

**Parental Conflict and Adolescent Attachment Styles in  
Individualistic vs. Collectivistic Cultures**

by

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### **Abstract**

This capstone project examines the impacts of interparental conflict on adolescents' attachment styles, comparing differences across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Adolescence is a less researched developmental stage, which plays a crucial role in adulthood. Existing research heavily leans toward Western populations, failing to take cultural differences into account. This literature review examines articles published within the 5–7-year range that highlight the impact of parental conflict exposure on adolescents' attachment and mental health across different cultures. Findings from this review demonstrated the adverse effects of interparental conflict on adolescents' attachment and mental health, taking into account mitigating factors such as support and external components. The importance of a more culturally infused attachment-based therapy model has been discussed, along with its benefits within communities, schools, and clinical practice. The study also identifies potential gaps and limitations in research, in hopes that future researchers can address them to build a stronger understanding.

*Keywords:* attachment, parental conflict, secure attachment, insecure ambivalent, insecure avoidant, individualistic culture, collectivistic cultures

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The adolescent stage in development is considered a pivotal period that significantly impacts their mental health in adulthood (Scheiner et al., 2022). According to statistics by the World Health Organization (2024), globally, it has been estimated that one in seven adolescents (10–19-year-olds) experiences a mental health condition, which goes unrecognized and untreated. This evaluation is based on the reported cases; however, the actual number may be significantly higher. Within the United States, almost 20% of youth and children between the ages of three and 17 have emotional, behavioural, developmental, and suicidal issues, which is said to be a nearly 40% increase in recent years (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2022). In Canada, according to the 2022 Mental Health and Access to Care Survey, 18.3% of adolescents (aged 15 years and above) got a diagnosis of anxiety, mood, or substance use disorder (Statistics Canada, 2025). Amongst the cases reported, depression and anxiety are the main determinants of disability and a decline in health. Suicidality follows closely as the third reason.

Research in mental health has seen a shift from studying the adult population to focusing on the adolescent age groups. This is due to research indicating that intervening in the early stages of development can lead to better outcomes in adulthood (Kosterman et al., 2019). Administering preventive methods during those crucial stages in life has been shown to have long-term effects into a person's 20s (Reynolds et al., 2017). In this chapter, recent studies will be examined to determine the importance of mental health for adolescents and the importance of viewing it from a cultural perspective. It will highlight the research process, challenges, and implications in the field of counselling and the researcher's positionality.

## Overview

Adolescence is a critical stage of development marked by psychological and emotional changes, along with a heightened sense of vulnerability. Many factors impact adolescents during this critical period of life, one of them being the attachment they form with their parents or primary caregivers (Khan et al., 2020). The earliest relationships a child forms are with their parents, who are a primary source of socialization and one of the most significant influences on their mental, physical, and emotional development in the early years (Morelli et al., 2022). Research has consistently supported the existence of a secure attachment style and its association with improved mental health outcomes. Any disruption in this bond or relationships tends to result in an increase in depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideations (Morelli et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Conflicts between parents have emerged as a significant factor that affects how adolescents view their surroundings and how well they develop their emotional self. While some non-Western cultures tend to internalize conflicts between parents, others are more covert with fights and arguments, exposing children to negative interactions (Morelli et al., 2022). This finding suggests differences within cultures and highlights the importance of examining the effects of parental conflict within them. Despite the global rise in parental conflict, research in this area remains limited in a cultural context. Examining its impact on young minds by considering the role of culture can provide more transparency around the development of interventions. This literature review aims to examine how adolescent attachment styles are impacted by parental conflict and how they may differ within individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Family systems incorporate multiple relationships; some households have more connections than others. The primary stakeholders in that system are the guardians who provide

for the children physically and emotionally. Guardians could be classified as a child's caregivers or parents. Children often look at their primary caregivers for support, advice, and safety (American Psychological Association, 2023). When the caregiver is dependable, the child considers them a secure base from which they are free to explore (Cherry, 2025). Any hindrance within that system can create further complications. Parental conflict is defined by an argument or difference in opinion that can be loud and lead to aggression, emotional, or physical abuse. Parental conflict differs from family conflict, which extends beyond a dyadic interaction and can include communities (Morelli et al., 2022). All households experience interpersonal conflict to some extent, but they differ in the impact it has on child development.

There are two types of conflicts identified by Warmuth and colleagues (2019): destructive and constructive. Destructive conflict refers to aggression (verbal or physical) and hostility, which leads to symptoms of externalization or internalization in individuals (Cummings et al., 2004). Constructive conflict, which includes cooperation, problem-solving, and affection, is linked to positive outcomes in children (McCoy et al., 2013). This literature review will focus on the impact of destructive conflict between parents on adolescent mental health. Studies (Gao et al., 2018; Narejo et al., 2023) have reported that exposure to destructive conflict between parents by adolescents tends to reduce their future successes, hinder their emotional and social well-being, make them susceptible to mental health concerns, and impact their attachments throughout their lifespan. The onset of childhood depression and anxiety has also been linked to destructive conflict within households (Choi et al., 2020). Although conflict does occur in all families to some degree, the intensity, frequency, and level of disruption within the household determine its impact on children and adolescents (Stith et al., 2009). As much as it affects their social life and

internal well-being, it also impacts their relationships with their parents, weakening the attachments formed in the early years (Wang et al., 2024).

According to Seo et al. (2024), attachment formations and perceptions of the conflict situation may vary depending on cultural affiliations. Different cultures have varying values and parenting styles that influence the level of closeness between children and their primary caregivers. For instance, attachments formed in collectivistic cultures will differ from those in individualistic cultures, as collectivistic cultures often employ authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, whereas individualistic cultures tend to have authoritative and permissive styles. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes discipline, obedience, and group cohesion, hindering their sense of individual autonomy and self-expression (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022). It is seen as one-way parenting, where children are expected to conform and any misbehaviour results in consequences. According to Masud et al. (2019), this form of parenting often results in children exhibiting challenges in decision-making and may appear shy. Whereas authoritative parenting is nurturing and involves disciplinary actions used to support rather than punish. Authoritative parenting has clear set of rules and boundaries, and children are encouraged to grow through open communication, tending to excel academically and have a high level of self-esteem. In an individualistic culture, there is a greater emphasis on personal autonomy, open communication, and respect, as well as building self-esteem and confidence (Ahmed, 2025; Masamba, 2024). Within this culture, parenting styles tend to be permissive or authoritative, which are more nurturing and warmer. Permissive parenting tends to lean towards building high emotional safety, but due to a low level of strictness, it tends to result in low academic achievement (Cai, 2024). In collectivistic cultures, attachment anxiety appears to be the emerging pattern, whereas in individualistic cultures, it is attachment avoidance (Kafetsios & Kateri, 2020). Adolescents'

perception of parental conflict is shaped mainly by how deeply rooted parenting styles and attachment patterns are within cultural values.

While previous research (Maya et al., 2024; Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021) has extensively investigated the effects of parental conflict on various aspects of adolescents' lives, more emphasis is being placed on the role of culture within their experiences and interactions. Understanding the cultural variations in parenting styles is crucial, as they impact the attachment formation between parent and child. This, in turn, affects how adolescents may cope with or interpret interparental conflicts (Lin et al., 2017). This study aims to investigate the impact of parental conflict on adolescents' attachment styles within the context of individualistic versus collectivistic cultures.

### **Problem Statement**

According to the 2023 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, mental health concerns are on the rise amongst adolescents. In 2019, 12% of youth aged between 12 and 17 years reported their mental health being 'fair' or 'poor,' and in 2023, the percentage was 23% (Statistics Canada, 2025). It has been found that family life, relational attachments, socio-economic status, communities, and cultural belonging are some of the many components that affect one's mental health and overall well-being (Kirkbride et al., 2024). Researchers have extensively studied the role of attachment, along with interpersonal conflict in married couples, and have specifically targeted therapeutic interventions to address these issues (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021; Wang et al., 2024). The effectiveness of research findings (Li et al., 2022) has led to the development of interventions and strategies that effectively address concerns raised by clients.

As global migration and intercultural marriages have significantly increased, further guidance is required to accommodate multiculturalism (Gopalkrishnan, 2018). The importance of cultural competency continues to grow within psychology and researchers are shifting their focus towards exploring these avenues and understanding how culture influences mental health (Ahad et al., 2023; Dumke et al., 2024). The cultural identity that defines an individual also heavily influences their responses to stress and life challenges (Alan, 2025). This makes it crucial for therapists to study culture and its impact on psychological well-being, enabling them to provide sensitive and well-informed services. These services would also ensure alignment with the Code of Ethics and that the best ethical practices are followed with clients. Additionally, through studying the effects of marital conflicts, a broader lens has been identified with the impact seen within the whole family system, specifically children and adolescents. The most vulnerable age at which individuals are most susceptible to the weakening of mental health has been identified as adolescence (Scheiner et al., 2022). Hence, this study looks at the effects of parental conflict on this population through a cultural lens.

### ***Research Questions***

When examining the research, it is evident how meaningful interpersonal relationships are to one's mental health and well-being (Block et al., 2022). Destructive and constructive conflicts within families have been explored, yielding results that support a decline in mental health when destructive parental disputes exist (Kong et al., 2024). Adolescents who experience these adverse incidents lead to an increased likelihood of getting depression and anxiety, along with impacts to academic success, relationship quality/quantity, and self-esteem (Ching & Wu, 2018). Moreover, impacts can vary across cultures, as differences have been noted among adolescents from collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Don, 2024; Farruggia et al., 2004).

Hence, this study aims to examine these issues from a holistic perspective with the research question, *“How does parental conflict influence adolescent attachment styles, and how do these effects differ between individualistic and collectivist cultural contexts?”*

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of attachment was first proposed by John Bowlby (1969), suggesting that the interaction and bond infants and children form with their primary caregivers are strong predictors of their future development in forming bonds and relationships (Yu, 2021). Humans are born as social beings and need quality relationships to develop and grow. Whether in celebration or in times of sadness and grief, humans seek connection and a sense of belonging (Braren, 2023). In times of distress or uncertainty, humans rely on their formed relations for support, such as a child going to their parents when they need help (Harlow, 2021). Bowlby went on to expand his understanding of attachments and introduced the concept of secure base (Kerns et al., 2015). The secure base scenario involves a child exploring their surroundings, feeling safe, and returning to their mother, which is indicative of a secure attachment. Bowlby reported that any changes or hindering of this bond can lead to individual attachment issues (McGarvie, 2024).

Based on Bowlby’s theory, Mary Ainsworth, a developmental psychologist, developed the strange situation experiment, a significant contribution to how attachment theory is understood. This experiment investigated the attachment between mother and child and the capacity in which the child explores their surroundings (The Attachment Project, 2024). This work found the role of the caregiver is crucial in attachment formation. Through the caregiver’s actions, the quality of the bond can be deduced, leading to the caregiver sensitivity hypothesis. Caregiver sensitivity tends to affect a child’s social and emotional development, as it impacts the attachment bond and hence can predict mental health outcomes later in life (Bohr et al., 2018). In

this review, attachment theory will be referred to as it explains how the type of attachment between parents and adolescents shape their outcomes in adulthood within a cultural context. This can illuminate the creation of preventive methods to ensure an evidence-based intervention during this life stage.

