# The Relationship between Conflict Management, Social Support among University Students

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## ABSTRACT

*This current study was conducted to investigate the role of conflict management, social support among university students (N= 200). Sample was collected 200 university students (Female =100, Male =100) age ranged 18-30 from four universities of federal area which are Quaid-E-Azam University, Bahria University, Air University And Nust In Pakista.. Purposive sampling technique was employed based on cross-section design. Two scales were used to asses' social support and conflict management. The result revealed that social support was not significantly correlated with conflict management styles. The result revealed that females' university students were more shown social support as compare to male students. Recommendations of the study are that both male and female can equally be benefitted by an intervention addressing conflict management however; female can get more benefit by addressing social support. This study would be helpful for pedagogical and clinical setting for university students. Non-significant results are discussed.*

**Keyword:** Conflict management, Social support

## INTRODUCTION

The present research examines relationship in how individuals handle conflict in their daily life basically affected by the social support they acquired. Specifically, this study scrutinizes how the strength of socials support causes an individual to adapt constructive conflict management styles by using multiple measures 'i.e. assertive communication and collaboration and constructive strategies. It is predicted that individuals with inadequate social support are more likely to rely on denying the problem exists, avoiding the problem completely, and blaming or criticizing others'. In a final note not only that individuals with a passable social support handle conflict in their life in distinct ways, but also that these specific strategies of conflict resolution are in turn associated with the quality of social relationships.

### Social Support

"The individual belief that one is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued, and belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligations" (Cobb, 1976). House (1981) described four main categories of social support: Emotional support (includes empathy, concern, love, and trust), Appraisal support (involves feedback and social comparison), Informational support (includes advice, suggestions, or directives), and Instrumental support (includes the form of money, time, and other explicit interventions on the person's behalf).

### Conflict Management

Donohue and Kolt define conflict as "a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals".

Conflict usually occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires. Interpersonal conflict is associated with increased negative affect and decreased emotional well-being and has been linked to depression and social withdrawal. So, an individual in these situations use different conflicting management styles. The commonly reported styles of conflict management are:

### Avoidance

 The intentional failure to engage other members in the group and to just go with the flow.

### Accommodation

The tendency to being more concerned with the others' needs and views than with one's own.

### Competition

Having no concern for the others' interests or needs and to wrestle with the others so that one's views and concerns might be the dominant ones.

### Collaboration

 The drive toward integrating the interests and needs of all parties involved.

### Compromise

Occurs when members focus on finding a common solution that addresses everybody's interest.

## Social Support and Conflict Management Styles

Understanding of thoughts, feelings and physical responses to conflict give better insights into the best potential solutions to the situation. That's why individuals having strong social support choose healthy pathways (Non-defensive attitude, calm, compromise) for resolving conflict hence strengthening their social ties. Whereas individuals having low social support choose unhealthy ways (Withdrawal, resentful reactions, pessimistic attitude) to resolve conflict. (Brissette, Cohen, Seeman; 2000)

Variety of literature provides evidence that the benefits of social support are strongly influenced by many personal, relational, situational and emotional characteristics of the interactional context and effective social support enhance coping strategies in an individual. Micheal W.Morris et al: (1998) conducted a study on conflict management styles: Accounting for cross-national differences. They formulated that a problem in joint ventures between U.S. and Asian firms is that cultural differences impede the smooth resolution of conflicts between managers. In a survey of young managers in the U.S., China, Philippines, and India we find support for two hypotheses about cultural differences in conflict style and the cultural values that account for these differences: Chinese managers rely more on an avoiding style because of their relatively high value on conformity and tradition. U.S. managers rely more on a competing style because of their relatively high value on individual achievement. Our study underlined the same relations as social support is related to cultural traditions and values and individual from different sectors have a particular level of support which led them to adapt a specific conflict management style.

Judi Beinstein Miller (2008) studied Memories of Peer Relations and Styles of Conflict Management Memories of peer acceptance are investigated among young adults in relation to their imagined styles of conflict management. In an initial pilot study, college students provided accounts of their childhood and adolescent peer relations. They also wrote responses to a series of interpersonal conflict situations. Scales for estimating peer memories

and conflict responses were developed from their responses. These instruments were used to test preliminary findings that assertive styles are associated with positive memories and acquiescent styles with negative ones. Evidence from a second pilot and follow-up study supported both propositions. The final peer relations memory scale and its subscales were shown to have respectable internal reliability and to predict self-consciousness as well as conflict response scores. Similarly our study also attempted to study that effective social support promotes constructive conflict management styles and this study support the idea in a way positive memories are particularly a result of positive social(peer) support acquiescent or consenting styles of dealing with conflicts.

