

Gender Differences in Assessing the Impact of Inter-Parental Conflict on Students Academic Achievement Motivation in Ruiru Sub County Kenya

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Abstract

Research suggests children of different gender exposed to a similar environment of inter-parental conflict may have varying responses. While the impact of inter-parental conflict may be similarly damaging for both girls and boys, they may have different reactions to conflict and hostility between their parents. This necessitates the need to comprehensively understand why some children may be more vulnerable to the impact of inter-parental conflict than others. In this paper, the author seeks to establish the perception of who between the male and female students is mostly affected by inter-parental conflict in terms of academic achievement motivation. The study was guided by Fincham's cognitive contextual framework theory and adopted a mixed method research design. A total of 281 students participated in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to select guidance and counseling teachers and parents of the students. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select schools from the 13 public and 18 private schools in Ruiru sub-county as well as to select students from the chosen schools. Data was collected using four instruments: Children Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Questionnaire (CPIC) and Academic Motivation Survey (AMS) for Students, interview schedule for seven guidance and counseling teachers and focus group discussion for ten parents of the students. Data analysis was conducted both descriptively and using inferential statistics. In this, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to establish the relationship between inter-parental conflict and academic achievement motivation at 0.05 significance level. T-test was used to determine sex differences in inter-parental conflict and academic achievement motivation. The results were summarized in tables of frequency distribution and percentages. The results provided evidence that there was a significant gender difference with regard to inter-parental conflict and some domains of academic achievement motivation which were in favor of girls in both data sets.

Keywords: Inter-parental conflict, gender differences, students, Ruiru sub-county, children perception, Academic achievement motivation.

1. Introduction

Inter-parental conflicts affect children by influencing psychological processes in them or the functioning of family systems such as parenting (Betram, 2005). The sensitivity and vulnerability to inter-parental conflict however varies in boys and girls. Unlike boys, girls tend to be more sensitive to disruption and interpersonal distress. In addition, girls are at higher risk for anxiety and depression. If the family is undergoing conflict, parents will not have time for their children. Berk (1999), asserts that problematic school performance, inter-parental relationships, low academic achievement motivation, are among the more common problems associated with child abuse and neglect. Such children often experience difficulties with social relationship, problem solving and the ability to cope with new, challenging and stressful situations. According to Maina (2010), abused or neglected children also develop aggressive behavior patterns, others become withdrawn while others even get post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression.

Inter-parental conflict has many sources: The birth of children into homes brings a type of pleasure and sign of fulfilment to the couple. It also helps to strengthen the marriage tie. However, it may also be a major source of conflict if a couple fails to discuss their priority and are not open to accept whatever comes their way in terms of having children in the marriage. Child rearing is a time-consuming task that requires huge amounts of energy. Husbands and wives often have conflicting views on how to parent, based on how they were raised. Couples may quarrel over the number of children to have in the family, may have different views about children's upbringing, discipline, education, morals, responsibilities, absence of children and gender (male or female) (Akinade, 1997; Niolon, 2003).

This paper is a focus of the differences in the effect of inter-parental conflict on male and female students' academic achievement motivation. The drawn on the hypothesis that: H_0 There are no students' gender differences in inter-parental conflict and students' academic achievement motivation.

2. Literature Underpinning

Several studies have examined gender as a central variable linking inter-parental conflict and child adjustment. However in all the studies, pattern of results is generally complex and inconsistent. Supporting a male vulnerability hypothesis, some researchers have indicated that the link between inter-parental conflict and child maladaptive is