### **Methodology**

The research method employed in this study utilized keywords and search engines. Once the research topic was finalized, it was broken down into subtopics that needed to be researched to gain a deeper understanding. Keywords used to research this topic were parental conflict, marital conflict, interpersonal conflicts, adolescent mental health, adolescent attachment, collectivistic culture vs. individualistic culture, parenting style in cultures, and parent-child attachment. The search was narrowed to content-specific research articles within a 5- to 7-year date range and optimized to view peer-reviewed articles, of which 37 focused on, with other relevant articles also considered. Seminal research papers were referenced when researching theoretical frameworks. Research articles that focused mainly on childhood or familial mental health were excluded for the literature review but scanned for helpful information that could provide a secure base for the research. While analyzing papers, relevant references on the topic were identified, leading to the discovery of additional articles. Culture is a broad topic that encompasses many different components; therefore, studies that did not examine the specificities of individualism and collectivism were also not mentioned. Search engines, like Google and Google Scholar, were used, along with PubMed, PsychINFO, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest.

The articles were reviewed using Creswell and Creswell's (2023) method by analyzing the studies and forming an abstract for them. These articles were stored on Mendeley Reference Manager for easy access and review. When reviewing the articles, the abstract was scanned to

ensure its applicability to the research questions. The conclusion was then examined, and the body was read. The studies chosen for examination were not based solely on positive results, as contradictory outcomes are an aspect of exploration. Inclusion was based on similarity and level of contribution to this review. There were some challenges encountered while conducting research, such as not being able to access some of the articles due to subscription issues. When exploring culture, numerous studies on Chinese populations were available, making it difficult to find other culturally relevant articles. I tried to request access to some of these articles and refined my search to give results that had full text available.

### ***Justification and Social Justice Implications***

According to Wilson (n.d.), interventions need to be culturally attuned, as cultural identity is one of the major influencers on how life and challenges are perceived. Conflicts are also influenced by culture, impacting perception and understanding within the adolescent age groups (Buchanan et al., 2023). For instance, according to Ching and Wu (2018), households that had unhealthy parental conflict dealt saw high levels of emotional insecurity and materialism in adolescents, as compared to those who dealt with parental conflict healthily. Despite the type of family structure (divorced, married, or separated), high levels of emotional insecurity within adolescents have been linked to destructive interpersonal conflict, leading to mental health issues (O'Hara et al., 2023). Furthermore, with increasing global connectedness, understanding adolescent attachment through the cultural lens has become important.

Existing research is predominantly geared towards Western-centric models, which often focus on individualistic forms of communities. These models are unable to capture the complex components in collectivistic cultures, making them less generalizable to other populations and their impact in marginalized societies (Hood et al., 2022). For instance, Mancinelli et al. (2021)

reported that Chinese adolescents who belonged to collectivistic cultures reported exertion of self-control as compared to those from Italy, Spain, and Poland. This suggests that cultural belonging tends to impact the internalization of attachment and self-regulation. In a similar way, Novianti et al. (2023) observed that maternal attachments are generally consistent across cultures, and paternal relations vary. These studies suggest broadening our understanding that not only are parenting roles impacted, but also how the adolescents react or respond to family dynamics. By examining events through a cultural lens, practitioners may have a deeper understanding of how to support best adolescents who are culturally diverse. As children spend most of their time in academic settings, this knowledge may help educators relate to their students and help form a bond based on trust, support, and understanding. This research may help educators comprehend the causes of emotional dysregulation, which can be associated with behavioural patterns (Parker et al., 2021). This information may help create programs that support multicultural families and offer support that adheres to their values and beliefs, as this is an area that currently lacks resources (Anderson et al., 2019; Yamaguchi et al., 2020).

By addressing the gap, practitioners may help cater to the multicultural aspects of clients and assist in the development of better intervention strategies, with better responsiveness and effectiveness. The outcome of this review can benefit various sectors of practice, including therapists and counsellors, who work with the population and could benefit from a more cohesive and informed practice. Findings show 28–74% of adolescents who are brought in for therapy through others leave without completing the treatment course, which has been associated with therapists' behaviour and events that occur within sessions (Stige et al., 2021). Hence, conducting research and examining what is useful and what is not is helpful to determine the best approach when working with this population to mitigate these challenges. Along with creating

and maintaining a good therapeutic relationship, it is essential to understand and validate client experiences (Opland & Torrico, 2024). Experiences differ across cultures, and by understanding the depth of such occurrences, therapists and counsellors can adopt a practical approach that is supportive, accepting, and respectful (Lavik et al., 2018; Løvgren et al., 2019).

### **Personal Reflection and Positionality Statement**

I grew up in a nuclear family, which was part of a larger collectivistic culture. Despite my childhood being in a different country, we were always connected to our relatives back in India through annual trips and phone calls. My dad, being brought up in India, had a different mindset from my mom, who spent most of her childhood in Abu Dhabi. For my mother, education was crucial, and therefore, she advocated for us, and we received the best education at the time. She also supported us throughout the school process and then our further studies. Moreover, our parenting was influenced by our cultural values and beliefs, with a greater emphasis on academic achievements rather than emotional understanding. There was also an observable gender role expectation that affected our autonomy and privilege within the family as well.

Due to my own parental conflict within the household, my siblings and I are not very close to our parents and find solace in our social circles. Through self-exploration, I realized that unresolved or mismanaged conflicts have a direct impact on children and their attachment to their parents. This review is essential to my own lived experience. As an adult, I realized that the outcomes could have been different if the situations had been different or handled differently. Understanding this has provided me with the knowledge to raise my children differently and build an attachment that is secure, which results in increased resilience, confidence, and better relationships. Despite the commonalities, this study is based on empirical research and through seeking external feedback and being mindful of my own viewpoints on the topic. Through self-

reflection (researcher positionality), I ensured that my assumptions and predictions did not influence this paper, and any arising countertransference was addressed accordingly. Another way this paper aims to mitigate bias is through triangulation, where multiple sources of information is be used for cross-verification (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Definitions of Terms**

This section provides definitions for the terminology referenced in this literature review to clarify its meaning.

#### ***Attachment***

Attachment is described as a long-standing connection of an individual with others. This can occur with family, peers, pets, or others within the community (Jakobsen & Fischer, 2023).

#### ***Collectivistic Cultures***

These cultures are characterized by individuals who view themselves as part of a larger group, such as a family or community. Their goals are also aligned with those of the group as a whole, rather than just themselves, fostering harmony, loyalty, and cohesion among people. This phenomenon is more prevalent in Eastern or less affluent societies and has been associated with a lower divorce rate, stronger social and family structures, and an emphasis on responsibilities and conformity within these societies (Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023).

#### ***Individualistic Culture***

Emphasizes the individual's independence from groups. There is an emphasis on personal achievements, more autonomy, and the rights held by individuals. Individuals expect to take care of themselves and/or the people in their immediate surroundings, often at the expense of losing social ties. This type of culture is more prevalent in Western societies and has been linked to a

higher divorce rate, a greater emphasis on self-expression and freedom, and fewer restrictions within interpersonal relationships (Piotrowska & Piotrowski, 2023).

### *Insecure Ambivalent Attachment*

Insecure ambivalent attachment is described as when the caregiver is only available in certain situations, which creates fear around abandonment and rejection. A need for closeness also defines this and can be anxiety-provoking for individuals (Feuerman, 2019).

### *Insecure Avoidant Attachment*

Insecure avoidant attachment is when the child might be prone to developing anxiety, difficulties in relationship formation, and has a fear of commitment as they struggle to connect emotionally (Feuerman, 2019).

### *Parental Conflict*

Refers to a hostile relationship between parents (married, separated, or divorced). This is considered destructive and can negatively impact an individual's emotional well-being (Kong et al., 2024).

### *Secure Attachment*

Secure attachment is known as the healthiest kind of attachment. It is further defined as the presence of emotional and physical warmth, availability, and trust, where a child has a sense of comfort from the caregiver (Pittman, 2020).

## **Overview of Capstone Chapters**

Building on this foundation, Chapter 2 will provide a more comprehensive literature review that presents key themes of the research topic, further underscoring its importance and relevance. Chapter 3 will present the findings of the research question of how parental conflict

influences adolescent attachment styles, and how these effects differ between individualistic and collectivist cultural contexts and provide discussion and applied practice recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Parental conflict and its impact on adolescent mental health have become a serious concern worldwide (Somani & Khan, 2025), leading to more research within this population. Parental conflict has been defined as a disagreement between caregivers, whether verbal or physical, leaving a significant imprint with long-lasting effects (Barthassat, 2014). Statistics show that one in seven adolescents, between the ages of 10 and 19, experience a mental disorder (World Health Organization, 2024). According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2025), this has been a rising concern in Canada as well, with around one out of five young Canadians experiencing mental distress. One of the identified factors affecting adolescents is the attachment they form with their parents. As stated by Parsa et. al. (2014), the interaction between parents and their child impacts how they transition through phases, affecting their self-competence and identity. If exposed to parental conflict, the formation of the relationship changes, affecting the adolescents' mental health. This relationship might also develop differently under cultural values and norms. The purpose of this review is to examine how parental conflict affects the attachment styles of adolescents and their mental health in different cultural settings by answering the research question, *“How are adolescents affected by conflict between parents, and if collectivistic or individualistic cultures mediate that relationship?”* This literature review analyzes relevant studies and identify key factors that help answer the question.

This chapter organizes the literature into themes. These themes illustrate how changes in adolescents' mental health occur and their determinants, and consider parental conflict, culture, and attachment styles. It will examine the theoretical foundations of parental conflict and attachment, exploring how parental conflict affects adolescent mental health and attachment.

Additionally, it will investigate how parenting styles, conflict, and attachment are influenced by culture, as well as the gaps and limitations that exist within the literature.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Family Conflict and Attachment**

Investigating how parental conflict impacts the development of adolescents through attachment theory is foundational. The earliest development of attachment theory was initiated by Bowlby (1969), marking it as one of the most significant areas of child development. He described attachment as a different relationship that exists between an infant and their caregiver, which is foundational for further development (Bowlby, 1979). Attachment can also be described as an emotional closeness between family members, particularly parents or guardians, that helps foster independence and relationship formation (Dagan et al., 2021; Rees, 2007). Parental conflict can directly affect adolescents' safety and availability, disrupting that process.

### ***Evolution and Mechanisms of Attachment***

Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of emotions, behaviour, and cognitions as predictors of the quality of attachment (Du, 2020). A well-established attachment's function is to protect the child from danger while also providing them with a secure base from which to explore (Opie et al., 2020). The relationship between parent and child serves an essential function at all stages of life, and it undergoes a significant shift during the adolescent stage. The attachment between adolescent and the parent greatly influences their transition; having a healthy attachment requires a secure attachment (Mohsen, 2025). It also promotes a long-lasting psychological connection with primary caregivers, affecting various aspects of life both in the present and the future (Gregory et al., 2020). Explicit or implicit concerns in this area of development can lead to disruptions in emotional and psychological connectedness in adulthood. Due to differences in parental behaviours, the quality of care affects the kind of attachment

formed (Thompson et al., 2022). This highlights that attachment is a complex, dynamic process that is shaped by parental behaviour and the developmental stage of an individual. This suggests that interventions need to focus on both the developmental stage and the immediate environment with the caregiver.

