

The Impact of Parental Conflict on the Educational Outcomes of Children with Mental Retardation: A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT:

In this research, the educational results of mentally retarded children are analyzed considering parental disagreements. One hundred children with slight to moderate intellectual disabilities (aged 8 to 14) and their parents were included in the study. The Educational Performance Assessment Scale (EPAS) and the Parental Conflict Scale (PCS) were the tools for data collection. A strong negative correlation between parental disagreements and the children's academic performance was found ($r = -0.63$, $p < 0.01$). Poor adaptive behavior, less involvement in the classroom, and lower academic scores were some of the crisis-related problems. The findings emphasize the necessity of psychosocial support and family unity in the process of bringing about better educational gains for the group of children that have intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: correlation, family environment, children with mental retardation, educational outcomes, and parental conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The family setting is crucial for children's growth and has an important impact on the development of children with intellectual or developmental disabilities. One of the major factors affecting progress in all three terms—cognitive, social, and educational—for children who are mentally retarded is the continuous emotional support and stable parental relationships (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2015). The home is the first place where these children acquire basic skills like emotional regulation and learning behaviors, which are important in the direct influence on their educational paths. On the contrary, parental conflict—be it verbal, emotional, or physical—can create a stressful home situation that can easily disrupt children's learning, concentrating, and motivation and thus increase the problems existing already in their development (Cummings & Davies, 2010).

The negative impact of family conflicts on children's academic and emotional functioning has been a consistent finding in studies carried out in the past. Grych and Fincham (1990) created a cognitive-contextual

model and through that model showed how children's understanding and emotional reactions to parenting disputes have a major influence on their psychological features and behavior. Likewise, Amato and Afifi (2006) documented that parenting discord tends to be one of the most significant factors leading to children's poor academic performance, increase in behavioral problems, and lack of emotional well-being. They also posed that these children might experience anxiety, withdrawal, or aggression that would hinder them from engaging effectively in educational settings. The security hypothesis of **Davies and Cummings (1994)** to some extent affirmed this by positing that children's feeling of safety and stability in the family is the basic requirement for successful development. When conflicts between parents take away this emotional security, kids might show signs of anxiety, withdrawal, or aggression, all of which would make it harder for them to participate fully in school.

Research has probed extensively into this area but children with intellectual disability have not been given much attention in the research (**Emerson, 2003**). It is highly likely that these children are the most sensitive group that would suffer from family dysfunction and lose the whole family support. Kids with disabilities or of special need are less likely to reach their ultimate learning potential unless the schools and parents create a highly structured and supportive environment for them all the time (**Schalock et al., 2010**). The continuous stress from parent fights might completely drain the kids as their coping skills are already very weak; thus, they might miss out on the lessons and even lose their interest in school. Moreover, conflictual parents might be overwhelmed and, as a result, unable to provide children with special needs the steady therapeutic support and the academic reinforcement that they need (**Kersh, Hedvat, Hauser-Cram, & Warfield, 2006**).

2. Objectives of the Study:

1. To find out how much conflict there is between parents in families of mentally retarded children.
2. To evaluate the educational performance of the children with mental retardation.
3. To identify the relationship between parental conflict and educational outcomes.

3. Hypotheses of the Study:

- H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There exists no significant correlation between parental conflict and educational outcomes of children belonging to the mentally retarded group.
- H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There exists a significant negative correlation between parental conflict and educational outcomes of children with mental retardation.

4. Methodology:

4.1 Research Design:

The current research utilized a correlational research design to investigate the link between parental conflict and the academic performance of children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. A correlational design was seen as fitting since it permitted the study of the intensity and direction of the relationship between the naturally occurring variables with no intervention.

The study took a quantitative route, backed up with qualitative insights which were aimed at enhancing the interpretative depth. Reliable measurements were obtained through the use of standardized psychological

tools, whereas short semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers were utilized to gain a contextual understanding.

Moreover, inter-rater reliability was computed for teacher-rated scales to verify the consistency of the assessments. Through background data collection and partial correlation analysis, efforts were also made to control for confounding variables like parental education, socioeconomic status, and duration of child enrollment in school.