more noticeable in boys than girls especially in the prediction of externalizing indicators in childhood (Jouriles & Norwood, 1995; Davies & Lindsay, 2001; Kerig, 2001). There could be therefore a difference in how boys are affected by inter-parental conflict. Early studies examining marital conflict and child adjustment found that conflict was more closely linked to behavior problems in boys than in girls (Emery & O'Leary, 1982; Porter & O'Leary, 1980), a finding consistent with studies of children's adjustment to divorce and other psychosocial stressors (Emery, 1988; Zaslow, 1989; Zaslow & Hayes, 1986). One explanation offered for this difference is that girls are more likely to be shielded from conflict than boys. However, it appears that boys and girls are equally likely to be exposed to and are equally aware of marital conflict (Emery & O'Leary, 1982; Porter & O'Leary, 1980). Consistent with this finding, more recent investigations have reported significant associations between marital conflict and girls' adjustment, suggesting that both boys and girls are adversely affected by exposure to inter-parental conflict (Emery & O'Leary, 1984; Johnson & O'Leary, 1987; O'Leary, 1988; Long *et al.*, 1987; Peterson & Zill, 1986).

Literature on whether a child's gender plays part in the effect of inter-parental conflict on their academic motivation is scarce. In the relatively small set of studies in which gender has been examined as a focal variable in the link between inter-parental conflicts and child adjustment, the overall pattern of results has produced inconsistent and even contradictory results (Davies & Lindsay 2001). Two models have commonly been proposed to explain gender as a moderator in the link between inter-parental conflict and child adjustment. The male's vulnerability model suggests that boys are more susceptible to the deleterious effects of inter-parental conflict than girls. The differential reactivity model on the other hand, posits that all children are affected by conflict but boys tend to respond by manifesting adjustment problems in the realm of externalizing problems, girls tend to respond with internalizing difficulties (Davies & Lindsay, 2001).

Studies on gender differences in children's reactions to inter-parental conflict are scarce. In the few studies reported in relevant reviews of literature in which gender has been examined as a variable there is inconsistent and contradictory results. Morbech (2017) conducted a study on inter-parental conflict and children's internalizing and externalizing problems on a Norwegian sample. The sample consisted of three hundred and sixty four families; mothers, fathers and children. Data was collected using self-report questionnaire. The results indicated that the relationship between inter-parental conflict and children's internalizing and externalizing problem between genders differed. Conflicts were found to predict more internalizing behaviors for girls but not for boys and externalizing problems were more in boys but not girls. In this paper, we seek to find out which gender is affected more by inter-parental conflict.

An investigation on children's perception of inter-parental conflicts and their cognitive emotion regulation was done among pre-university students of Ahvaz in India by Mussaffa (2014). He used the cognitive emotion questionnaire (CEQ) and children's perception of inter-parental conflict (CPIC) Questionnaire. The results suggest a significance difference among boys and showed no significant difference in the effect of cognitive emotion especially on threat which means that both genders are affected. It also indicates a highly significant main effect for the types of cognitive emotion regulation on self-blame and catastrophizing of boys and girls. Different emotions were perceived in different ways among boys and girls even when they were from the same family. The findings on whether parental conflict influences gender indicated mixed results.

Another study conducted by Vairami and Vorria (2007) examined gender differences as far as the effect of inter-parental conflict on (pre)adolescents peer relationships was concerned among primary school pupils in Greece. The study was evaluated using Danish mothers; data from the Danish Longitudinal Survey of Children (DALSC) assessed at age seven and the outcomes assessed at age eleven. (CPIC) scale was used to assess the perceived conflict by children. Significant gender differences were found with regard to self-blame in girls and perceived threat in boys. Both sexes predicted negatively in intensity, frequency and resolution. The current study involved both public and private high schools in Ruiru sub-county and tried to investigate whether there are inter-parental conflict effects on gender using mixed research method.

3. Methodology

This study was undertaken in Ruiru Sub-county that was selected due to its high capacity of public and private secondary schools. Kiambu County, in which Ruiru is part, is a cosmopolitan with people of diverse cultures and social inclinations; therefore, the respondents for this study represented a diverse population. The author considered Ruiru sub county because of the accessibility and familiarity to the author. The population of the study comprised of 281 Form three students from 31 public and private secondary schools in the sub-county.

