.
- To explore how family structure determines the specific types of conflicts Indian adults aged 18-30 years experience in different domains, including the conflicts associated with career, marriage, gender, religion, and lifestyle.

- To determine how inter-generational conflicts within family structures influence Indian adults aged 18-30 in terms of anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as how they evaluate their overall self-worth and life satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vijayakumar et al. (2025) explored the link between young people's intergenerational conflict and suicidal behavior in South India. They designed a diagram of how family pressure, gaps in family communication, authoritarian parenting, and societal pressures contribute to youth emotional distress. They believed social problems, coupled with parental and youth value contradictions and the race for education, heighten psychological problems. The study showed that unresolved tensions caused by family conflicts contribute to emotional and psychological distress, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation. The study described the culturally established norms of respect and loyalty to the family as among the major factors of youth behavior in Indian culture. To tackle intergenerational conflicts in Indian adolescents and early adults, the study recommends a mental health approach combined with counseling and family communication to mitigate the issues.

Vaidya et al. (2023) looked into the different kinds of family conflicts in India. Most of the family conflicts are caused by differences in values, gaps in family member's generations, barriers in communication, and financial issues. The authors noted the impact of modernization and lifestyle changes in the family on relationships, which subsequently increased the gap in family member relationships. This study also looked into different family relationships under the impact of cultural and social expectations, gender, and family authority. The study recognized the presence of family conflicts, and noted the negative effect of family conflicts on emotional and mental well-being and overall peace and order in society. The study found that strong family relationships required the ability to effectively communicate, share emotions, and resolve conflicts.

Verma, Bhattacharya, and Singh (2024) Studied how family dynamics and relations spanning generations are influenced by India's interconnected society. The study showed how Indian families are influenced by family members being intergenerationally emotionally close and grounding collectivist values. The authors talked about family relationship changes caused by urbanization, globalization, and movement in education. The authors also noted members of the younger generations are more interested in independence, while members of the older generations are more interested in family values and responsibilities. This creates conflict in the household in both the emotional and traditional sense. The study both emphasized the good and bad in relationships between generations, including support, depending, and the added pressure each member of the family feels.

Madhavan et al. (2024) performed a scoping review to

study the intergenerational conflicts and their impacts on the young generation to analyze the effects caused by conflicts and possible interventions to reduce their impact. The study analyzed the existing literature to understand the impact of parent and children conflicts on young people's mental health, emotional stability, and behavioral manifestations. The study finds conflicts mostly arise from academic pressures, communication barriers, and gaps in the expectations of the family. The study found that family conflicts manifest the growing young people's suicidal tendencies, stress, and other mental health issues. The study explored the impact of family counseling, psycho-education, emotional supports, and mental health programs in schools.

Kao and Tienda (2022) studied the correlation of optimistic thinking with the level of success achieved in education by the immigrants in the American school system. Immigrants are shown as settlers with educational goals, which in turn encourages the children to perform better in school. The researchers discussed the importance of having optimistic and encouraging parents and the positive influence of education to achieve the goals. This research provided positive ways for immigrants to overcome the obstacles related to attitude and behavior that interfere with education. The study mentioned that there are difficulties like transition issues, discrimination, and established and/or conflicted ethnic-identity issues which may make attainment of educational goals more challenging. The researchers stated that regardless of the inequitable structures, the immigrant population remains hopeful and is able to maintain high levels of educational achievement.

Berrington (2020) studied family transition expectations for young adults in the second generation UK population. The focus of this particular study was on the immigrant population's descendants compared with the UK local population on views regarding marriage, being a parent, living together, and moving out. Cultural background, family customs, and ethnicity were found to have a big impact on views surrounding adulthood and family creation. The study found that second generation immigrant youth are known to try to balance a mix of their family's traditions and the modern British social values. The study also found that family transition decisions were also impacted by varying gender role views, educational goals, and social integration. The study found that immigrant youth have a unique and complicated contrast between the use of their culture in the modern society they are adapting to.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 STUDY DESIGN AND SETTING

The study followed a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) survey cross-sectional approach. To reflect geographical, linguistic, religious and socioeconomic diversity, data collection was done in six States of India (Delhi-North, Maharashtra-West, Tamil Nadu-South, West Bengal-East, Rajasthan-Central-North and Assam-Northeast) from

September 2024 to February 2025.