Secure attachment is formed when there is more supportive parenting involved, building on trust and parental availability for support (Bosmans et al., 2020). The level of support in this type of attachment is predictable, responsive, and catered to the child's needs, serving as a secure base for the child (Bosmans et al., 2020). When the level of support is inconsistent, with less trust, it can lead to a preoccupied attachment style (Graziano, 2024). To ensure reassurance, support, or a sense of protection when it cannot be predetermined, a need arises to maintain proximity to the caregiver (Enevold, 2022). When parents are unsupportive in the face of a stressful situation due to an inability to self-regulate in the presence of difficult emotions, it can lead to an avoidant or dismissive attachment style. Walsh and Zadurian (2022) investigated how parental attachment styles and child temperament predict the quality of parent-child attachment during the adolescent stage of life, in the United Kingdom, using a cross-sectional online survey of 100 parents of adolescents aged 12 to 15 years. A low quality was reported when there was parental attachment anxiety, while temperament was a stronger predictor of negative affect and affiliation in attachment. This study looked into the early adolescence, which was a strength, considering limited research in this developmental area. It also utilized a qualitative design, which posed reliability and validity. This highlights the importance of considering child characteristics through relational outcomes, providing a bidirectional perspective. Despite that, the study was limited in its approach to use self-reported measures and having a small sample size and mostly Irish mothers, making generalizability a challenge. However, attachment

outcomes cannot be fully understood through parental behaviours alone; they need to be investigated as a reciprocal influence rather than a one-way interaction.

Similarly, Therriault et al. (2021) found results that supported and emphasized the importance of the parent-adolescent attachment. They conducted a longitudinal study with 706 French-speaking Canadian adolescents, focusing on identifying the individual and contextual factors that affect the quality of attachment. They also focus on trust, communication, and alienation when it comes to viewing the behavioural problems, parenting practices, temperament, peer attachments, parental attitudes, and abuse history. The results indicated that within the global attachment model, internalizing behaviour problems and peer attachment tended to be positive predictors. This study was longitudinal, strengthening its predictive validity and also the use of varying means of collecting data (parents, adolescents, teachers) gives more power to the results as multiple data sources were used to conclude this aspect. They also had a large sample size, making the conclusion generalizable. On the other hand, the population used in this study were predominantly Caucasian adolescents, making this specific to one population and not generic over different cultures.

In both studies, the parent-adolescent relationship tends to be a protective factor against worsening mental health. Mixed results were seen when examining peer involvement. Together, both these studies indicate that a secure attachment between parent and child can be a protective factor against worsening mental health in adolescence. Simultaneously, peer attachment plays a mixed role, suggesting that adolescents' impact through parental conflict can be affected by other factors that can exacerbate or buffer the outcome. A challenge similar in both were the sample participants, as they were predominantly Caucasian and were not culturally diversified. This highlights the importance of investigating adolescent attachment as a layered process rather than

solely focusing on parental conflict and also highlights the need for a more culturally diverse population sample.

Furthermore, Khan et al. (2020) added a developmental perspective to this topic by conducting a longitudinal study involving 690 participants in USA. These participants ranged in age from seven to 19 years, and the study reported that the baseline parental depression and the increase in parent-child stress were developmentally related, linked to a heightened adolescent insecurity. They also reported that the quality of friendships was linked to attachment but was not a developmental driver, and genetic factors did not have any impact on attachment development. The strengths of the study were its large sample size and the use of mixed methods of data collection, used multiple times over the span of three years, identifying change in various ways. It was concluded that the presence of depression and stress did influence attachment in the parent-child dynamic. This provided further evidence that the emotional well-being of parents was associated with attachment stability over time. By emphasizing the mental health of parents as a developmental risk factor, it is evident that parental conflict needs to be viewed as a broader constellation of family stressors that impact attachment in adolescents. This opens up the scope of research possibilities into looking at immediate conflict impact on long-term parental functioning and emotional stability. However, the research design cannot determine causal relations in the variables used in the study, hence causal conclusions cannot be drawn from this. Additionally, the sample included 85% of mother-child relationships, and hence any inferences to other relationship dyads need to be cautiously explored.

### **Dimensions and Patterns of Parental Conflict**

It has been established that parental attachment with adolescents has an everlasting impact on their mental health (Dagan et al., 2021; Moretti & Peled, 2004). The type of bond

formed plays a role in future relations. One of the identified factors that affects this attachment formation is interparental conflicts. This conflict can affect emotional, behavioural, and physiological development and capabilities (Zemp et al., 2016). Adolescents who have witnessed intense interparental conflicts tend to experience damage to their emotional and cognitive processing, which leads to heightened emotional reactions (Harold & Sellers, 2018). Individuals who have been exposed to parental conflicts growing up have exhibited higher levels of distress, anxiety, depression, and lower life satisfaction (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018). An experimental research paper by Enevold (2022) identified four dimensions of interpersonal conflict: conflict frequency, hostile interparental conflict, constructive interparental conflict, and child-related conflict. Conflict frequency relates to the number of times parents engage in conflicts or disagreements, which has been shown to have a small but significant effect on adolescents' reactions. Constructive interpersonal conflict is associated with the frequency of positive tactics employed to resolve conflicts or disagreements, resulting in a more positive outcome (van Eldik et al., 2020).

Additionally, conflicts in families affect all members of the system (Morelli et al., 2022). Despite being the source of disruption, they also act as a support, depending on their positionalities. Adolescents exposed to parental conflict may have ways to adapt in the short term, through coping strategies and support, but gradually this leads to rigid patterns of functioning across situations, creating emotional insecurities and behavioural changes. The study conducted by Enevold (2022) involved 297 individuals aged 18 to 22, from the state of Illinois, and the study indicated a correlation between emotional regulation and attachment anxiety and avoidance. Multiple regression analysis was used and the results in the study indicated a correlation between emotional regulation and attachment anxiety and avoidance. It mentioned

how previous studies have suggested that father and mother attachment moderated the relationship between internalizing behaviours that adolescents exhibit and interparental conflicts. It also states that father attachment moderated the relationship between adolescents' externalizing behaviours and interparental conflict. The researchers assumed that mother and father attachment would be a moderator as well as siblings (as they are also seen as attachment figures). This study showed no moderation with mother and fathers' attachment between interparental conflict and emotional regulation on young adults. Whereas the sibling attachment avoidance and interparental conflict did moderate, which was also a strength of the study to look at multiple components of a family and how they impact attachment formations.

Furthermore, Luijten et al. (2021) examined 1064 adolescents between 11-17 years of age from Netherlands, and looked at how parent and adolescent relationship quality impacts internalization in adolescents. The study was a cross-sectional design, which posed as a challenge due to collecting data at one single point, limiting long-term effects. One of the strengths of the study was its inclusion of mothers and fathers rather than focusing on one parent's relationship. The study's sample size was also large, making it generalizable. Moreover, Qu et al. (2025) conducted their study in China with 914 participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. The study used self-reported measures to collect data at intervals over 12 months. Cross-sectional design was used, which cannot determine causation and hence the results need to be used with caution. The sample used was specific to the Chinese culture, hence limiting its generalizable factor to other cultural populations.

Previous longitudinal observational and cross-sectional studies (Luijten et al., 2021; Qu et al., 2025) have suggested that father and mother attachments moderate the relationship between adolescents' internalizing behaviours and parental conflicts. It also stated that father

attachment moderated the relationship between adolescents' externalizing behaviours and parental conflict. These studies have similar research designs and hence a longitudinal approach might strengthen the findings further, showing the impact overtime. These findings highlights the importance of sibling roles within families in terms of emotional buffering, encouraging examining various relationship within family structures.

Similarly, research has highlighted differences in attachment styles between mothers and fathers and their impact on one's emotional well-being (Pinquart, 2023). The effects of parental conflict on attachment to fathers worsen, especially after divorce, according to a study by Etxeberria and Eceiza (2021), but no significant difference has been found with attachment to mothers. Olatunji and Idemudia (2021) performed a cross-sectional design with 394 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19, in Nigeria, recruited from 8 high schools. The results indicated a positive correlation between interparental conflict and the aggression experienced by the adolescent. This confirms that when an adolescent is exposed to a conflict between the parents, they tend to develop high levels of aggressive tendencies. This study helps understand the extend and impact of exposure to environments with conflict. The cross-sectional design of this study makes it challenging to draw any cause or effect from the results. The sample size of the study is also small, and hence cannot be generalized. The strength of the study is its focus on the quality of interpersonal conflict, adding more depth to the findings.

Similarly, Maya et al.'s (2024) research looked at the attachment relationships within the risk areas (underdeveloped). This study had 67 adolescents belonging to low socioeconomic communities in Spain. Some participants were exposed to parental conflict while some were not, to map out the difference. The study explored the lower-income population, giving a deeper layered understanding. The research findings suggest that conflict within marriage heightens the

aggression within adolescents, supporting research conducted by Olatunji and Idemudia (2021). It also affects the attachment formed with the father more than the mother. The research highlights the importance of father involvement in the therapeutic process, and future direction involves involving fathers in sessions and the rising need for preventive measures within low-income families to counter psychosocial risks. The findings suggest that parental conflicts associated with deteriorating adolescent mental health are universal, with improving attachment style to parents leading to better psychological outcomes. Hence, Spanish research by Maya et al. (2024) sought to examine attachments with fathers in parental conflicts, using family systems theory. Their work examined the impact of marital conflict on parental attachment and psychosocial aspects in the adolescent population. They had 67 adolescents from low socioeconomic communities in Spain, and some were exposed to parental conflict, while others were not, to investigate the differences.

### ***Parental Conflict as a Predictor of Internalization in Adolescence***

The profound impact of parental conflict on adolescents requires further exploration through their internal worlds. Examining internalizing symptoms in adolescents is also crucial to explore, such as anxiety, depression, and emotional dysfunctions (Doering et al., 2022). These effects are long-lasting and tend to affect all aspects of life (Vergunst et al., 2023). Internalizing symptoms vary across the world, and are affected by cultural contexts, as culture defines ways of social interactions and affects expression and mental well-being (Kim et al., 2019). In India, 23.33% of youth tend to have anxiety and depression (Salaam & Kyere, 2025), which might be due to parental psychological control, as it tends to minimize autonomy. A meta-analysis, conducted by Salaam and Kyere (2025), aimed to understand whether psychological control had a cultural component or was universally harmful. It included 48 participants from 18 countries.

The results revealed a significant correlation between internalizing symptoms and psychological control. A more substantial effect was also observed when youth self-reported symptoms and the parental figure was not specified. This link was stronger in adolescents than in younger children, indicating that, despite cultural variation, there is a relationship between psychological control and internalizing symptoms. While this suggests that the way distress is expressed is shaped by culture, the need for psychological control can be harmful. Interventions may need to find a balance in cultural sensitivities and parenting practices. A strength of this study was its consideration of culture as an essential component in understanding psychological control and internalization in adolescents. One of the potential drawbacks was the exclusion of additional cultures and the limitations of using studies published in English. It would have been useful to include studies written in native languages (with translation) to determine the true impact in the adolescent population across various cultures.

Furthermore, O'Hara et al. (2023) examined the impact of parental conflict on adolescents' emotional processing and security, as well as its effect on their internalizing and externalizing symptoms. The research question investigated was whether interparental conflict and emotional insecurity affect adolescent mental health, and if they differ in family structures. This study included 1,032 adolescents aged between 10 and 15 years, in United States, from both divorced and married families, employing a cross-sectional design. The results indicated that interpersonal conflict affected adolescents' emotional insecurity, regardless of the family structure to which they belonged. These findings underscore the need for interventions that prioritize emotional safety over just family structure. The findings challenge the assumption that structural issues within a family lead to internalization challenges in adolescents. Instead, the focus needs to be on the environmental aspects within the family system. Although the study had

a large sample size, which made generalization easy, the data collection method was self-report. Self-reported questionnaires can be prone to bias when examining sensitive topics, though anonymity can also help mitigate that bias (Cochran et al., 2025).