The study adopted a mixed method research design which focuses on collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was collected through the students' questionnaires whereas the qualitative data was collected from the interview schedule as well as focus group discussion. This was very important for triangulation. In this paper therefore, quantitative statistical results are first presented and then qualitative results thematically to either confirm or disconfirm the statistical quantitative results. For data collection, the study used questionnaire guide for students due to its objectivity, large group coverage, non bias, confidentiality and quick responses (Kumar, 2011). The study also made use of interview schedule for guiding and

counseling teachers which according to Kothari (2004) provides non bias accurate information on a personal contact basis. More so, a focused group discussion method was used for purposively sampled group of couples/parents which consisted of ten parents based on Krueger and Casey's (2000), recommendation of between six and eight participants.

Proportionate stratified sampling was used to select schools from the stratum of public and private schools, categories. Simple random sampling was then used to select the students in Ruiru sub-county and also students from each of the schools. The sample size thus of the schools and students is as presented in table 1. A sample of between 10% and 20% is considered suitable (Gorald, 2001).

Table 1. Sample size for form three students

Accessible population Sample				Sample Size		
School Type	Students	Boys	Girls	School	Boys	Girls
Public	13	515	433	3	103	87
Private	18	231	226	4	46	45
Total	31	746	659	7	149	132
Grand total	31	1405 (100%)			20%(7)	20%(281)

Source: Sub-County Director of Education Ruiru Office

A total of 281 participants were selected from boys' schools, girls' schools and mixed schools. In addition, seven teachers participated for the interview, and ten were selected for focus group discussion. The total number of participants was therefore 298. Data collection was then done by use of questionnaire, interview schedule and focused group discussion.

Since a mixed method was adopted for the study, triangulation strategy was employed in data analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative data yielded from this study. Both data sets were analyzed separately, and the results discussed side by side. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods of data analysis were used in the presentation of the findings. The study tested the following hypothesis:

H₀ There are no gender differences in inter-parental conflict and students' academic achievement motivation.

4. Results

The study sought to establish whether there was a difference in inter-parental conflict and academic achievement motivation on children by gender. Table 2 gives general information on the demographic data of the participants. It also shows the return rate of the questionnaires and sampling unit (schools) and also the respondent's gender.

Table 2. Response rate of students

		No. of students	Total%
Gender	Male	149	53.00%
	Female	132	47.00%
Total		281	100%

Thus, the response rate for the students was 100% (281) as shown in table 2.

The study had three sets of participants namely students, guidance and counseling teachers and parents. Their distribution by gender is as shown in table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of participants by gender

Participants	Male	Female	Totals
Students	149	132	281
Teachers	0	7	7
Parents	5	5	10
Totals	154	144	298

Table 3 presents demographic data of respondents in terms of gender. The quantitative data had 281 student respondents who participated in the study comprising 132 girls (47%) and 149 boys (53%). On the other hand, the qualitative data had 7 guidance and counseling teachers all of whom were women and participated in the in-depth interview. Ten parents, 5 Males (50%) and 5 females (5%) participated in the focus group discussion (FGD). Therefore, the total number of the participants was 298.

Table 4. Gender difference in inter-parental conflict

CATEGORY	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CP	0.682	0.409	0.996	279	0.32
SB	1.176	0.279	0.202	279	0.84
S	6.893	0.009	1.534	279	0.126
TH	1.519	0.219	4.089	279	0
TR	0.327	0.568	2.940	279	0.004

CP- Conflict Properties, SB – Self Blame, S-Stability, TH-Threat, TR-Triangulation, AAM- Academic Achievement Motivation.

The students' results in Table 4 show that there were significant gender differences in Threat ($t = 4.089$, $df = 279$, $P < 0.05$) and Triangulation ($t = 2.940$, $df = 279$, $P < 0.05$). This difference was in favor of girls. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The guidance and counseling teachers' results indicated that the girls are affected more than boys by inter-parental conflict.