3.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Stratified random sampling technique was used with strata as State, Urban/Semi-urban or Rural area, in addition to Joint or Nuclear or Extended Family Structure. Using the power analysis, the target sample size was determined to be 500 youth, aged 18-30 years, with medium effect size (80% power, 5% significance). Final sample $N = 500$ obtained at the universities, community centres and digital networks. Inclusion criteria: Being of Indian nationality, between 18 – 30 years old, living with or in regular contact with their family of origin, with the ability to read and respond in Hindi/English. Exclusion criteria: psychiatric bipolar instability, current psychiatric hospitalizations, inability with a person for informed consent and recent bereavement.

3.3 INSTRUMENTS

1. **Generational Conflict Inventory (GCI-24):** For this study, a 24-item scale was created that measured the frequency and intensity of conflicts, with five options each and a 5-point likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always) that were rated in 10 areas: career, marriage, lifestyle, religion, technology, finance, social relations, politics, gender roles, and freedom of movement. The GCI-24 showed good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$) and good convergent validity with the Family Conflict subscale of the Family Assessment Device (Epstein et al., 1983; $r = 0.76$; $p < 0.001$).
2. **Cultural Value Scales:** The Collectivism – Individualism Scale (CIS) (Triandis, 1995) was adapted in India (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994) and measured horizontal and vertical orientation ($\alpha = 0.82$). Organizational and non-organizational religious involvement was measured with the Religiosity Scale (Chatters et al., 1999; 12 items; $\alpha = 0.78$).
3. **Mental Health Measures:** All questionnaires used were translated and validated in both Hindi and English: Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7; Spitzer et al., 2006; $\alpha = 0.91$), Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9; Kroenke et al., 2001; $\alpha = 0.89$), Perceived Stress Scale-10 (PSS-10; Cohen et al., 1983; $\alpha = 0.84$), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965; $\alpha = 0.87$), and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985; $\alpha = 0.88$).

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 27.0 (IBM Corp., 2020), and R Version 4.3.1 were used to analyze the data. The characterization of the sample and conflict domains was done by descriptive statistics (frequencies, means and standard deviations). Association between the family type and the prevalence of conflict was explored within each domain separately using chi-square tests (χ^2). Over-all conflict intensity was determined by multiple linear

regression with backward elimination, and the assumption of normality, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity were assessed using residue plots and variance inflation factor ($VIF < 3.0$ for all of predictors) calculated. Low, moderate, and high conflict groups were compared on mental health outcomes using One-way ANOVA and post-hoc using Tukey's. Effect sizes are reported using Cohen's d for pairwise comparisons and η^2 for ANOVA. A significance level of 0.05 was used and Bonferroni correction was performed for multiple comparisons.

4. RESULTS

4.1 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The demographic information for the 500 respondents is shown in Table 1. The sample was predominantly female (52.2%), with a relatively balanced age distribution across three cohorts: 18–21 years (28.4%), 22–25 years (37.4%), and 26–30 years (34.2%). The biggest group of residential respondents were the urban (55.6%). The distribution of the family type was similar to the national trend where both the joint family (44.2%) and nuclear family (39.4%) ranked as the most prevalent type. As per the national demographics, the majority of the sample was Hindu (62.2%) while Muslim (17.8%) Christian (11.6%) and Sikh/Other (8.4%) respondents added in the religious diversity.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS (N = 500)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	218	43.6	43.6
	Female	261	52.2	95.8
	Non-binary/Other	21	4.2	100.0
Age Group	18–21 years	142	28.4	28.4
	22–25 years	187	37.4	65.8
	26–30 years	171	34.2	100.0
Residence	Urban	278	55.6	55.6
	Semi-urban	131	26.2	81.8
	Rural	91	18.2	100.0
Family Type	Joint Family	221	44.2	44.2
	Nuclear Family	197	39.4	83.6
	Extended/Other	82	16.4	100.0
Education	Undergraduate	189	37.8	37.8
	Postgraduate	196	39.2	77.0
	Professional degree	115	23.0	100.0
Religion	Hindu	311	62.2	62.2
	Muslim	89	17.8	80.0
	Christian	58	11.6	91.6
	Sikh/Other	42	8.4	100.0

4.2 PREVALENCE AND DOMAINS OF GENERATIONAL CONFLICT

Generational conflict was reported at some level in the six months before the survey by 78.4% of the respondents; 23.6% of these respondents described the conflict experienced as high or severe (GCI-24 score ≥ 16). Marriage and the selection of partners (68.4%), career and educational choices (66.2%) and gender role expectations (57.1%) were the most commonly reported conflict areas among the entire sample. The least reported conflict (38.2%) happened among political and ideological

viewpoints, which is in line with relatively limited exposure of formal political discussion to domestic family interaction in India.