Imran Malik et al. (2010) studied the abilities of balancing work and family through social support among working women in Pakistan. Work-family balance (WFB) is considered as one of the most important issues in organizational studies. This  study examines the relationship of social support (SS), employee performance (EP) and job satisfaction (JS) with work-family balance of working women in Pakistan. Based on cross – sectional data, out of 315 distributed questionnaires, 150 women working in different public and private sector organizations responded to the questionnaire, thereby resulting in a 47.6% response rate. The work family balance through social support is a new concept, and as such, little evidence is available in the literature. The study aims to provide empirical grounds for the said relationship in a developing country. Independent sample t – test, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The study confirms that social support is moderately related to employee performance and job satisfaction and is strongly related to work family balance, whereas employee performance is moderately related to job satisfaction and has weak relationship with work family balance. The multiple regression analysis shows that social support and job satisfaction have a significant strong positive relationship with work family balance, whereas employee performance has a highly significant moderate relationship with work family balance of working women. Significant differences were found among the public and private sector working women with respect to social support, job satisfaction and work family balance. The relationships of independent variables such as social support, well performance at work and job satisfaction are contributors of work-family balance. Similarly our study intended to manifest that how supportive social relations can help a person to cope with his daily life conflicts in an appropriate way and create a harmony in his/her life.

Lim Siew Geok  and Tam Cai Lian (2008) conducted a study of marital conflicts on measures of social support and mental health Marital conflict tactics and social supports have been proven to predict health outcomes in couples. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of marital conflict tactics and social support on the general health of couples in Malaysia. It also aims to find out which type of perceived social support has a greater impact on an individual and his/her spouse's mental health. A random sample of 399 participants from Selangor who were either married or cohabiting was used in this study. Characteristics of conflict tactics and perceived social support in relation to general health were assessed. The result shows a moderate correlation between the variables. This supports the hypothesis that the manner in which couples handle conflict has an influence on their mental health. Additionally, couples' ability to handle conflict is also related to perceived social support. This means that a person with a better conflict tactic scale and more perceived social support is more likely to have a better general health.

By reviewing all above literature, the significance of our research is clarified. Nowadays Pakistan is facing a number of problems like an increase in job dropouts, unemployment, poverty, poor living conditions, security issues etc. These all are affecting our lives badly

especially Pakistani youth is the major target of these problems as they are becoming more dissatisfied with their life, feeling difficulty in managing these conflicts constructively so this research will be a mean of awareness in individuals that how one can help himself and others to cope in a constructive way with all such conflicts. So, this research support the notion that the individuals should have high social support and the tendency to regulate their emotional experiences, increase their self worth and able to manage their conflicts in a healthier manner, hence leading towards the satisfied and harmonious social relations.

## METHOD

### Objectives

Following are the objectives of present research:

1. To study that adequate social support enhances use of better conflict management strategies in university students.
2. To find out that more adequate the social support of students, more will be the quality of their life and harmony in their social relations.
3. To investigate that there is no gender discrimination in conflict management styles if all individuals are provided with adequate social support.

### Hypotheses

Following are the hypotheses of present research:

1. Effective social support promotes constructive conflict management styles.
2. There is no gender discrimination in conflict management styles if all individuals are provided with adequate social support.

### Operational Definitions

#### *Social Support and Social Relation*

Social Support could be defined operationally as the process by which various forms of assistance is provided to others in a difficult life situation from their family, friends or significant others. According to the research instrument "Provisions of Social Relation scale" (PSRS) if a person score higher, it means he/she has provided with good social support and he/she has effective social relations with his friends and family as compared to those who score low on PSRS.

#### *Conflict Management Styles*

Conflict management styles are operationally defined as different coping strategies used by two parties to resolve their disagreements that involve a threat to their needs, interests or concerns. According to Thomas and Kilmann Mode Instrument, there are five conflict management styles: Accommodating, Avoiding, Compromising, Collaborating and Competing. Person can use one or more than one mode simultaneously depending upon the conflicting situation but high score on any specific conflict mode means that he is using that mode excessively to resolve his/her daily life conflicts. Integration of all modes with respect to situation or compromising style is considered to be the best way of conflict management.