Table 6. Independent samples of T-test

	F	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
ACADEMIC MOTIVATION	0.054	0.883	279	0.378

Results in table 6 show that there were no significant gender differences in academic achievement motivation (AAM) between boys and girls ($t = 0.883$, $df = 279$, $P > 0.05$). The null hypothesis which stated: there are no gender differences in inter-parental conflict and students' academic achievement motivation was therefore not rejected.

However, the guidance and counseling teachers' data results in table 7 show that the girls' academic achievement motivation was affected more by inter-parental conflict than boys.

The results on gender effects on AAM, by the interview schedule indicated that boys and fathers are affected more on AAM than girls and mothers. The null hypothesis was further advanced in order to help in determining whether there existed any gender differences with regard to the domains of Academic Achievement motivation. The data obtained was subjected to the independent samples t-test taking into consideration the specific domains of academic motivation: Intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Gender differences in the domains of AAM

Domain of AAM	F	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
IMTK	1.936	2.166	279	0.031
IMTA	.700	1.159	279	0.247
IMES	.092	.882	279	0.379
EMID	.014	1.544	279	0.124
EMIN	1.717	1.374	279	0.171
EME	.593	2.775	279	0.006
AMOT	6.021	.725	279	0.469

Results in table 7 shows that there is a significance difference in gender towards intrinsic motivation to know ($t = 2.166$, $df = 279$, $P < 0.05$) and extrinsic motivation to regulation ($t = 2.775$, $df = 279$, $P < 0.05$). Both differences are in favor of boys. This means that though there is no general gender difference in academic achievement motivation, the boys were affected more in intrinsic motivation to knowing and extrinsic motivation towards regulation.

One out of the seven guiding and counseling teachers interviewed said that boys and fathers are affected more on inter-parental conflict than girls; the rest revealed that girls and mothers are affected more on inter-parental conflict. The focus group results seemed to be in agreement with the students respondents results and the guidance and counseling teachers such that the respondents indicated that the females were more affected by inter-parental conflict than males: "both genders will be affected and may start drinking, drop out of school, can join some illegal groups like (Mungiki) in this region and if they can't take it any more they can put on a mask and develop defense mechanisms, but the girls are affected more than boys" (parent male 3).

When asked which parent gender is affected most by inter-parental conflict, the FGD participants indicated that: "females are more affected by inter-parental conflict because they are more attached to their children". When the researcher asked for more clarifications and further explanation why the females are affected most by the inter-parental conflict one participant added by saying: "...but a man is also affected, only that women speak out their problems which the men don't. The men lock themselves in and are not able to cope."(Parent male 2).

5. Discussion of the Findings

The results indicated that the girls are affected more by inter-parental conflict. These findings are consistent with

the findings of Cumming and Heindel (1999) and Morbech (2017) that show that girls are especially likely to exhibit vulnerability to inter-parental conflict within domains of internalizing behaviors like fear, threat, emotional distress, and feelings of responsibility. The results further contradict those of Vairami and Vorria (2007), who conducted her study in Greece among primary school children and found a significant gender difference with regard to self-blame in girls and perceived threat in boys.

Similarly, the findings of the current study contradict those of Mussaffa (2014), which showed no significant difference in the effect of inter-parental conflicts in both genders on cognitive emotion, especially threat and self-blame which meant that both genders were affected in all ways. In most of the studies reviewed girls were found to predict more internalizing behaviors and the boys more externalizing behaviors.