4.2 Sample:

The research team obtained their sample of 100 children (52 boys and 48 girls) aged 8 to 14 years with mild to moderate mental retardation who were selected from five special education schools in Madhya Pradesh, India. The inclusion of two additional schools gave the findings a wider scope of application and more accurate representation of the population.

Research subjects were drawn by a mixed method of purposive and random sampling where first, all qualified students were found from the chosen schools and then random selection was applied in each category. All the students were part of structured educational programs and diagnosed by standard psychological and medical criteria.

Inclusion criteria required that:

- The child's mother and father were cohabiting and ready to take part.
- The child was medically diagnosed with mild or moderate intellectual disability and was following the regular curriculum at the school.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Traumatic brain injury.
- Gullain-Barre syndrome.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Boys	52	52%
	Girls	48	48%
Level of Mental Retardation	Mild	60	60%
	Moderate	40	40%
Total	—	100	100%

Table: 1

The sample size was considered statistically adequate for correlation and group comparison analyses (t-tests), ensuring sufficient statistical power.

4.3 Tools Used

1. Parental Conflict Scale (PCS) – Sharma & Gupta (2018)

The PCS method was applied for assessing the frequency and intensity of parental conflicts. This scale consists of 30 specific items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 denoting "Never" and 5 "Always"). The scale encompasses such areas as financial quarrels, problem-solving difficulties, communication barriers, and emotional detachment, among others.

- Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$
- Validity: Based on family functioning indices determined through correlation.

2. Educational Performance Assessment Scale (EPAS)

The EPAS quantifies the academic performance in areas such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and classroom behavior and participation. It has 25 items that are rated on a 5-point scale by teachers who base their judgment on classroom observation and students' academic records.

- Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$
- Validity: Confirmed through expert review and pilot testing.

In the process of establishing the inter-rater reliability, two teachers trained independently scored a random sample of 20 students. The inter-rater reliability coefficient that was derived ($r = 0.81$) attested to the evaluators' consistency.

Teacher Training Session

Before data collection, participating teachers underwent a **brief training session** to standardize rating procedures and ensure uniform interpretation of EPAS items.

4.4 Procedure:

The school authorities, along with the ethics committees of the institution, granted their approval, and then doctors and teachers gave their informed consent. The data gathering process was divided into two major steps:

1. Parental Evaluation: Parents separately and one after another took the Parental Conflict Scale (PCS) in a closed-off space where their responses would be confidential and their anxiety about giving the wrong answer would be lessened. And while this was happening, basic demographic information (such as parental education, occupation, and family income) was collected so that confounding variables could be controlled.

2. Teacher Evaluation: The teachers of the respective classrooms, who were already experienced in the use of EPAS, performed the educational assessment of each participating child through classroom observation and access to academic records.

To ensure high-quality data:

- Temporal effects were reduced as both data sets were collected in a one-month interval.
- Qualitative interviews (10–15 minutes each) were held with a few parents and teachers to know the factors that affected the conflict and learning outcomes.

Data were subjected to Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation for analysis to find out the correlation between parental conflict and educational performance. Independent samples t-tests were also performed to explore differences according to gender and degree of mental retardation. The variables of socioeconomic and educational background were controlled for in the analysis through partial correlation.

5. Results:

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

the basic features of the data collected from 100 children with mild to moderate mental retardation. The analysis included scores from the Parental Conflict Scale (PCS) and the Educational Performance Assessment Scale (EPAS).

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Parental Conflict Score	100	72.45	11.82	45–95
Educational Performance Score	100	58.62	9.74	40–85

Table:2

Interpretation:

The Parental Conflict Scale's average score of 72.45 points towards conflict in the families of the subjects at a moderately high level. The mean score for Educational Performance which is 58.62, on the other hand, indicates that, meaningfully, students were academically functioning at an average level, with considerable individual differences (SD = 9.74). The large margin (40-85) reveals that some students performed well enough while others were falling behind considerably—likely due to family and psychosocial issues.

The **standard deviation (SD)** was computed using the formula:

$$SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(X - \bar{X})^2}{N - 1}}$$

where X = individual scores, \bar{X} = mean score, and N = total number of cases (100). A higher SD in parental conflict (11.82) indicates greater variation in the level of discord among families.

5.2 Correlation Analysis:

The relationship between **Parental Conflict** and **Educational Performance** was analyzed using **Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r)**.