### Instruments

In this research the standardized scales: Provision of Social Relation Scale (PSRS) and The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument will be used to study the effect of social support on conflict management styles among university students.

### Provisions Of Social Relations (PSRS

The Provision of Social Relations Scale (PSRS) scale was originally developed by Turner, Frankel and Levin (1983) and in the present study its Urdu translated version by Ayub (2004) will be used. The PSRS is 15 items scale that measures individual's perception about provided social support. Its family support factor contains six items assessing family support (items 4,7,8,10,11 and 14) and the peer support factor is composed of nine items that address support from friends (items 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 13, 15). The items 7 and 15 are negatively worded. Reliability of the scale is .97. The respondents will be asked to rate how closely each statements describe their relationship by replying to each item with a help of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "very much like my experience" to "not at all like my experience".

### The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument was designed by Thomas and Kilmann in 1974 to assess an individual's behavior in conflicting situations. Reliability of the Thomas-Kilmann instrument have been reported as ranging from .61-.68 (test-retest) and .43-.71 (Cronbach alpha) (Rahim, 2001) indicating that the instrument is a reliable device for such assessments. It consists of 30 statements that measures five modes of conflict handling; the competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating and compromising modes. It is dichotomous scale with two options of "A" and "B". Person can use one or more than one mode simultaneously but high score on any conflict mode means that individual is using that mode excessively to resolve his/her daily life conflicts.

### Sample

This research will aim to address the student population of the universities of Federal area; Pakistan. The sample (**N=200: Males=$n_1$=100, Females=$n_2$=100**) will be selected by random and purposive sampling technique. Five universities will be selected to collect the data, namely Air University Islamabad, Bahria University Islamabad, FAST University Islamabad, NUST University Islamabad, and Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad. 40 students will be chosen from each institute with an equal proportion of male and female i.e. 20 male and 20 female students from each university. Age range of the sample will be 18 to 25 years.

### Procedure

This research will be conducted upon university students of Federal Area Pakistan; to study their skills of conflict management and the degree of provided social support. Standardized scales will be used in the research i.e. Provisions of Social Relations Scale (PSRS), and The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. The sample size for the research will comprise of 200 individuals within age range of 18-25 yrs. Permission to administer the research will be taken from the respective university's administrations by showing them permission letters from our institute, telling them the topic, purpose and objectives of the research. Oral consents will be taken from the subjects to participate in the research by explaining them the objectives of the research and assuring them the limits of confidentiality. Instructions regarding questionnaires will be given in written form and oral assistance will also be provided if subjects had any difficulty in understanding or filling the questionnaires. After completing the administration of the scales, statistical analysis of the data will be carried out by applying appropriate statistics using SPSS program.

### RESULTS

Following are the tables which are demonstrating results and findings obtained from this research study:

**Table 1. Reliabilities of subscales of Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating) and Provision of Social Relation Scale (PSRS)**

| Scales | No. of items | Reliability (α) |
|---|---|---|
| *Competing* | 13 | 0.69 |
| *Collaborating* | 13 | 0.54 |
| *Compromising* | 13 | 0.61 |
| *Avoiding* | 13 | 0.56 |
| *Accommodating* | 13 | 0.65 |
| *PSRS* | *16* | 0.72 |

Above table 1 shows that these scales are highly reliable as reliability of all the scales is Competing=0.69, Collaborating=0.54, Compromising=0.61, Avoiding=0.56, Accommodating=0.65, PSRST=0.72 i.e. >0.5 so all the scales used in the research were highly reliable.