Further, the results of the qualitative data (interview schedule) support those of quantitative data that shows that the girls were affected more than boys in inter-parental conflict. The results of the focus group also corroborate the ideas of the interview schedule and questionnaire which seem to suggest that the effects of inter-parental conflict were more in girls than in boys. Here is a response from the focus group discussion:

Girls are very emotional they have a tendency of ‘carrying’ (bearing burdens) for other people. They also tend to sort the problems by seeking to know who between the father and the mother the cause is. . On the other hand, boys don’t exhibit their emotions. They suffer inwardly and cannot express their feelings. When they can’t handle the stress anymore they can commit suicide or kill their fathers. (Parent male 2)

One possible reason that may help to explain the observed support is the cross-cultural differences in the way of upbringing (socializing) boys and girls. The socialization process of gender roles teaches children how to behave in accordance with their gender. Different genders are socialized differently on how to react to inter-parental conflict, they are also given different roles according to the genders, and there is also a difference in the way the parents interact with the children during a conflict (Davies & Lindsay, 2001).

The findings from the students’ participants are consistent with researchers like Nagarathanamma and Rao (2007), who found no significant difference between boys and girls with regard to achievement motivation level. The results however contradicted earlier findings of Riffat (2011) and McGeown *et al.* (2012) who discovered that there were significant gender differences in favor of girls. When the hypothesis was further advanced to test whether there was any significance in terms of the various domains, the findings revealed that there is a significance difference in gender towards intrinsic motivation to know and extrinsic motivation to regulation. Both differences are in favor of boys. This means that though there is no general gender difference in academic motivation, the boys were affected more in intrinsic motivation to know and extrinsic motivation towards regulation. The findings contradicted and agreed partly with those of Mutweleli (2014), who found out that boys had higher mean scores than girls in all the domains of academic motivation which define intrinsic motivation. These domains include, intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation towards accomplishment and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation. In the domains of academic motivation related to extrinsic motivation, boys had a higher means than girls in extrinsic motivation identified. Girls had higher means than boys in extrinsic motivation introjected and extrinsic motivation external regulation and amotivation. The difference can be attributed to the sample characteristics of the current study depicted by a higher number of boys than girls. There were therefore mixed results from both data for the study.

Further, it was found that there was a significant gender differences found with regard to inter-parental conflict and some domains of academic motivation which were in favor of girls in both data sets. In addition, significant correlation was found between parental level of education and inter-parental conflict. Mixed results were found between parental occupation and inter-parental conflict. Finally, there was significant relationship between age at marriage and inter-parental conflict. A major implication and recommendation of the study was that, teachers, parents and all stakeholders in education should work together in creating conducive school and home environments to foster the development of academic achievement motivation. New intervention should be devised to make inter-parental conflict less afflicting to the children.

Secondly, the results for the students showed a significant relationship which were in favor of girls with regard to threat, triangulation, and stability.

6. Conclusion

This study comprised focus into two variables gender differences and inter-parental conflict and gender differences and academic achievement motivation. Significant differences were detected in the first variable on gender differences in inter-parental conflict and these differences were in favor of girls, more specifically, with regard to threat, triangulation and stability. This means that inter-parental conflict has negative cognitive appraisal of threat, in girls. This represents threatening conflict that the student feels and is unable to cope. There is also evidence of triangulation which means that the girls are mostly torn between taking sides with either of their parents. Stability has elements of blaming the parents for their situation.

Second, the other variable was on gender differences and AAM. Significant gender differences were not found on AAM in general, however gender differences were found only with regard to AAM domains of intrinsic

motivation to know and extrinsic motivation external regulation and they were in favor of boys. The qualitative data results showed that girls are affected more than boys by both inter-parental conflict and academic achievement motivation. The qualitative data results of the FGD concur with the quantitative data results indicated that the girls are usually emotional and have a tendency of bearing other peoples' burdens.

Gender is one of the factors that may account for differences in inter-parental conflict and students' academic achievement motivation. While boys are reportedly better than girls in some domains of academic achievement motivation, girls are affected most in inter-parental conflict. The effects of inter-parental conflicts are more in girls than boys. Generally, teaching learners (regardless of gender) to cope with family problems might enhance their motivational beliefs.

7. Recommendation

Appropriate intervention programmes particularly targeting girls should be developed in schools, in order to help reduce the gender differences which were found to exist with regard to students' inter-parental conflict and academic achievement motivation.

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