Complementing these findings, Morelli et al. (2022) examined whether family conflict and internalizing symptoms in children are bidirectional and whether they extend beyond the effects of violent victimization. This was a longitudinal study that recruited 1,281 high-risk children and caregivers, in different regions of USA. The data was collected at the ages of six, eight, and 10. The results indicated the presence of strong bidirectional associations between the existence of conflict and internalizing symptoms between the mentioned ages. There were no differences between the genders, and the conflict was solely responsible for the victimization. The strength of this study design is the large, diverse socioeconomically sample that was studied in a longitudinal structure. This mode of study looked at bidirectional associations between the children and family conflicts through different developmental stages, examining their internalizing symptoms. It also had some limitations, such as, relying on self-reports of the caregivers, which can lead to shared bias and underreporting of events. Also, the data reported has been from families considered to be high-risk and hence this cannot be generalized to families who may not fall under this category. This study concluded that interventions need to consider the impact of everyday conflict in the shaping of childhood mental health. The conflict does not need to be violent in nature to have an impact, highlighting the importance of parental support at times of stress.

Another study by Picinich (2022) examined the internalizing issues faced by adolescents who are exposed to marital conflict and whether being exposed to parental conflict at a young age can act as a predictor of anxiety and depression in adolescents. They also considered gender

as a potential factor. Secondary data were obtained from the longitudinal Fragile Families and Child Well-Being study. The sample consisted of 4,989 children from low-income families. The longitudinal aspect of this study helped the researchers examine different developmental trajectories, providing a more comprehensive outlook. The results of the study indicated that if children were exposed to interparental conflict at a younger age (three years), then they were likely to have anxiety and depression by the age of 15. No difference was observed in gender. When children are exposed to parents' fighting, it is linked to lower self-esteem and difficulty in child adjustment, leading to mental health concerns later in life. While the effects are seen in children, constant conflicts between parents are also indicative of their ability to parent due to added distress and heightened feelings of anger, highlighting the importance of taking parental status under consideration as well. One of the limitations to the study was the use of self-reporting measures for parents, which gives way for underreporting. However, to mitigate this, multiple reporters were involved (parents and teachers), mitigating for single-informant bias. The results also highlight the importance of early interventions, particularly for individuals living in high-conflict households, along with the importance of the timing of parental conflict along with the intensity. It also views the challenges of socioeconomic stress and implies that interventions target the explicit factor of conflict, as well as the implicit factors. As the sample population belonged to low-income households, generalizability to those who are not in this category is limited.

Together, these studies provide evidence to support how internalization in adolescence is highly impacted by ongoing parental conflict and is not a result of one isolated incident. Despite other components that may further deteriorate the situations, emotional disconnection through conflict can change future outlooks. Although the studies examined by Morelli et al. (2022) and

Picinich (2022) focused on different age groups, they still help establish a pattern of potential issues that give rise to mental health concerns experienced by adolescents in low-income families. Both the studies took a longitudinal approach, inferring possible causality but limited generalizability to those from lower socioeconomic status. Understanding the core issues related to conflict and their effects on adolescent age groups is crucial as it helps understand the origin of concerns that transition into adolescence. Overall, these findings suggest that internalization cannot be attributed to a single predictive factor but rather to enduring relational dynamics.

### ***Parental Psychopathology and Its Impact***

Parental psychopathology has also been a topic of research, and emotional regulation is linked, with no explanation of intergenerational transmission (Karl et al., 2024). A nationwide birth control, longitudinal study was carried out by Khanal et al. (2025) in Finland, to assess the intergenerational links between anxiety in childhood or adolescence (depending on their age of initial diagnosis). As per the study, a mean age of diagnosis was around 12.7 years, falling in the adolescent age range. This study initially viewed 867,175 singleton live births between 1992 and 2006. After comparing and contrasting cases with the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 21,671 cases were investigated. These cases had a diagnosis of anxiety disorder between 1998 and 2016, defined by the ICD-10 diagnostic codes. The study also had 72,414 control subjects. The results indicated a high prevalence of anxiety disorder in individuals whose parents had a psychiatric disorder. A higher association was seen with maternal disorder as compared to paternal, and the timing of their diagnosis (before or after childbirth) was irrelevant.

This study had a large sample, which helps generalize the results in Finland, giving high statistical power. It also used records that were within the data-based, omitting self-report measures and avoiding recall biases and underreporting. The study also had some limitations, as

only those were included in the study who had anxiety levels on the higher end, not considering milder or untreated cases of anxiety. It also is very specific to Finland and hence the results might not be applicable to other cultural affiliations. The result of the study emphasizes the impact parental psychopathy has on children. It supports the idea that internalizing symptoms and emotional insecurities in adolescents can be shaped by parental emotional instabilities, leading to insecure or disorganized attachment styles.

### **Parental Conflict and Adolescent Outcomes**

Some literature (Enevold, 2022; O'Hara et al. 2023; Picinich, 2022) focuses on mentioning the universal impact of parental conflict on adolescents. It is also equally important to view this from a cultural perspective. Parenting practices, family dynamics, and even the definition of conflict can differ between cultures, impacted by the values and norms. This also impacts adolescents' experience within the environment. Hence, it is important to examine it through a cultural lens to broaden the level of understanding of how conflict is viewed and its impact on adolescents' mental well-being.

### ***Cross-Cultural Perspective***

Research across multiple cultures has shown how parental conflict and a dysfunctional attachment pattern tend to affect adolescents behaviourally, emotionally, and psychologically. These are multi-faceted and are expressed in varying ways. Adolescence is the age group that undergoes various levels of hormonal influxes, academic pressure, and social belonging. Studies have shown that parental conflict hurts adolescents (Shenfield, 2024; Tang, 2025). Wang et al. (2024) conducted a study in China to investigate the interpersonal relationships and their link to suicidality in adolescents. The hypothesis was to see what the correlation is in Chinese adolescents between suicidal intentions and their perception of parental conflict and attachment

style. It also hypothesized that the parent-child attachment would act as a mediator between the conflict perception and intentions about suicide. The study recruited 1,028 participants from high schools in China, who were then given self-reported questionnaires. The large sample size is one of the strengths, which may result in lower margins of inaccuracy. It was a cross-sectional design, which is quicker and inexpensive when administering to a larger population, but it cannot determine causation. Despite that, the study findings showed that the parent-child attachment was crucial in the mediating role between suicide intention and conflict perception, and how the parent-child attachment can be improved with more positive interactional patterns. It also found that adolescents living in rural areas are at a lower risk of suicidal ideation than those living in urban areas. Parental responsiveness is crucial within the Chinese population in safeguarding adolescents, which contradicts previous research that suggested the opposite result, namely, low responsiveness. This underscores the complexity of cross-cultural findings. Even though the way parents respond is often universal, the impact it has may vary depending on their cultural values in terms of collectivism and autonomy. Since the study used self-reported questionnaires, it gives room for biases and the results cannot be generalized, as the cultural perception towards suicide may have affected the way adolescents responded.

Several studies have examined the impact of cultural and environmental factors on parental conflicts. The Nigerian study, based on Grych et al.'s (1992) dimensions of interparental conflict (conflict frequency, threat, and self-blame), aimed to investigate the relationship between adolescent aggression and interparental conflict (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021). It was a cross-sectional, longitudinal study, supporting the notion that various factors of adolescent lives are affected, such as peer victimization. They employed this design with 394 adolescents aged 12 to 19. These were recruited from eight high schools. The study indicated a positive correlation

between interparental conflict, and the aggression experienced by the adolescent. This shows that when an adolescent is exposed to a conflict between the parents, they tend to develop high levels of aggressive tendencies. The use of a cross-sectional design limits the causality aspect, despite expanding our understanding of how aggressive behaviours relate to conflict manifestations. Although easier to administer, cross sectional designs cannot determine or account for change that may occur overtime. Building on this, a longitudinal study could be beneficial in determining whether aggression in adolescents is a byproduct of conflict or whether adolescents who are already aggressive perceive the conflict more intensely.

Other studies (Khanal et al., 2025; Maya et al., 2024) in this literature review also indicate similar results, which in turn affect the attachment formed with parents, leading to diminishing support at home and mental health concerns. Instability between parents can often lead to family separation, disrupting the lives of children (D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019). Children impacted by negative experiences at home, whose parents opt for divorce, have a higher prevalence of facing mental health challenges at some point in life (Parker, 2022). This may also impact their success rate, growing up negatively impacted (Pedro-Carroll, 2020). The impact of parental conflict varies across different age groups, with the effects being most pronounced during adolescence, due to heightened sensitivity towards peers, formation of self-identity, and emotional regulation. For instance, external stressors within the environment, such as pressures faced in schools, community violence, or economic dependence, can increase the negative impacts of experiencing parental conflict. Consequently, access to resources becomes limited when financial instability is present. Activities that may mitigate the effects of conflict are not outsourced with limited economic power, which is the opposite for those in better financial situations (Feghali et al., 2025).

A study conducted by Narejo et al. (2023) in Pakistan examined the effects of parental conflict on children's upbringing, including emotional and grooming aspects. The study's objective was to identify the proportion of parents who experience conflict and how it impacts children growing up. Students for this study were recruited from secondary schools, resulting in 495 participants initially. Only the children with lower grades (D and E) were included, lowering the number of participants to 114. The researchers used a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design, which enabled them to collect data quickly with real-life insights. However, the study relied only on the mothers' self-reports, excluding fathers, may give rise to biases. Cross-sectional designs tend to infer correlations and not cause and effect, which is a limitation to this study. However, the study's results showed that approximately 68% of children who received lower grades at school had experienced parental conflict, supporting previous research on the broadened effects of parental conflict. However, the study did not mention moderating variables or limitations, which prevented it from providing a holistic understanding. It also excludes the higher-performing students, which does not provide an accurate representation, raising the question of whether the study reflects the broader population or is only limited to at-risk students. When these findings are compared to Maya et al.'s (2024) study, which examined the impact of parental conflict on parent-adolescent attachment in low-income families, it can be concluded that psychological risks are high in families with socioeconomic vulnerabilities and parental conflict. Viewing this holistically, the cross-cultural evidence shows that adolescent distress is universally linked to parental conflict; the mechanisms (academic achievement, aggression, or suicidality) are highly shaped through cultural expectations and socioeconomical conditions of families.

### *Psychological Mechanisms and Mediations*

Moreover, Ching and Wu (2018) examined how parental conflict influences materialism in adolescents through the lens of emotional insecurity. Dittmar and colleagues (2014) define materialism as the acquisition of possessions or money that has an attached meaning of status and value. This is said to be associated with poor well-being and can come from a place of insecurity. The research aimed to identify if emotional insecurity acts as a mediator in the relationship between the behaviour observed in adolescents' materialism and parental conflict. The study included 214 Chinese adolescents and conducted a two-wave longitudinal questionnaire-based study. One of the strengths of using this research design was being able to observe the changes overtime, providing stronger evidence when compared to one-time measures. The study reported that when parental conflict was destructive, there was an increased sense of emotional insecurity, which in turn led to higher materialism. If the parental conflict was constructive, then there was a lower sense of emotional insecurity and hence lower materialism. It was also reported that the perceptions held by parents were an essential factor. The study's results indicate that the type of parental conflict experienced has an impact on adolescents' materialism, particularly through emotional insecurity. If the conflict is constructive, then better outcomes can be observed. The study had a small sample size, considering it was a self-report study, and perhaps a multi-informant approach might have been beneficial, allowing for a more diverse cultural exploration. A small sample size limits the study's ability to be generalized and the self-report from adolescents makes the study prone to biases as it may not truly reflect the conflict behaviours.