Variables	r-value	p-value	Significance
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Parental Conflict × Educational Outcome	-0.63	0.000	Significant at 0.01 level
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The **correlation coefficient (r)** was computed using the formula:

$$r = \frac{N(\sum XY) - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Here:

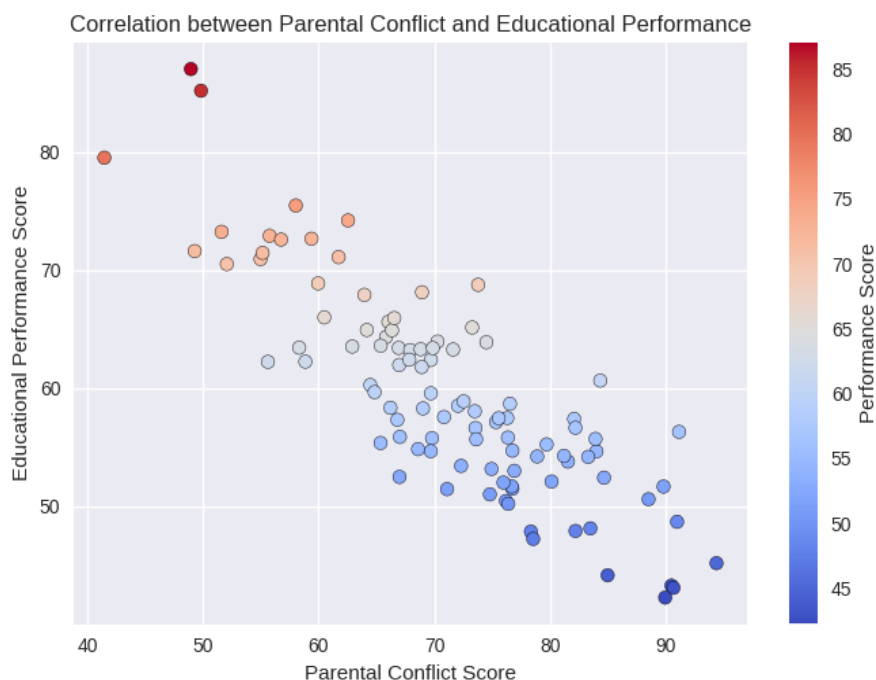
- X = Parental Conflict Scores
- Y = Educational Performance Scores
- N = 100

The obtained correlation, $r = -0.63$, signifies a strong negative correlation, meaning that as parental conflict increases, the child's educational performance decreases. The p -value = 0.000 ($p < 0.01$) confirms the result is statistically significant.

Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) — “no significant correlation between parental conflict and educational outcome” — is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Graph 1: Correlation Between Parental Conflict and Educational Performance

Pearson $r = -0.63$ (Strong Negative Correlation)



Red line shows negative linear trend: Higher conflict associates with lower performance

Interpretation:

The finding implies that intense conflicts including verbal fights, emotional detachment, or contradictory parenting practices cause setbacks in children's learning capacity, motivation, and participation in the classroom. Kids who are regularly exposed to conflicting parents may suffer from anxiety, attention issues, and difficulty in regulating emotions, which eventually results in lower academic performance.

5.3 Group Comparison (High vs. Low Conflict Families)

To further explore the effect of parental conflict, the sample was divided into two groups using the median split method based on PCS scores:

- **High Conflict Families (n = 50)**
- **Low Conflict Families (n = 50)**

The difference in educational performance between these groups was tested using an **Independent Samples t-test**, calculated as:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{S_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

where:

\bar{X}_1, \bar{X}_2 = group means,

S_1, S_2 = standard deviations,

n_1, n_2 = sample sizes (50 each).

Group	N	Mean (EPAS)	SD	t-value	p-value
High Conflict	50	52.14	8.32	6.07	0.000
Low Conflict	50	65.10	7.11		Significant at 0.01 level

Interpretation:

Low-conflict children outperformed their high-conflict peers in educational performance by 13 points, which was a statistically significant difference supported by t-value of 6.07 at $p < 0.01$. It can thus be concluded that the harmony in the family is an important factor contributing to the improvement of educational performance for kids with mental retardation. The emotional stability in the low-conflict families leads to better concentration, learning that is more uniform, and more cooperation between the teachers and the parents.