**Table 2. ANOVA Analysis of subscales of Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating) with Provision of Social Relation Scale (PSRS)**

| Scales | N | Mean | SD | F | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Competing* | 37 | 53.95 | 8.65 | | |
| *Collaborating* | 20 | 54.15 | 7.95 | | |
| *Compromising* | 46 | 57.52 | 10.08 | 0.173 | 0.144 |
| *Avoiding* | 50 | 58.02 | 8.72 | | |
| *Accommodating* | 47 | 57.30 | 8.17 | | |
| *Total* | 200 | 56.60 | 8.91 | | |

Table 2 shows that that there is no significant effect of social relation and social support on choice of constructive conflict management styles

**Table 3. Cohen's d and t values of subscales of Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating) and Provision of Social Relation Scale (PSRS)**

| Scales | Male (n=80) | | Female (n=80) | | Upper limit | Lower limit | Cohen's d | t | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | | | |
| *PSRS* | 55.02 | 8.65 | 58.17 | 8.94 | -.698 | -5.602 | -0.3581 | -2.53 | 0.012 |
| *Competing* | 5.45 | 2.46 | 4.89 | 2.49 | 1.250 | -1.30 | 0.2262 | 1.60 | 0.111 |
| *Collaborating* | 5.78 | 1.81 | 5.42 | 1.60 | .834 | -.114 | 0.2107 | 1.50 | 0.136 |
| *Compromising* | 5.76 | 1.84 | 6.04 | 2.47 | .326 | -.886 | -0.1285 | -0.911 | 0.364 |
| *Avoiding* | 6.36 | 1.70 | 6.96 | 1.80 | -.111 | -1.089 | -0.3427 | -2.41 | 0.16 |
| *Accommodating* | 6.68 | 2.05 | 6.79 | 2.30 | .498 | -.718 | -0.0504 | -0.357 | 0.72 |

Above table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in t value of male and female using scales Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating) and Provision of Social Relation Scale (PSRS).

## DISCUSSION

Present research aimed to study the effects of social support and social relations on conflict management styles among university students. Purpose of this research was to examine the stereotypes affixed with selection of different styles in conflict management and influence of social relations on it. For this purpose, two standardized scales were used i.e. Provision of Social Relation Scale (PSRS) and The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Reliability of both scales and their subscales was calculated from SPSS which confirmed that all scales were highly reliable and internally consistent. Reliability of PSRST is 0.72 and subscales of Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument are Competing=0.69, Collaborating=0.54, Compromising=0.61, Avoiding=0.56, Accommodating=0.65, i.e. >0.5. As the α value of all scales is greater than 0.5 it clarifies that scales used in this research were highly reliable.

Hypothesis 1 "Effective social support promotes constructive conflict management styles" was  tested by applying one way ANOVA analysis of SPSS.

Table 2 revealed the relationship of  Social Relation and conflict management styles. Insignificant results from table 2 means that there is no significant effect of social relation and social support on choice of constructive conflict management styles. This exhibit existence of the possibility that if a person rate higher on one scale will not have any significant influence on other scale and vice versa.

As illustrated by the results that social support has no significant correspondence with preference of any conflict management strategy, which states that people with almost similar socioeconomic and academic status have almost similar vision to life situations. The reason behind this inconsequence can be linked to subject variables of our sample as we selected student population of federal area of more or less same age group and educational background. By believing that they are educated people we can propose that they must have a professional and didactic vision towards life circumstances and arising conflicts. Educational foundation and same life situations give them a way to understand their conflicts which does not require any social support for that. It can be possible that support they get from social relations can encourage them to strive against personal disputes but it do not have impact on choosing modes which they are using to manage their conflicts and disputed conditions.

It was suposed that each person has a unique style or approach to conflict and alter the conflict approach in regards to a given situation.  By results it is shown that each person do not use same or only one  management strategy for conflicts rather they use different styles and modes in different situations. As people with qualified foundations of more or less same backgrounds must have a true understanding that in which situation a particular approach for conflict management must be used. Also they know the emotional outcomes, consequences, intensity and importance of conflict they are facing to use the best and suitable mode as per demand of situation. This particular outcome can also be due to different emotional states in different conflict situations. As mentioned by Chuang S.C, Wang S.M, Kung S and Wang W in their study aimed to identify the role of emotions and the approaches people utilize in conflict management, and to examine the extent, subjective emotional states, influence their approaches to conflict. Iit was expected to examine whether there is any difference under the

effect of helping concerns for others in relation between emotions, and the approaches to conflict. Findings demonstrated that positive emotional state has a significant positive effect on cooperative approach whereas; negative emotional state has a significant positive effect on competitive or avoiding approach.