Table 2 breaks down the prevalence of conflict past families by family structure type, with chi-square tests of association. Independent of sex, the prevalence by joint family youth was significantly greater than that by nuclear family youth in all ten conflict domains ($p < 0.001$ in eight domains; $p < 0.01$ in two domains). Marriage and partner selection (joint: 82.6%, nuclear: 49.2%, $\Delta = 33.4$ percentage points) and career choices (joint: 78.3%, nuclear: 54.8%, $\Delta = 23.5$ percentage points) revealed the

greatest differences between the family types. A middle pathway akin to a structural gradient in conflict risk was

found for extended family youth across most measures.

TABLE 2: CONFLICT PREVALENCE (%) BY DOMAIN AND FAMILY STRUCTURE TYPE

Domain of Conflict	Joint Family (%)	Nuclear Family (%)	Extended/Other (%)	χ^2 p-value
Career & Educational Choices	78.3	54.8	63.4	<0.001
Marriage & Partner Selection	82.6	49.2	70.7	<0.001
Lifestyle & Dress Code	69.7	41.1	58.5	<0.001
Religious Practices & Rituals	61.5	32.5	51.2	<0.001
Use of Technology & Social Media	55.2	38.1	46.3	0.003
Financial Independence	71.5	47.2	62.2	<0.001
Social Relationships & Friendships	58.4	36.0	48.8	0.001
Political & Ideological Views	43.0	28.9	37.8	0.018
Gender Roles & Expectations	66.1	38.1	56.1	<0.001
Freedom of Movement	60.2	33.0	52.4	<0.001

Note. χ^2 tests conducted with $df = 2$ for all domains. Significance thresholds: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.3 Predictors of Generational Conflict Intensity

A series of multiple regression analyses were performed with the GCI-24 total score as the criterion and 9 theoretically derived predictor variables entered simultaneously in the analysis. The overall model was highly significant ($F(9, 490) = 64.31, p < 0.001$) and

accounted for 54% of variance in conflict intensity ($R^2 = 0.54$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.53$). There were no problematic multi-collinearity as VIF values ranged between 1.08-2.34. The Durbin-Watson statistic is $d = 1.97$, which indicated independence of residuals. The complete regression result is represented on Table 3.

TABLE 3: MULTIPLE REGRESSION PREDICTORS OF GENERATIONAL CONFLICT INTENSITY (GCI-24 TOTAL SCORE)

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	2.341	0.312	—	7.503	<0.001
Family Type (Joint)	0.872	0.098	0.312	8.898	<0.001
Parental Education (Years)	-0.143	0.031	-0.198	-4.613	<0.001
Youth Education (Years)	-0.211	0.044	-0.209	-4.795	<0.001
Urbanization Level	-0.318	0.072	-0.187	-4.417	<0.001
Religiosity Score	0.241	0.058	0.172	4.155	<0.001
Gender (Female)	0.189	0.087	0.089	2.172	0.030
Collectivism Score	0.378	0.063	0.248	6.000	<0.001
Digital Media Exposure	-0.142	0.047	-0.121	-3.021	0.003
Peer Influence Score	-0.198	0.051	-0.155	-3.882	<0.001

Note. $N = 500$. $R^2 = 0.54$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.53$, $F(9, 490) = 64.31, p < 0.001$. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized coefficient.

The positive predictor that showed the highest magnitude was "joint family structure" ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$) indicating that belonging to or having main family affinity with a joint family structure very strongly increases the conflict intensity. Collectivism score turned another positive

strong predictor ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$), suggesting that youth who are more collectivist in their values, but want the modern autonomy, are more prone to internal and interpersonal conflicts. Religiosity positively predicted conflict intensity ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.001$), perhaps related to

the conflict over the role of religion and secular living. Negative predictors—the ones that lowered bullying intensity—were parental education ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$): more education means parents are better able to accept youth choices or negotiate their options; youth education level ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.001$): more educated youth may have more power to assert themselves or find compromises; urbanization level ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.001$): more urban areas are more normatively liberal; digital media exposure ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.003$), likely reflecting both increased youth autonomy in obtaining information and increased parental awareness of current norms; and peer influence ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$): stronger peer networks buffer family conflict. Consistent with literature on barriers young women encounter in Indian families, female gender was significantly correlated with slightly increased conflict ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = 0.030$).