Mental health concerns amongst Chinese adolescents gained traction as a significant issue (Wu et al., 2022). An increase was seen within disorders like ADHD, anxiety, and

depression, due to behavioural and psychological factors, such as internet addiction, family life stressors, and poor self-regulation. Despite peer relationships becoming important and central to adolescents' lives during this stage, early parental influence or bonds remain foundational as a predictor (Rogers et al., 2022). The importance of attachment is well established in research; however, Tan et al. (2023) conducted a study aimed at investigating how attachment exerts its influence in terms of psychological quality, and coping mechanisms are possible mediators. This has not been thoroughly examined within the non-Western populations. It was a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey with 633 participants, limiting its ability to conclude any causality, but making the data collection process quicker and economical. The study concluded that adolescent mental health can be determined by parent-child attachment and is partly through psychological quality. Coping mechanisms (task-focused) act as a buffer, meaning that if the adolescent is not a good problem-solver, then their inner strength matters in protecting their mental health. If the adolescent is good at problem-solving, then inner strength does not make a significant difference, as they are already able to find effective solutions. Future directions suggest conducting a longitudinal study and incorporating additional moderating factors, such as emotions.

Subjective well-being is described as the perception one holds about their world and their evaluation of it (Cherry, 2023). This has been seen as a predictor of longevity and good health. Well-being of adolescents has become a recent focus of evolving research, extending beyond behavioural concerns such as substance abuse. It is during this transitional period that one is more susceptible to emotional discomfort and instability, as factors that induce increased stress according to Mastorci et al. (2024). Mónaco et al.'s (2019) study explored whether emotional competence acts as a mediator between the well-being of adolescents and their parental

attachments, accounting for age and gender. This study had a sample of 1,276 Spanish adolescents aged 12 to 15 years. It was a cross-sectional study, which can be quicker to administer and is also cost-effective. Another strength of using this study is ability to cross reference multiple variables, giving a more depth analysis. Although, it does limit the causality of the study and can be prone to self-report bias. Data being collected at one point cannot measure the long term impact, which is also a downside to using this design. However, the study's results indicate a higher life satisfaction associated with parental attachment, as well as enhanced emotional competence and reduced stress. Emotional competency did not completely mediate the relationship between adolescent well-being and attachment. At the same time, gender and age also moderated the relationship to a certain degree, with girls exhibiting more emotional expressivity. These studies have demonstrated the profound impact that adolescents experience due to repeated parental conflicts. Distressing impact on adolescents due to conflict has been observed across various cultures, making it a universal concern.

Collectively, there are key psychological mechanisms that can impact adolescents' attachment formation (emotional insecurity, coping mechanisms and competency of emotions). These studies were also conducted in collectivistic cultures; they highlight the role of culture in the way conflict and emotional security is viewed and formed. It's important to take these under account as they inform counsellors and psychotherapists to take multiple cultural and psychological factors account when working with adolescents. Overall, the findings support the research question by showcasing how conflicts between parents can hinder the attachment processes in adolescents in various cultural settings.

### *Identity and Attachment Formations*

Adolescence is a stage in life where emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development takes form, solidifying a sense of self through the quality of their attachment relationships and the social environment (Mastorci et al., 2024). Their social identity affects how they interact and behave, usually through a reflection of their inner emotional world (Main et al., 2025).

Moreover, it is also a form of response learned through early-life interactions with caregivers, peers, and community members. According to Cooper et al. (1998), adolescents with good attachment had a good sense of self and identity through emotional support and deeper communication with their mothers. Through modelling and exposure, adolescents learn conflict behaviours from parents and reenact them with their siblings and partners. Due to low communication and physical contact, they are more prone to mental health concerns (Borecka-Biernat, 2022).

Delgado et al. (2022) provided a theoretical foundation by conducting a systematic review of 19 studies that examined the role of attachment in social-emotional development and relationship formation. Out of the 19 studies, 15 studies were cross-sectional while 4 were longitudinal. Attachment was categorized into secure, insecure, ambivalent, and insecure avoidant. In the adolescent stage, there is a high level of importance given to the relationship an individual forms with their peers, but it is still believed that the quality of that relationship is affected by parental attachment. This study aimed to investigate how parental attachment style influences the quality of peer relationships among adolescents. The study selected peer-reviewed articles on adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years and found that having a secure attachment is positively correlated with forming better peer relationships, whereas having a poor peer relationship is associated with an insecure attachment style. Variables, such as gender and family,

were moderators for these. Analysing mixed designs provided the review to have a more accurate association of long-term patterns. While cross-sectional designs can help with diverse data in larger samples quickly, longitudinal designs can provide causal inferences by looking at change over a period. However, cross-sectional designs can limit conclusions on cause and the differences in how each study was carried out also needs to be considered as it can lead to less consistent findings. The study concluded that there is a need for longitudinal and culturally diverse research, suggesting a gap in understanding attachment through the lens of non-Western societies.

### ***Cross-Cultural Aspects of Social Functioning***

In contrast to studies investigating the Western population, Hess (2021) examined the relationship between frequency of parental conflicts, peer problems, and prosocial behaviours between children and adolescents between the ages of seven and 16. There were a total of 1,157 individuals from the German interdisciplinary Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics. The participants had to undergo a computer-assisted paper interview and a self-administered computer-assisted self-interview. This was a longitudinal study that identified that prosocial behaviours decreased along with an increase in peer problems when parental conflict frequency increased. Moreover, an increase in parental conflict also resulted in a decrease in warm parenting, negatively impacting social well-being. While this longitudinal study broadened the understanding, the use of self-reported data collection methods leaves room for possible bias.

Furthermore, Lavik et al. (2018) provided a broader viewpoint of adolescent functioning by conducting a qualitative study to gain a better understanding of what adolescents value and what constitutes a good outcome. The standard symptom focus on the outcome does not hold

true to the values and personal goals that are important to the age group/individuals. It does not reflect the lived experience, and hence, the research question was set to determine what a good outcome is through the lens of the adolescent service users. This study conducted focus groups and individual interviews with 22 adolescents aged between 14 and 19 years, recruited through the public mental health services in Norway. As thematic analysis was used, five themes were identified. It was reported that a good outcome for the adolescent population is defined in terms of identity, emotional understanding, autonomy, and the connection formed, strongly associating with a secure attachment framework. This is complementary to a client-centred approach, building on the understanding that adolescents hold value in emotional insight rather than in external behavioural management. This study provides important information regarding interventions that can be utilized for positive outcomes. If a youth-centred approach is administered, it can help adolescents recover better, and by knowing what values are deemed important by the clients, it helps tailor the therapy to suit those. This study used the voices of adolescents to its strength, but due to the small sample size, it may not be generalizable to different cultures or geographical locations. Another challenge in this qualitative design is the inability for it to be generalized as the participants were from Norway. If replicated in more diverse populations, it could help identify possible patterns between adolescents.

Considering a different perspective, a study by Li & Ye (2024) included 886 students from China to examine how parental conflict can influence adolescent academic burnout and if the parent-child relationship and teacher relationships act as mediators. Academic burnout can negatively impact one's academic performance due to emotional fatigue. This area of the adolescent's life has received less attention, but attachment styles in general have been studied extensively. This study also considered the role of the teacher and examined whether it mitigates

the negative effects of family situations. The study's results revealed a positive correlation between parental conflict and academic burnout. The role of their interrelationship had a moderate impact on it. It was also found that the support offered by the teacher had a moderate impact on parental conflict in their interpersonal relationship, which in turn affected their burnout. The study had a cross-sectional design, which can help with larger sample size in attaining stronger associations between variables, it also cannot infer causality. It can be concluded that academic burnout highly correlates with both school and home environments, but the long term impact cannot be captured over-time. Having a good relationship between parent and child, along with the support from the teacher, can help mitigate the impact of parental conflict. This finding supports the idea that security related to attachments is not limited to the home but also extends to institutional environments. This is an essential consideration in collectivistic cultures, as external support is braided into the family systems.

It is evident that the social and behavioural factors in adolescence are not purely influenced by the individual or the family, but are connected to economic status, culture, and institutional contexts in which attachment relationships exist (Hess, 2021; Lavik et al., 2018; Li & Ye, 2024). Self-efficacy, peer involvement, and academic performance tend to influence adolescent attachment and serve a vital role in the outcomes. It was also noted that studies conducted in Iran, China, Norway, and the USA have found differences in the expression of attachment. There is a difference in the way attachment is formed and perceived, highlighting the importance of a deeper level of understanding of how collectivistic and individualistic cultures affect the value system and attachment.

### *Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescent Adjustment*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all aspects of life were affected in different ways (Nascimento et al., 2023). As people started working from home, educational delivery was modified to suit virtual platforms, impacting social and familial life. It was noted by Wang et al. (2023) that when families were forced to transition to remote learning and work, it heightened work-family conflict, leading to a poor family environment. Work-family conflict has been linked to parental behaviour and individuals experiencing negative work-family conflict tend to exhibit negative parenting behaviours (Holmes et al., 2018). This type of negative parenting leads to a disengagement of parents from their adolescents' academic engagement.

Empirical studies have reported that parental involvement has a significant impact on adolescent academic outcomes. Wang et al. (2023) investigated this phenomenon and how the involvement of parental figures impacts the work-family conflicts, affecting the academic engagement of adolescents. A sample of 886 dual-income Chinese families was used. They were from 11 different provinces during the 2020 lockdown. The study indicated that a significant impact was seen on work-family conflict on parental involvement, which affected academic achievement, regardless of parental role. In the adolescent stage of life, the mother's role was more prominent. There were indirect effects seen as per developmental stage, with a more substantial effect observed in middle and late adolescence. Future directions suggest examining longitudinal studies, considering interventions that focus on work flexibility, and supporting the involvement of parents. It had a cross-sectional design, which helped researchers collect data for a large sample size. Data was collected amongst different adolescent developmental stages, acknowledging the complexity of processes at each stage. This acted as an advantage, mimicking long-term impact slightly. However, it used self-reporting questionnaires, which are prone to

biases, especially with sensitive topics. The sample also excluded single-parent households or families with socioeconomic standings, limiting the data to dual-income families and hereby also limiting its generalizability.

Moreover, attachment can also be viewed through the lens of forming an emotional connection. Any loss of an emotional connection with close ones tends to cause interpersonal distress, a vital characteristic of internalizing symptoms (Eilert & Buchheim, 2023; LeMoult, 2020). The possibility of using caregivers as a secure base is compromised, leading to mental health concerns. Supporting this, a study by Afriat et al. (2023) aimed to examine the parent-adolescent and peer relationships during the pre- and mid-COVID periods and how they affected adolescent mental health. It involved 163 participants from Kingston, Ontario, who were approximately 15 years old. It was hypothesized that an improved relationship with parents would be associated with better mental health outcomes. The researchers employed online surveys, and the collected data were analyzed using multilevel models. The study employed a qualitative approach, a longitudinal design, with assessments conducted in three phases, and it was noted that the quality of parent-adolescent relationships was a high predictor of depression, emotion dysregulation, and stress. Longitudinal designs allows the researcher to observe changes overtime, leading to a more thorough analysis. However, no significant associations were found when the quality of adolescent and peer relationships was examined, underscoring the role of parental attachment. As it was not an observational study and relied heavily on self-report questionnaires, there is chance of potential bias. The sample size was also small, participants being recruited from one geographical location can also limit generalizability.