Hypothesis 2 "There is no gender discrimination in conflict management styles if all individuals are provided with adequate social support" was also proved with the help of statistical analysis done in SPSS program. Results of t-test show that there is no significant difference between the scores of male and female participants as shown in Table 3. t value of male and female has no significant difference on PSRS and subscales of Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode instrument (Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating) are -2.53, 1.60, 1.50, -0.911, -2.42, -0.357 respectively. With respect to the second hypothesis it is evident that conflict management styles are devoid of gender discrimination when individuals are provided with adequate social support. Depending upon the research responses mostly university students have the ability of identifying, labeling, assessing the intensity of the experience and conflict they are facing. University students whether male or female are well educated, cultured and erudite people who have an understanding of their capabilities, self worth, and societal standards. They are continuously interacting with media, attending workshops and seminars that help them to know the strategies to overcome their lacking, promote their qualities and come out of their disputes successfully that's why there is no significance difference of male and female scores in the t-test.

With the help of statistical analysis, hypotheses that were proposed in the present research had been verified and had reached to the conclusion that effective social support do not aid in choosing constructive conflict management styles and if all individuals are provided with adequate social support there is no gender discrimination in conflict management styles

## CONCLUSION

Hypotheses that have been proposed in present research are Hypothesis 1 as effective social support promotes constructive conflict management styles and hypothesis 2 states as there is no gender discrimination in conflict management styles if all individuals are provided with adequate social support. As evident from all results and discussion that there is no significant relationship between conflict management styles and social support because the sample taken from prestigious institutes has similar contented sense of soul and perception of life circumstances whereas social support and conflict management is devoid of gender discrimination supported by the analysis. In short the study implies that there is a need to advocate the issue of smart dispute management with reference to sense of understanding and expression of one's inner rather than the avoidance of conflict at times.

## LIMITATIONS

Following are the limitations of the research:

1. Lack of recourses, lack of time, and the lack of money all leads towards the potential weaknesses of this study and causes major issues related to the generalization of the results.

2. Study is conducted upon the individuals of the similar class at the prestigious institutes; which is the vital reason of uniformity in the stated responses.

3. Selected sample size was enough to represent the population of a specific area (Federal area of Pakistan) and could only generalize the results over that specified and limited population due to which the external validity of the research is low and its results could not be generalized to other population, settings and locales in Pakistan.

4. Besides the limitation of sample size and locale this research could not cover diversified aspects that could be achieved by introducing more variables like socioeconomic status and marital status, and family size in the research.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined below are aimed at providing students, teachers, parents and future researchers with practical guidelines to seek adequate social support and communal control and attain sense of belonging, self-worth and security to immense themselves in successful conflict resolution and face incongruity with confidence and keep your personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

1. Individuals with low social support should be provided with opportunities for spontaneous creative play, learning that reinforce their ideas so that they can explore their real identities which ultimately act as a step towards positive self understanding, internal motivation to solve the problems with dignity.

2. Students should learn from the research work on emotional, appraisal, informational and instrumental support and programs should be conducted to create awareness about the skills to adjust life's journey in its real soul.

3. Parents and teachers should provide daily guidance by engaging individuals in exploring activities and they should serve as individual's social and emotional coaches to cope with the youth common problem of avoiding the conflicts encountered.

4. Workshops should be conducted to teach how to replace tough disciplines practices, conflict solving skills and life strains.

5. Universities and educational institutions should conduct seminars and conflict management programs to laid emphasis on the importance of articulating one's inner and ideas to resolve the disputes meaningfully.

6. It is recommended that future researchers replicate this study by substituting different social support and conflict resolving measures to get a vast and new idea about the relationship between these constructs.

7. Future Researchers should expand this study by broadening the sample. The sample could be expanded to represent a broader representation of males, females and students from different ethnic groups and socioeconomic status to be able to generalize the findings to greater number of population instead of the present study done at Federal area of Pakistan.

8. Researcher can conduct longitudinal studies to test the consistency of social support acquired and conflict management styles implement and modify at different stages of life.

9. The results of the study can be amended by the analysis done at different career and life settings as the above study provide evidence that somewhere there is an influence of life and family settings particularly social statuses over one's perception of life's problem and their resolution.

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With regard to our study the first step is to discover the respondents true or best fit preferences and help them to stand out positively because one's vision of life tribulations can be distorted and confused by family peers and environmental pressure. Therefore knowledge and understanding can reform one's vision of dealing with the conflicts and world around.

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