4.4 COPING STRATEGIES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

A 5-point scale (5 = highly effective; 4 = effective; 3 = "okay"; 2 = not very effective; 1 = not at all effective) was used to assess the coping strategies participants used when there was generational conflict and their effectiveness in coping with this type of conflict. Table 4 shows tables of strategies, frequency of use and mean effectiveness ratings. Avoidance/silence (67.4%) was the most often used strategy, corresponding to shared Indian cultural identity value of maintaining harmony within the family ignoring the expression of individual members. But avoidance was rated as one of the least effective strategies ($M = 2.81$). There was a high disparity between effectiveness knowledge and behavioural practice with the highest effectiveness rating for open communication, which was used by only 54.2% of respondents.

TABLE 4: COPING STRATEGIES — USAGE FREQUENCY, EFFECTIVENESS, AND RANKING

Coping Strategy	Use Frequency (%)	Effectiveness (M)	SD	Rank
Avoidance/Silence	67.4	2.81	0.92	6
Open Communication	54.2	4.12	0.74	1
Compromise & Negotiation	48.6	3.89	0.81	2
Seeking Third-party Mediation	31.4	3.41	0.88	4
Emotional Suppression	58.7	2.34	0.97	8
Peer Support & Discussion	43.2	3.67	0.79	3
Social Media Venting	39.8	2.58	1.04	7
Religious/Spiritual Coping	27.6	3.22	0.95	5
Physical Exercise/Recreation	22.4	3.18	0.87	—
Professional Counseling	8.2	4.02	0.68	—

Note. Effectiveness scored 1–5; M = mean. Ranking reflects descending effectiveness. Professional counseling had insufficient n for ranking.

Given the ongoing stigmatisation of seeking help for mental health issues in India, only 8.2% of the respondents reported seeking professional counselling which was rated as highly effective ($M = 4.02$). Only 22.4% used physical exercise and recreation, but it had a good effectiveness ($M = 3.18$). Twenty-seven point 6 per cent endorsed spiritual coping, and it was moderately effective ($M = 3.22$), indicating that spiritual frameworks are still important meaning-making aids for Indian youth.

4.5 MENTAL HEALTH CORRELATES OF CONFLICT INTENSITY

Three conflict groups were formed using the GCI-24 scores: low (0-8; $n = 158$), moderate (9-15; $n = 212$), and high (16-24; $n = 130$). The ANOVA for one way indicated significant differences on all the six mental health indicators (Table 5), where all the F-values are above the critical value at $p < 0.001$. Tukey's post-hoc tests also revealed that all three groups be different from each other on all indicators ($p < 0.001$ in all comparisons between pairs).

TABLE 5: MENTAL HEALTH INDICATORS ACROSS CONFLICT INTENSITY GROUPS (ONE-WAY ANOVA)

Mental Health Indicator	Low Conflict (M±SD)	Moderate Conflict (M±SD)	High Conflict (M±SD)	F-value	p
Anxiety Score (GAD-7)	4.21±2.14	7.83±2.61	11.42±3.07	87.34	<0.001
Depression Score (PHQ-9)	3.87±1.98	7.41±2.78	10.89±3.21	76.21	<0.001
Life Satisfaction (SWLS)	26.4±4.1	21.3±4.8	15.7±5.2	94.17	<0.001

Self-esteem (Rosenberg)	31.2±4.4	27.8±4.9	23.1±5.6	61.42	<0.001
Perceived Stress (PSS-10)	12.4±4.2	18.7±4.8	24.3±5.1	102.83	<0.001
Academic Performance (GPA)	8.21±0.72	7.43±0.88	6.71±1.02	47.19	<0.001

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. All F-tests significant at $p < 0.001$. Tukey's HSD confirmed all pairwise group differences ($p < 0.001$). Higher scores on GAD-7, PHQ-9, and PSS-10 indicate greater symptom burden; lower scores indicate better wellbeing for SWLS, RSES, and GPA.