There were a lot of mental health concerns at the time of the pandemic due to isolation, leading to an increase in loneliness (Qian et al., 2024). Coinciding with government orders to

stay at home, there was also an increase in parental conflicts at home. Compared to this conflict occurring in a non-quarantine time, the impact would have been less on the adolescent witnessing the event (Li et al., 2022). This is due to their flexibility and the possibility of removing themselves from the environment; however, with COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders, families were significantly impacted. Li et al. (2022) studied the impact of adolescent mental health during the COVID-19 era. They had 655 Chinese adolescents aged between 13 and 16 years old. Surveys were conducted in three waves, using a longitudinal design. The results of the study indicated there was a high prevalence of depression during the pandemic and even in the six months that followed. Strong predictors of depression were some parental conflict subscales (resolution and content), and family support decreased with an increase in parental conflict, increasing feelings of burdensomeness, which resulted in depressive symptoms. With longitudinal designs, associations are strongly linked due to multiple data collection points. These studies highlight the impact of the pandemic by disrupting routines, relationships, and educational systems. This occurred during their peak time of adolescent interpersonal development, career building, and education. Identifying its diverse effects amongst different cultures and populations can help provide informed support. The mode of data collection was also self-reports by adolescents, giving rise to potential biases as they might want to come across as desirable.

### **Adolescent Attachment in Cultural Contexts**

#### ***Cultural Variation in Parenting and Attachment***

Attachment theory is grounded in human relational needs but does not account for cultural contexts in parenting practices (Keller, 2018). The framework proposed by Bowlby (1969), emphasizes the importance of proximity and security; however, research has shown that

sociocultural norms, parenting ideologies, and values within systems tend to influence the expression, perception, and consequences of attachment (Thompson et al., 2022). Global data shows the prevalence of insecure-avoidant attachment in individualistic societies and insecure-anxious attachments in collectivistic societies (Strand et al., 2019). This section will focus on how parenting practices are different across cultures and how they work to shape the expression of adolescent attachment.

In the USA, a child's development is benchmarked with standardized assessments and specific developmental milestones (Masamba, 2024). This is a similar case in the UK, as the evaluations are conducted under the standardized Early Years Foundation Stage, which does not account for any cultural differences (Masamba, 2024). In Japan, the child development trajectories are heavily influenced by group harmony and academic achievements. In Africa, there are broader socio-economic and cultural factors (poverty, malnutrition, educational challenges, and violence) that contribute to a child's development (UNICEF, 2023). There is an apparent disparity with how a child's development is viewed, which also affects how they are parented. Parenting is also influenced by cultural belonging. These differences in cross-cultural perspectives highlights the importance of cultural contexts when looking at the impact of parental conflict in adolescents. In countries that align with individualistic cultures, conflict can challenge autonomy and emotional understanding. Whereas, in collectivistic cultures, the impact can be seen in emotional security, socio-economic pressures and harmony within families. This broadens the scope of impact on adolescents who have witnessed parental conflict, depending on their cultural affiliation.

Lin and colleagues (2017) set the foundational work in research through a cultural examination of individualistic and collectivistic societies. Their study assesses the impact of

individualism and collectivism in attachment orientations (avoidance and anxious), and whether they act as moderators in psychological health in different cultures. It has been noted that the type of attachment formed tends to predict the quality of relationships and psychological well-being. Culture can have an impact on attachment formation and hence affect their well-being. There has been limited research on the effects of individualism and collectivism on attachment and its quality. This study involved 143 participants, aged between 18 and 29 years, who were recruited from universities in a Western cultural setting in Australia. Out of the total number, 100 were females and 43 were males from multicultural backgrounds. It was a cross-sectional design and hence no causation can be determined, but the use of a cross-cultural comparison offered the researchers a chance to study cultural variations. The results of the study indicated that attachment anxiety was reported to be higher in a collectivistic culture. Attachment anxiety was also strongly associated with having an adverse psychological outcome in collectivistic societies. There was no moderation found in individualism nor in avoidance. Due to a smaller sample size, the results cannot be generalized. However, this provides a deeper understanding of how parenting styles impact attachment orientations in different cultural contexts. This study was limited in its sample collection, as it was conducted at a single institute. Therefore, an exploration into different cultures could provide more comprehensive and generalizable results. Other social and institutional components were not.

Moreover, to build understanding on the cultural impact on parental style, Masamba (2024) conducted a study that aimed to examine how parental styles, influenced by culture, affect child development. This was a desktop research methodology, which means the data was collected through secondary, already existing sources and not through direct fieldwork. It was reported that within the collectivistic cultures, group harmony and obedience were considered

important, though authoritarian or authoritative parenting styles were not. Within the individualistic culture, self-expression and independence were considered important, through a permissive or authoritarian parenting style. It was also observed that factors such as socioeconomic and religious beliefs also influenced parenting behaviours. However, while Masamba (2024) provides an overview of parenting differences across cultures, limitations are present due to its reliance on secondary data. Instead of giving a fresh perspective on cultural aspects, data from desktop reviews might already be tainted by biases or assumptions. Having no observed data makes it challenging to assess the lived experiences and all the nuances that exist. Despite the study's setbacks, it highlights the differences in values and parenting styles between individualistic and collectivistic societies. This gives more direction to future studies to adopt a more ethnographic methodology and move away from categorical differentiations of societies. This would give them more insight on how parents navigate cultural practices or differences in their lived experience.

In a study by Buchanan et al. (2023), it was noted that parental self-efficacy tends to decrease as children transition into adolescence, and the studies examining this phenomenon were primarily conducted in Western contexts. Parents who exhibit a higher level of self-efficacy tend to adopt a promotive stance in parenting. The research questions being investigated here are whether parental self-efficacy (PSE) truly declines during the transition and if this decline is influenced by cultural context (individualistic vs. collectivistic), the parents' demographics, and the children's genders. This was a longitudinal study consisting of 1,178 mothers and 1,041 fathers who were from around nine countries. The study found that the PSE in the individualistic countries declines, whereas in the collectivistic countries, it increases. The demographics of the parents were initially affected but did not prove to be significant in all trajectories. Through a

longitudinal model, the study was able to capture the developmental change in parental self-efficacy when their children transitioned from childhood to adolescence. The researchers followed parents for 3.5 years, showing how their parental efficacy evolved with different developmental milestones. It also showcases a strong cross-cultural comparison as it looks at countries that represent collectivistic and individualistic cultures. These results demonstrate that culture has a significant influence on the decline of PSE during adolescence. Collectivistic cultures may provide some buffer against that possible decline. This study suggests conducting it among different cultural samples. Also, a more in-depth qualitative study could help with a thorough examination of the individualism/collectivism experience. Another aspect to be considered is the self-report measures of the parents, which could be prone to biases as they are the ones being tested, making it more subjective.

Taking the studies into account, attachment formation can be deeply rooted in culture and various other surrounding components. Studies by Lin et al. (2017), Masamba (2024), and Buchanan et al. (2023) highlight that attachment anxiety, parenting style, and confidence in parenting are influenced by cultural norms. The variations present point to the importance of accounting for collectivistic and individualistic frameworks that shape how attachment is formed and perceived. It also provides a foundation for a deeper understanding of cultural settings and adolescent adjustment. In the studies mentioned, there were similar challenges with design. A limitation that was consistent across the studies was the use of self-report questionnaires or secondary data sources and not exploring the lived experiences of participants. Even though this was a challenge, the studies still provide high correlations between attachment in adolescents and parenting, giving deeper insights for the future researchers to build on.

### *Cross-Cultural Attachment and Adolescent Adjustment*

The adolescent stage of development is crucial for identity formation, emotional regulation, and shifting interpersonal dynamics (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018). As previous sections have emphasized, attachment is not universally experienced but is impacted by cultural values and parenting styles within individualistic and collectivistic communities. Not only do they help in shaping attachment, but they also impact coping mechanisms used when self-regulating. A cross-cultural study by Mancinelli et al. (2021) investigated the role of individualism and collectivism in the adjustment phases for adolescents influenced by parental attachment. The research question explored in this paper is whether maternal or paternal attachment may be a predictor for adjustment challenges in adolescents across cultures and if self-control is a mediator. This is a cross-cultural survey with 1,000 adolescents with diverse cultural backgrounds (Italy, Spain, China, and Poland). The study reported that the Chinese participants (collectivistic) exhibited lower attitudinal self-control but high behavioural self-control. Although this did not align with the researchers' expectations, it still demonstrated better self-control than that of the American population (individualistic). It could be underreported in the Chinese sample on the self-report questionnaires. Maternal attachment was higher than paternal across all four countries, with Italy and Spain having a comparable result between maternal and paternal, attributing that to their warmth and friendliness in parenting styles. Culture was a moderator in the way these attachments formed.

Building on this study, Maya et al.'s (2024) study on attachment with parental figures in Spain supports Mancinelli and colleagues' (2021) findings, stating that the presence of conflict in the family has a high impact on paternal bonds. The maternal role has been the strongest amongst these studies, marking that as an essential element of adolescent adjustment. This is also

supported by Buchanan et al. (2023), who posit that fluctuations in parental self-efficacy are associated with stronger parental roles in adolescents within collectivist cultures. These findings offer insight into further exploration of cultural roles and culturally responsive interventions. These interventions need to acknowledge the varying parenting styles, individual attachment experiences, and the needs of adolescents within diverse societies.

### **Implications for Intervention and Therapy**

#### ***Intervention and Resilience***

Resilience does not always come naturally and at times can be an outcome of a well-timed intervention at the right developmental milestone (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). They start as early as childhood and can also be an individualized support later in life. They play a vital role in reinforcing protective factors for adolescents as they face challenges in life (Xing et al., 2023). This section will explore the importance of intervention at prime developmental stages and the outcomes.

Kosterman et al. (2019) provides a broad foundation by investigating the effectiveness of early social intervention and its outcome in adulthood. This was a longitudinal study that followed students from elementary school into their 30s. Previous studies have examined the long-term impact of early intervention, but only a few have followed clients over the years to assess its effects (Orton et al., 2024; Duagi et al., 2024). This was a non-randomized controlled trial involving 808 students assessed on their health behaviour, mental health, relationships, socioeconomic achievements, and civic engagement. The intervention group received multiple sources of support, including teacher training, child skills training, and parent workshops. The study's findings reported positive outcomes in the health component, mental health, and overall adult functioning. At the same time, no significant effect was noted on substance use disorder,

sexual risk behaviours, or close relationships. The results of this study help identify the effectiveness of early intervention and how adolescents can benefit from it if negatively affected by parental conflict.

Expanding on this, Reynolds et al. (2017) examined the benefits of early childhood interventions across the education, behavioural, and health domains. As these interventions have proven effective, further research is being conducted to understand their contributions to improved mental health outcomes in adults. One of the factors addressed in this study was family support behaviour, among others. The research question addressed in this study examines the primary processes that support early childhood interventions and their impact on adult well-being. It reviewed a few longitudinal studies and reported that, in terms of familial support, the more involved parents are, the higher the academic success is, supporting the effectiveness of early intervention. This study followed participants over 30 years, hence the results can be strongly considered. It also used multiple domains for data collection, taking into account various insights. These results reaffirm the importance of parental involvement in a child's life and its impact at different stages of life. One of the issues with longitudinal study, especially of this magnitude, is over-time some participants may choose to leave, which can alter results.