Overall Findings

1. A very strong inverse relationship ($r = -0.63$) illustrates that parental disagreement is a serious factor affecting the academic performance of mentally handicapped children.
2. The t-test indicated a very large difference in means among the high and low conflict groups ($t = 6.07, p < 0.01$).
3. These results lend further support to the emotional security hypothesis — that children from stable families get better learning outcomes.

6. Discussion:

The research results of this investigation unambiguously indicate that the conflicts between parents have an undesirable impact on the educational results of children suffering from different grades of mental retardation. The obtained correlation coefficient ($r = -0.63, p < 0.01$) shows a strong negative connection between the two variables thus validating the assumption that the higher the parental conflict the lower the educational performance of children. This finding is consistent with previous research which pointed out that the stress in the family and the fight between parents are serious obstacles in the development of children's emotions and cognitive skills (Amato, 2010; Harold et al., 2012). In case of children with disabilities, the conflict between the parents is even more detrimental as their reliance on emotional stability, structure, and guidance is very high.

Hence, one can conclude that the child's success in education is not merely the result of a good school but also the product of the family's emotional and relational climate. Children who live in a home where the parents are always fighting, there is emotional distance or overriding neglect, usually are the ones developing psychological insecurity, fear, and withdrawal. These disturbances of feeling make it difficult to attend, remember and participate in class which are the major aspects of learning. The research further supports the "Emotional Security Hypothesis" (Davies & Cummings, 1994), which proposes that a child's feeling of emotional safety within the family is crucial for their behavioral and academic adjustment. When this safety is threatened by parental conflict, the children are more prone to develop anxiety, low self-confidence, and behavioral problems which in turn have a negative impact on their educational participation.

In addition, a continuous fight among the parents might signal their emotional detachment from the kids, moreover, the quality of their parenting could be different too. Such differences might lead to less supervision, different times for studying, and lack of good reinforcements. Conversely, families with low-conflict issues usually support each other and maintain a stable environment that helps the kids grow academically, hence, early reading and learning confidence. The t-test results from this learning, moreover,

showed that offspring from low-conflict families had significantly higher educational performance than children from high-conflict families ($t = 6.07$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the statistical difference highlights the protective effect of a stable and friendly home environment on the academic growth of children with special needs.

The results point again to the issue of family dynamics as a factor impacting special education outcomes. Teachers and psychologists often prioritize in-class interventions, however, the study suggests shining a light on family-level factors as well. Interparental discord not only cause children to have difficulties in their emotional regulation but also interrupts the teacher-parent collaboration which is highly depended upon for the success of the educational planning. Hence, family counseling, parent training, and emotional support should be integrated throughout the special education process.

Children with mental retardation cannot get their academic potential if family relationships are troubled. Good communication, less stress, and emotional attachment among family members will greatly enhance the learning environment.

Key Implications:

- **Emotional Stability:** A serene and emotionally safe home atmosphere guarantees that the children with mental retardation will have better attention, memory, and learning motivation.
- **Family-Based Interventions:** The use of parental counseling and family therapy in special education environments can alleviate disagreements and improve educational results.

7. Educational Implications:

1. Family therapy should be incorporated into the special education program from the start.
2. Parents would, in turn, be able to learn more and, as a result, be less disputatious among themselves through the sessions planned for them.
3. In this manner, the communication between the school and the house will alert the teachers and the psychologists to the family tensions at an early stage.
4. The financial support for family-centered intervention programs should be shared between the government and non-government organizations.

8. Conclusion:

Parental conflicts, conflict between parents or caregivers, have a major impact on the educational development of children with mental retardation. They are highly correlated ($r = -0.63$, $p < 0.01$) so that the more discord among parents, the lesser the children's academic success and classroom involvement. Children who live in high-conflict homes suffer from emotional insecurity, anxiety, and distraction, which in turn, make learning difficult. The study results demonstrate the very important supportive and peaceful home environment for educational success. The low-conflict families give their children emotional stability, which in return benefits the children's confidence, motivation, and school performance.

Moreover, improving the relationships and communication of the parents is the only option for achieving better learning outcomes for children with special needs. The counseling and psychosocial

interventions for family should be treated as a priority in order to bring about both family harmony and academic progress.

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