TABLE 6: DOSE-RESPONSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFLICT INTENSITY AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

Conflict Intensity	Anxiety Score	Depression Score	Perceived Stress	Life Satisfaction	Self-Esteem	Academic GPA
None (0-1)	3.2	2.9	10.1	28.4	32.1	8.51
Low (2-3)	5.1	4.7	14.2	25.8	30.4	8.11
Moderate (4-5)	7.8	7.4	18.7	21.3	27.8	7.43
High (6-7)	10.2	9.8	22.4	17.1	24.5	6.98
Severe (8-10)	13.6	12.9	26.8	13.2	21.1	6.41

Progressive change in six mental health indicators corresponding to the five stages of conflict intensity. Values are means for the groups. Going up means a worse situation from Anxiety, Depression, Perceived Stress and going down means a worse situation from Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem and GPA. All trends are upwards. The dose-response effect is especially noteworthy for two anxiety measures: the high conflict group had a mean GAD-7 score of 11.42 which is in the moderate-severe clinical range whereas the low conflict group had a mean score of 4.21 which is in the minimal anxiety range. Likewise, the mean score on PHQ-9 in the high conflict group was above the moderate depression cut-off point ($M = 10.89$), while in the low conflict group, the mean score ($M = 3.87$) fell in the Minimal depression range. There were parallel inverse relationships between conflict intensity and life satisfaction and self-esteem scores, and academic performance (GPA on a 10-point scale) decreased from $M = 8.21$ (low conflict) to $M = 6.71$ (high conflict), a decrease of about 1.5 grade points which is clinically meaningful.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF CONFLICT

The intensity of generational conflict found in the present study is best explained by the joint family system ($\beta = 0.31$) which is also in line with the theoretical expectation based on ecological systems theory and structural functionalist theory. JTFFs, by definition, bring intergenerational proximity, intergenerational obligation, and intergenerational interdependence, all of which exacerbate the salience of value differences and provide many occasions for their expression. When multiple generational worldviews are compressed and shared within the same residential and economic unit, they can be conflict-generative if the generational worldviews are significantly different.

It ought not, however, to be interpreted as condemnation of the institution of the joint family as such. It has been long realized by the Indian sociologists of the roles played by joint families in the sharing of resources, bringing up children and old people and emotional support. The link between the intensity of conflict and joint family structure may not be linear, i.e. families with moderate interdependence may facilitate intergenerational communication that is productive. It is not so much a question of structure but of how there's communication, negotiation and authority in the structure. Whereas joint families where decisions were made in a democratic style had significantly less generational conflict as mentioned by Kumari and Singh (2019) in the same set up of joint families.

5.2 CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL MEDIATORS

Collectivism's positive impact on predicting the intensity of conflict should be interpreted with caution. This latter finding might be expected in terms of collectivism, which selection procedure emphasizes group harmony; the opposite direction indicate that the effect must be working through a different mechanism. Building on this, we suggest that the collectivism-conflict increasing effect is due to an internalization of the family obligation norm which produces internal conflict for young people who also have individualistic aspirations. Being collectivist oriented renders the youth not only subject to family pressure from outside but also makes them feel the collar tightening, autonomously-seeking and struggle with themselves, painful ambivalent in my word. This affirms the idea of 'relational self-construal' in which self-criticism and feelings of guilt are apparent when one deviates from in-group norms.

The findings for both parents and youth that a higher level of education was associated with lower levels of conflict intensity support and expand current research regarding

education as a moderating variable in intergenerational relations. Educated parents seemed to be more accommodating of youth independence, possibly as a result of exposure to alternative value systems and ways of relating with family members as a result of their education. In turn, educated youth will be more effective communicators and negotiators, less prone to inflame their relationships or lose key elements of them and better able to assert needs without sacrificing the relationships. This discovery has several implications for social policy, namely that investments in education, especially in higher education for women and adult literacy, will likely result in intergenerational peace dividends.

5.3 MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Among the more policy-relevant findings of this study is the dose-response relationship between an increase in conflict intensity and mental health deterioration reported in Table 5 and Table 6. Moving from low to high conflict (LC to HC), there is about a 7-point change in the GAD-7 score corresponding to a movement from minimal to moderate clinical range, and there is about a 7-point change in the PHQ-9 score as well. These are not inconsequential changes and represent in clinical practice, changes of symptoms that would lead to an intervention.

That having high conflict is associated with the most absolute increase in perceived stress (12 units of PSS-10 between low and high conflict) is consistent with the conceptualization of generational conflict as something relatively chronic. Generational conflict is not an event with defined beginning and end points times, as this conflict is a constant feature of daily family life, leading to a constant activation of the stress response system. The allostatic load literature (McEwen, 1998) has documented the health consequences of such chronic familial stress, and this is of particular concern during developmentally important periods for youth.