While these studies emphasize the structural benefits of interventions, Darling et al. (2024) help integrate a conceptual viewpoint. The article was not a study and was set out to explore how the attachment theory can improve the mental health for children and adolescents, specifically looking at healthcare providers. It discussed how attachment-seeking behaviours are not limited to their development in childhood but rather expand throughout the lifetime. Attachment-seeking behaviours exist in times when certain needs or wants are unmet or when there are uncertainties. These needs are a result of seeking protection and are adaptive responses

to the current environment. It's mentioned that people perceive health workers as a source of security, and when people are not happy with their provider, it's often a result of attachment insecurity. In this scenario, the patient may be hesitant to trust the professional's advice, which can directly impact their treatment approach. It can also have an impact on adhering to treatment suggestions and managing symptoms. Mentioning this study in the literature review is important because it offers a conceptual and theoretical framework to the research question, explaining the reasons to why attachment processes is important in the clinical contexts. However, due to it not being an study, it can be viewed as grey literature, limiting its contributions. This article argues that interventions prove to be more effective when relational dynamics are taken into account. It positions attachment as a mechanism for resilience and emphasizes safety and consistency as key for therapeutic relationships, reflecting on secure attachment formations.

Considering a more applied perspective, Stige et al. (2021) looked at the barriers for adolescents seeking therapeutic interventions. It has been identified that adolescents do not enter the therapy room of their own accord or due to their own motivation but come in due to adult intervention. A higher therapy dropout rate is also observed among adolescents, but the reasons for this are unclear. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of adolescents to figure out the reasons they find therapy helpful or unhelpful. The research question explored in this study was how therapy is experienced by adolescents who are there due to adult initiation and what potential factors differentiate their experience. This was a qualitative study involving 12 adolescents in Norway. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted per participant, and a thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The findings reported that relationship quality drove the success of therapy, along with the flexibility shown by the therapist and client agency. If there is authentic engagement in the session, it negates the initial reluctance of the adolescent.

This research design provides in-depth insights into the lived experiences of adolescents, capturing the emotions and motivation that quantitative measures are not able to capture. Although qualitative design methods provide detailed results, they are also limited in the sample size numbers and can be subjective, with high level of dependency on researchers interpretation. Future direction was given towards training therapists to practice more flexibility and relatedness in therapy sessions.

Similarly, Løvgren et al. (2019) undertook an exploration of a client's perspective. By knowing about the components that make them effective and help enhance the therapeutic alliance and the treatment outcomes. The research question in this study was to determine the key factors perceived by adolescents that contribute to their improvement during psychodynamic therapy. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Using thematic analysis, four key themes emerged. This highly correlated the relationship between relational support, practical focus, and autonomy in treatment were the key determinants of the therapy's success. This study had only female participants, which was a limitation. It is suggested that male experiences be researched alongside cultural aspects. Collectively reviewing these studies shows that resilience is built through the quality, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity of interventions during the developmental stages. Having access to the right mode of support during life challenges tends to help adolescents navigate through them more effectively as they feel seen, respected, and safe enough. However, if the interventions are not culturally inclined, they may not be as effective.

### **Culturally Sensitive Approaches**

The reviewed literature on attachment, parental conflict, and adolescent adjustment highlights the importance of integrating culturally sensitive approaches as essential (Ching & Wu, 2018; Salaam & Kyere, 2025). The attachment theory provides a fundamental base for

human relational needs, but the way it is expressed is embedded in cultural, historical, and social aspects. A lot of research articles express the need to move beyond those rigid models and take a more flexible and culturally sensitive approach to understanding. Studies by Mancinelli et al. (2023) and Masamba (2024) that looked at cross-cultural variations in adolescent adjustment and parenting challenged the use of Western models of attachment, finding that parental norms and emotional expression can be different across cultures. These studies have provided insights into how different cultures define secure attachment and resilient adjustment.

Culturally grounded parenting ways have also been emphasized as important when examining the mental health of adolescents. This complexity was also echoed in studies by Piotrowska & Piotrowski (2023) and Lin et al. (2017) that parenting styles can become more complicated within individualistic and collectivistic communities. This environment can create a sense of confusion for adolescents as they might be unsure of what healthy relationships may look like. This stage of development is important due to changes and adaptations that occur and how it shapes their interaction with the world. Hence, it is important to consider cultural aspects when offering support. This support can be affected by the socio-political components, as highlighted by Salaam and Kyere (2025), as it can create systemic barriers for people belonging to marginalized communities. They are often victims of cultural misinterpretations as well during interventions or assessments.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review has investigated how adolescent attachment is shaped by parental conflicts, considering the impact of individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The studies present data that parental conflict tends to disrupt the development of a secure attachment, leading to behavioural, emotional, or psychological issues during adolescence. Depending on cultural

affiliations, these effects arise and are coped with in varying ways. Within the individualistic culture, any disruptions can lead to attachment avoidance, whereas in collectivistic cultures, the attachment is affected more indirectly (e.g., internalized stress). Studies were also analyzed on the research design used, as both qualitative and quantitative methods have their advantages and disadvantages. Both forms of data analysis were explored in numerous studies, providing a more holistic analysis. Furthermore, the studies also explored protective factors of cultural parenting practices, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches in research and practice. These correlations were important to explore as it provides insights into ways attachment formation is impacted by internal and external components. Culture plays a vital role in how these components are experienced and dealt with.

### Chapter 3: Discussion and Applied Practices

The purpose of this capstone project is to investigate how parental conflict affects the mental health of adolescents, impacting their relationship and attachment with their guardians/parents. As various cultures shape beliefs and relational expectations, this paper examined parental and adolescent attachment in both collectivistic and individualistic societies, highlighting how culture acts as a mediator. This literature review aimed to answer the following question: *“How does parental conflict influence adolescent attachment styles, and how do these effects differ between individualistic and collectivist cultural contexts?”* This chapter synthesizes the findings in Chapter 2, linking them to the research question and identifies potential gaps in the literature and providing recommendations within practice. Future directions will also be explored, along with a personal reflection and learning section.

#### Discussion

##### *Parental Conflict and Attachment*

Research shows that families that have high level of conflicts have a significant impact on adolescent’s mental health. For instance, Enevold (2022) reported that higher levels of anxiety, depression, and insecure attachment in adolescence were related to experiencing interparental conflicts. An increase in risks associated with emotional dysregulation, lower self-esteem, and challenges with peer relationships was reported according to Ching and Wu (2018). Parental conflict not only impacts adolescents’ mental health but also the attachment formed, often characterized by fear, confusion, and difficulty building and maintaining trust (Enevold, 2022). As discussed previously in Chapter 2, the patterns observed show consistency across different studies, highlighting how attachment behaviours shape adolescent outcomes. Attachment theory is frequently referred to when looking at relationships and how they are

managed. It can also predict how the sense of security, internal stability, and resilience take shape with adolescents' experiences. It can also aid in forming a secure attachment with a consistent amount of predictable support by the caregiver (Bosmans et al., 2020). When there is inconsistency in parental availability, adolescents are more likely to have dismissive, preoccupied, or avoidant attachment as a way to protect themselves (Enevold, 2022). Attachment cannot be predicted by parental behaviour alone and exists in a reciprocal role with adolescent characteristics (Walsh & Zadurian, 2022). Parental conflict and adolescent characteristics influence parental behaviours in a two-way relationship of attachment (Walsh & Zadurian, 2022). This indicates that the quality of attachment is not just impacted by paternal actions but also by the individual characteristics and emotional responses.

#### ***Parent-Adolescent Relationship as Protective Factor***

In addition to the parent-adolescent dyadic interactions, attachment outcomes can be further understood by viewing the relational and contextual aspects. As identified in Chapter 2, the quality of the parent-child relationship can be seen as a protective factor, acting as a buffer between parental conflict and adolescent mental health. The study by Therriault and colleagues (2021) highlighted how positive peer attachments and behavioural internalization by adolescents can impact attachment outcomes. This implies that while the adolescent-parent relationship can be a protective factor, the relationship with peers can also exacerbate or buffer it, depending on the quality of that peer-adolescent relationship. Similarly, Khan and colleagues (2020) also found that adolescent insecurity was impacted by parent-child stress and depression in parents. In this study, the peer relationship was related to the attachment aspect but did not drive development, and genetics was found to have no role in the attachment outcomes. These findings support the multifactorial perspective in Chapter 2, highlighting that adolescent attachment is formed

through a combination of family stressors, the mental well-being of parents, and the social environment. This in turn influences how parents interact with one another, leading to constructive or destructive conflicts, and broadens the understanding that this cannot be viewed in isolation and is influenced by internal and external factors. Intersectionality plays a vital role between parental mental health, relationship with peers and family dynamics. It directly supports the research question as the influence is multifaceted, It is vital for psychotherapists to acknowledge intersectional as adolescent issues may be rooted in multiple factors and not just one. They must contour to taking these components into account within their therapeutic work with adolescents.

### ***Parental Conflict and Adolescent Outcomes***

Moreover, research that has explored parental conflicts shows how they can have a negative impact on adolescents' mental health and fuel their insecurities. Enevold (2022) identified four dimensions of interparental conflicts: frequency, hostility, constructive conflict, and conflict related to children. These dimensions tend to have an impact on adolescent development in different ways. While more regularity and hostility within conflict can challenge adolescent security and emotional regulation, a positive repair (constructive conflict resolution) can act as a supportive measure and add resiliency (Eldik et al., 2020). Conflict is often viewed as harmful, undermining the importance of how this conflict is managed within families and adding the impact of moderating factors, making this process more complex. Attachment patterns of mothers and fathers have been thoroughly explored by Qu et al. (2025) and Luijten et al. (2021), who have demonstrated how attachment to parental figures acted as a moderator between parental conflicts and the externalizing behaviours of adolescents. Interestingly, a buffering

effect was observed for father attachment. Similarly, Enevold (2022) also found that attachments between siblings moderated the relationship between emotional regulation and parental conflict.

Using family systems theory, Maya et al. (2024) found a link between a rise in aggression and parental conflict, which impacted the father-adolescent attachment. Olatunji and Idemudia (2021) found similar results in their cross-sectional, longitudinal study of Nigerian adolescents. These results highlight the importance of parental attachment and, shifting the traditional focus on maternal bonds, showcase how vulnerable they could be through conflicts and have a significant impact on adolescent adjustment, extending the discussions in Chapter 2.

Despite family structure, all the studies reviewed (Khanal et al., 2025; Morelli et al., 2022; Picinich, 2022; Morelli et al., 2022; O'Hara et al., 2023; Salaam and Kyere, 2025) highlight that parental conflict significantly impacts the mental health of adolescents and their emotional development. Considering the various dimensions of conflict, constructive conflict tends to act as a buffer during hostile and child-related conflicts, provided it is effectively modelled. This suggests that not all sorts of conflict can be categorized as harmful; rather, how it is dealt with and resolved through communication is a true determinant of its developmental implications. Additionally, it was also identified that sibling relations also play a significant role in managing conflict, highlighting complexities within family dynamics and the interconnectedness of the system. The complexity of the parent-child relationship needs to be explored in a broader way, accounting for protective or risk factors across the family system. In different situations, whether external stress (such as COVID-19) or internal, any conflict experienced has intensified emotional insecurity and undermined the support received by adolescents. This displays the vulnerability of adolescents in the face of structural and relational stressors being present. Simultaneously, the variation in results across studies points to cultural norms, socioeconomic

conditions, and coping resources that can alter the effects of parental conflicts. Keeping these points in mind, the pattern suggests the need for early intervention that aims at reducing the impact of destructive conflicts and strengthening family processes to avoid the transition of these factors into other stages of life. Overall, these studies have indicated that parental involvement and attachment quality are essential for adolescent adjustment, as well as the effects of destructive conflict patterns on adolescents' mental health and the relational outcomes. It's important for practitioners to acknowledge the role of parents/caregivers in how adolescents may present themselves in sessions. Their therapeutic practice might need to encompass multiple factors, which may involve parents.