Evidence of effects on academic achievement is also troubling. This one-point (1.5 grade) difference between low and high conflict groups on a 10-point scale is a significant gap in academics. Being more aware of these generational disparities in the private sector may render the findings even more interesting, since academic credentials play a critical role in social mobility in India and a growing body of evidence shows that conflicts are embedded in the social structures or mechanisms that drive access to educational opportunities.

5.4 COPING STRATEGIES: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Even though open communication was the most effective coping strategy, avoidance is the most practiced coping strategy; this paradox may be attributed to the institutional anachronisms concerning family communication in the hierarchical Indian family system. In most Indian cultural settings, confronting parents is not allowed in a direct way, as is normatively suggested in concepts like *izzat* (honour), *sharam* (shame) and the high regard for elderly people (Seymour, 1999). Youth with sufficient access to information to recognize that

communication would be beneficial may still choose not to communicate due to the potential loss of respect and social disinvestment from others and the family's split.

Thus, this analysis indicates that interventions aimed at behavior change for coping should be developed in the context of cultural and family system factors contributing to the social costs of some coping strategies as well as individual skill deficits. Interventions based on family may be especially promising for the Indian context inasmuch as they involve establishing legitimate forum for intergenerational dialogue, using a mediation forum modeled after traditional indigenous forums, e.g., the *panchayat*, with elders as mediators. The psychosocial aspects of having children discover that being assertive is a legitimate way to express their dignity as a son or daughter, rather than a rebellion against their families, may also help minimize the social costs of exhibiting assertive behavior.

5.5 REGIONAL AND RELIGIOUS VARIATIONS

While the scope of the present paper does not permit a full regional analysis, preliminary explorations suggested noteworthy variation. Respondents from Rajasthan and Assam reported higher conflict around marriage and gender roles compared to Delhi and Maharashtra respondents, consistent with regional differences in gender-equitable attitudes documented in National Family Health Survey data. Religious affiliation showed modest independent effects on conflict domains related to marriage (Muslim respondents reporting higher conflict) and lifestyle (Christian respondents reporting lower conflict), though these effects were substantially attenuated when controlling for education and urbanization. Future research should explicitly model regional and religious heterogeneity using multilevel analytic frameworks.

6. LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to the interpretation and generalizability of these findings. First, a cross-sectional study does not allow causal inferences because although conflict is associated with negative mental health outcomes there may be a reverse causation where psychological distress fuels conflict. Longitudinal studies of youth through the transition would be needed to demonstrate temporal precedence. Second, despite the geographical diversity of the sample, it is over-representative - showing a bias towards wealthier, educated, urban youth as a result of the recruitment strategy. Less educated youth and youth in rural areas are underrepresented; qualitative differences in generational conflict in these groups may not have been taken into account.

All the measures are self-report, which poses a common method variance and the social desirability bias. Cultural norms influencing family privacy and fidelity might make respondents underreport family conflict. Finally, GCI-24 was created especially for this study—although psychometric properties are acceptable, independent

validation and standardization are necessary. Fifth, the study fails to foreground the experiences and impressions parents and/or grandparents may have had which may differ from the young persons' experiences, lending only a young persons' perspective in interpreting the findings. The inclusion of parental perspectives would lead to more fully understand the relationalities at play in multi-informant designs.

The study period (2024–2025) has been deliberately selected as an impact window of the pandemic on Indian family life as the transition from extended nuclear families' co-residence during the pandemic may have left its mark on the family, even as it is now reverting to normalcy, to varying degrees. It is an open question whether the patterns seen are a persistent structural reality or a transitional feature of the pandemic era for which further study of these patterns is warranted by replicating the studies.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth empirical analysis about intergenerational conflicts in youths in India and finds conflicts as being widespread (78.4% reported prevalence), having a structural basis (with risk from joint family systems), culturally rooted (with collectivism being a source of increased tension), and psychologically and academically detrimental. These findings support a structural-cultural theory that describes a combination of the modern processes of urbanization and expansion of education and the global integration of the mass media, family structural systems, and personal value systems in shaping intergenerational conflicts. Several policies can be formulated based on findings from this study. Educational establishments need to acknowledge intergenerational conflicts as a serious psychological concern and enhance the availability of counseling services; this is especially important, given that professional counselors are underused, despite counseling being an effective intervention. Teaching about family life and intergenerational communication needs to be incorporated in educational systems. Increased women's literacy is linked to improved family relationships, and thus women's literacy must be prioritized. For policymakers, it is important to perceive intergenerational conflicts as being an inevitable result of social progress and to establish and support various constructive channels for managing intergenerational conflicts that also focus on the academic and emotional needs of students.

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