### *Cross-Cultural Evidence*

In Chapter 2, cross-cultural research showed that cultural norms and socioeconomic factors significantly influence the parenting path. Wang et al.'s (2024) research found that parent-child attachment mediated the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental conflict and their suicidality in China. Parental responsiveness was a protective factor, making adolescents living in rural areas more at risk than those living in urban areas. Parental responsiveness was a protective factor, with rural adolescents experiencing lower risk than those living in urban areas, highlighting how extrinsic and environmental factors can impact attachment outcomes. Similarly, in Nigeria, interparental conflicts were a predictor of levels of adolescent aggression (Olantunji & Idemudia, 2021). Narejo and colleagues (2023) conducted their research in Pakistan. They found that approximately 68% of students had lower academic achievements when experiencing parental conflict at home. The impact of being exposed to parental conflict was linked not only to psychological disturbances but also to lower academic performance. Other studies (Parker, 2022; Pedro-Carroll, 2022) also reported that prolonged

parental conflict was linked to divorce, which increased the risk of adolescent mental well-being. Collectively, these findings indicate that while the mechanisms of conflict and attachment are widely consistent, the specificity of those outcomes is shaped by cultural norms, values, familial expectations, and socioeconomic conditions. This also supports the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding culture acting as a moderator of adolescent responses to parental conflicts.

Taken together, the literature shows that adolescent attachment is multifaceted and culturally embedded. Parental behaviours, parental psychopathology, temperament of adolescents, and their conflict management skills all interact to produce outcomes. At the same time, peers, siblings, and the overall cultural context tend to have a mediating role. While a secure attachment is seen as a protective factor, destructive conflict harms adolescents' psychological well-being. The absence of a cultural perspective tends to limit the ability to generalize the findings across the population, highlighting the need for more culturally informed interventions. This highlights the importance of social support and information on family background/medical issues for therapy with adolescents. Through a holistic understanding, effective measures can be created in collaboration to encompass multiple components that attribute to adolescent mental health.

### **Gaps and Limitations in Current Knowledge**

Despite gaining valuable insights from existing research, there are gaps in the literature regarding parental conflict and adolescent attachment that can be addressed. Firstly, attachment and parental conflict have been studied and defined through a Western lens. A significant portion of the field of attachment stems from the works of Bowlby and Ainsworth (Bowlby, 1969), which assume relational needs are universal, applicable to all in the same way, and do not fully consider collectivistic cultural perspectives. In a collectivistic culture, dependence within

families, family honour, and family structure (a top-down hierarchy) impact conflict and attachment differently (Hess, 2024). When Wang et al. (2024) discussed the mediating role of attachment in Chinese adolescents' suicidality, they also revealed some cultural contradictions regarding how parental responsiveness differs, highlighting the need to readjust attachment theory in accordance with collectivistic cultures. Similarly, Delgado and colleagues (2022) also emphasized the need for a more culturally sensitive understanding of parental attachment and its influence on adolescents' emotional outcomes.

A second gap lies in the study of the developmental stage of adolescence and attachment. There is substantial research primarily focused on early childhood attachment (Dagan et al., 2021; Picinich, 2022); therefore, more studies are needed to assess the impacts on the formation of identity, autonomy, and peer resilience during adolescence, as they do not assess all these factors. Studies such as those by Therriault et al. (2021) and Delgao et al. (2022) show the significant role adolescent attachments play in shaping peer relationships, emotional competency, and trust; however, these findings are still in the developmental stages rather than a definitive rule. The adolescent stage of development needs to be identified in isolation, and more research needs to be centred around exploring its attachment challenges, rather than viewing it merely as an extension of childhood experiences (Jones et al., 2018). After reviewing the studies in this literature review, it was noted that most of them used self-report questionnaires as their methodological approach to data collection (Goyal et al., 2022). The answers given on self-report questionnaires can be impacted by pre-existing stigmas in cultures and the need to be socially desirable, especially in high-risk contexts (suicidality or materialism). This can jeopardize the validity and reliability of the results if the information is incorrect (Ching & Wu, 2018; Wang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, another area that has not been sufficiently examined is the environmental factors that impact families, such as socioeconomic factors. Studies conducted by Maya et al. (2024) and Feghali et al. (2025) highlight the impact of socioeconomic factors on increasing conflict; however, other factors, such as poverty, limited access to resources, and inadequate mental health services, remain underexplored in these studies. Integrating these factors into research can help gain a better, holistic understanding of the impact on adolescent mental health. Additionally, studies by Khan et al. (2020) and Khanal et al. (2025) demonstrate how parenting attachment is influenced by parental psychopathology, but only a few studies exist that incorporate parental mental health, conflicts, and attachments in one. Due to this gap, there is less understanding of how intersecting stressors (depression, conflict, and socioeconomic challenges) impact adolescent attachment.

To conclude, there is high correlation on how parental conflict affects adolescent attachment and mental health, and the limitations in cultural diversity and understanding through an artistic lens are present. The future direction of research needs to encompass cultural diversity to reflect the lived realities of diverse populations accurately. Based on the next steps, this process could benefit from a more culturally informed attachment-based intervention (CIAI). This approach addresses developmental sensitivity, systemic awareness, and cultural responsiveness. Therapists can highly benefit from incorporating this in their therapeutic work as being more culturally sensitive helps build a safe enough and trusting environment for clients. It strengthens understanding, building stronger therapeutic alliance and helps mitigate biases in sessions.

### **Application to Practice**

Addressing the lack of culturally attuned interventions that have been mentioned in literature, this paper proposes the CIAI that can be flexibly applied to clinical, community, and school settings. Clinicians can utilize this approach by integrating it into their practice through a cultural lens, helping to repair parent-child bonds while assisting adolescents in building and maintaining healthy coping mechanisms (Corpus-Espinosa et al., 2025). When working with larger groups, schools might find it helpful to integrate psychoeducation workshops for teachers and other supporting staff (Soneson et al., 2024). This could also be extended to the individual learning assistants who work with children with special needs, widening the scope of impact. These can help adolescents feel that their experiences are not out of the ordinary and encourage them to seek support or be there for each other (Soneson et al., 2024).

Communities can also involve more family members or siblings, since research shows that having a wider support system can help protect against the negative effects of conflict (Enevold, 2022). Integrating cultural consultants into communities (religious leaders or community helpers) can ensure that interventions align with individual cultural values and beliefs (Wang et al., 2024). Across these settings, CIAI focuses on preventive methods as well as treatment. This can help teach families and help them make the shift from destructive to constructive ways of handling conflict patterns, while aiding in the building of adolescent resilience. Aiming to provide a more balanced and inclusive framework of adolescent mental health, this approach seeks to bridge the gap and include culture within the already existing Western framework.

With the implementation of this method, therapeutic practice will also be well-aligned with the code of ethics and professional practice, in cultural competency. It offers an opportunity

to provide services that are respectful to the client's beliefs and values. This encourages practitioners to implement evidence-informed culturally attuned interventions, reducing the risk of harm and misinterpretation.

### **Future Research Direction**

Future research directions should recognize adolescence as a distinct developmental stage, rather than viewing it as a continuation of early childhood. Conducting longitudinal studies, such as those conducted by Khan et al. (2020) and Morelli et al. (2022), has demonstrated the importance of following developmental changes that occur over time. However, there is limited research that has followed adolescents into adulthood. By following adolescents into adulthood, researchers can identify how prolonged exposure to parental conflict affects relational stability, resilience, and mental health in early adulthood. Furthermore, future studies need to address the Western bias present in how attachment theory is used, as the traditional framework does not take collectivistic cultural values, family hierarchy, and interdependence into account.

Cross-cultural investigation remains an area that requires further research. Studies conducted in China (Wang et al., 2024) and Nigeria (Olatunji & Idemudia, 2021) have demonstrated that conflict manifests differently across cultures. However, there are fewer studies comparing these differences across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Future research might benefit from a comparative approach, examining how cultural values and norms, together with stress related to socioeconomic factors and parental psychopathology, intersect to shape adolescent attachment (Feghali et al., 2025; Khanal et al., 2025; Maya et al., 2024). Another way to reduce reliance on self-report data collection is to employ a mixed-methods design, which can provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescents' lived experiences navigating

challenges or conflicts. Additionally, reliance on self-report questionnaires needs to be addressed in order to mitigate the methodological limitations in studies. Employing a more mixed-methods or longitudinal approach, incorporating observations and interviews, can help capture the true essence of adolescents' lives and experiences.

With the literature having discussed culture so widely, it is essential that interventions incorporate it with future studies to conduct its effectiveness. While attachment-based interventions do exist, they are heavily grounded in Western models of thinking that do not consider cultural values. Future research needs to take aspects of parental psychopathology and family stressors into account, as these factors are not studied enough. Effectiveness can be tested through implementations in schools, clinical, and community settings by measuring cultural responsiveness to these adaptations. By adopting an intervention-based approach, research can move beyond theoretical practice and incorporate components that are more developmentally sensitive and grounded in cultural awareness and systemic understanding.

### **Reflectivity and Professional Development**

Working on this capstone project has made me reflect on my definition of parental conflict and what constitutes attachment within my culture. As someone from a South Asian culture, I am aware of how collectivistic values can influence parental practices and the way conflict is handled. This shift in focus made me realize how Western research dominates this area, and any adaptation requires constant evaluation. At the same time, I have come to realize the importance of balancing cultural considerations and evidence-based practices as a student practicing in this field. It has been interesting to balance being culturally aware while also incorporating interventions that resonate with the client's values, beliefs, and emotional awareness.

In this process, I have noticed a significant shift in my identity as an emerging therapist. My understanding has deepened regarding how adolescents are affected by parental conflicts, not just on a psychological level, but also through systemic and cultural processes. Wanting to work with the adolescent population, this literature review has given me new insights that can be used within my practice. I have also learned how to critically analyze existing models and adapt them to suit the cultural needs of clients. I want to continue building my skills and competency levels to become more culturally attuned and recognize the value of advocacy, ensuring that therapeutic spaces are not only safe but also culturally validating. My capstone has not only broadened my academic understanding but has also fostered growth, both professionally and personally, which I am very grateful for.

### **Conclusion**

This capstone project looked at how parental conflicts impact the attachment styles in adolescents through a cultural lens. The studies mentioned in the literature review highlight the multifaceted nature of adolescent attachment, demonstrating the impact of external and internal components. External challenges include family stressors, relationship with peers, parental mental health and cultural expectations. Internal challenges include mistrust, identity formation, anxiety and emotional dysregulation. This showcases the complexity involved when supporting adolescents who may be struggling due to unstable or unpredictable environments.

As per this analysis, a Culturally Informed Attachment Intervention (CIAI) was proposed as an ethical approach to mitigate the relationship between Western models of attachment and the cultural diversity that exists in the world today. CIAI directly aims to target both the internal and external challenges that are commonly experienced by adolescents. It also promotes cultural awareness, humility, identity, when working with adolescents. By implementing and

understanding these principles, practitioners can help with parent-child relationships and ensure to reduce the long-term psychological impacts of destructive conflicts between parents.

Overall, the findings and reflections in this capstone highlight the importance of being culturally attune, developmental stages of adolescents and implementation of ethical and cultural interventions. It mentions the importance of practitioners implementing this within their practice which can lead to meaningful changes for the clients. This project has highlighted a key viewpoint, that adolescent mental health cannot be understood in isolation and multiple components need to be brought into account. By integrating these insights, inclusive frameworks of therapy can be created to include cultural diversity and foster healthier mental health for adolescents, helping them through their developmental stages.

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