

## Exploring Psychosocial Influences on Adult Conflict Resolution Style: A Literature Review

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**ABSTRACT:** Effective conflict management generally involves three main strategies: non-confrontational approaches, solution-focused methods, and control-based techniques, each influenced by different psychosocial factors. This study systematically explores the psychosocial determinants of conflict resolution through a comprehensive literature review from 2002 to 2024. Using a rigorous methodology, independent reviewers applied standardized selection criteria, extracted data, and assessed study quality. Out of an initial pool of 123 journal articles, 22 high-quality papers were chosen for detailed analysis to examine how psychosocial factors impact adult conflict management. These articles were sourced from leading academic outlets, including the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Sage Journals, Francis & Taylor, MDPI journals, and so on. The analysis shows that multiple psychosocial factors greatly affect conflict resolution strategies and reveal consistent gender-based differences in preferred conflict management styles. Finally, this paper considers the implications of training programs at various levels, which may help individuals improve emotional regulation in conflict situations.

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict, Psychosocial factors, Adult, Attachment, Conflict Resolution Styles

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As human beings, we need to communicate with one another, making conflict an inevitable part of life (Eunson, 2012). However, people handle conflict in different ways. It arises when individuals or groups express differing beliefs, values, or opinions (Ergun & Eğinli, 2024a). Conflict occurs at various levels, and its effects depend on how individuals perceive the situation and the methods they choose to resolve it. It can manifest in different forms, such as intrapersonal (within oneself), interpersonal (between individuals), between a person and a group, inter-group (between groups), or inter-organizational (Ali et al., 2024). Interpersonal conflict is neither inherently good nor bad (Coleman, 2000); since we cannot eliminate conflict in our lives, how we manage it matters because conflict can create growth opportunities (Proksch, 2016).

Psychosocial factors influence an individual's mental health and well-being through psychological and social elements. These positive or negative factors profoundly affect both personal and professional life. Psychological factors refer to internal processes, such as thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and coping mechanisms, whereas social factors encompass external influences, including relationships, social support, and environmental conditions (Singh-Manoux, 2003).

Understanding and addressing psychosocial factors in conflict resolution styles is crucial for promoting mental well-being and improving health outcomes. These factors influence how individuals approach and handle conflicts, ultimately shaping their resolution style (Trifan, Meeus, and Branje, 2024).

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Conflict

Conflict arises when two or more individuals hold differing perceptions or beliefs, leading to anger and hostility. At times, we may even experience internal conflict within ourselves. Conflicts manifest across three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. How we handle stressful situations depends on how we navigate these three dimensions. Understanding this three-dimensional perspective helps us better comprehend the nature of daily conflicts (Mayer, 2010). Figure 1 below illustrates this concept:

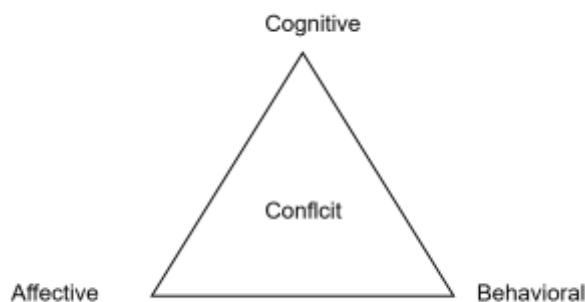


Figure 1: Dimensions of Conflict

Conflict stems from various sources, including economic differences, values, power struggles, beliefs, perceptions, and cultural disparities (Fisher, 2000). It can be either healthy or unhealthy. Healthy/Positive conflict occurs when both parties resolve disagreements constructively, leading to mutual understanding and an acceptable outcome. In contrast, unhealthy/Negative conflict arises when individuals feel threatened, attacked, or abused, creating a hostile environment. Handling conflict in a harmful way can negatively impact our lives. However, conflict can enhance problem-solving skills and foster growth when managed positively (Fortin et al., 2020; Sanson & Bretherton, 2001).

2.2 Stages of Conflict

As we have seen, conflict operates across three dimensions, each of which can negatively impact an individual’s personal and professional life. Therefore, identifying the underlying reasons for conflict is essential—it allows us to understand better and manage the situation effectively. Conflict progresses through five stages (Shaw, n.d., 2019). The stages are illustrated below in Fig. 2:

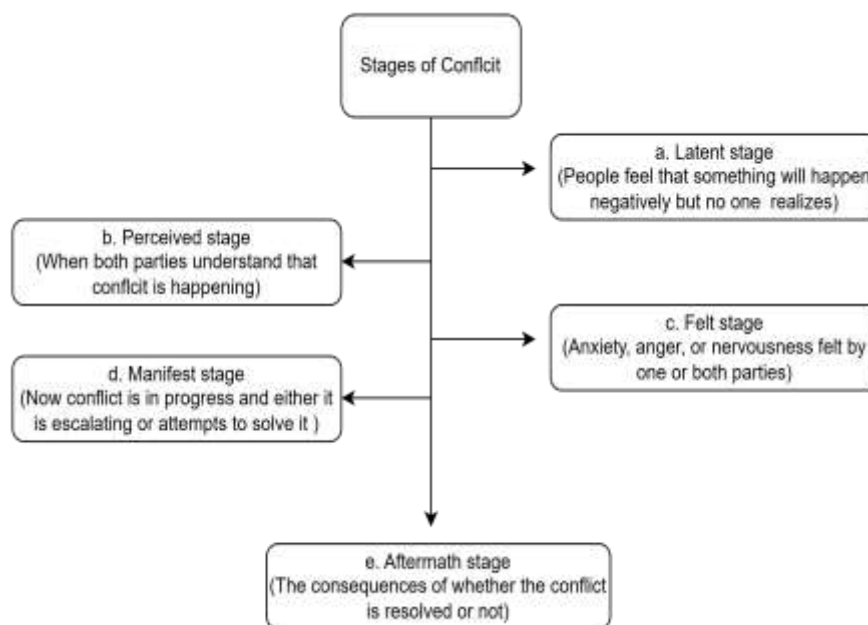


Fig. 2: The stages of conflict (Shaw, n.d., 2019)

2.3 Perspectives of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution requires more than simply recognizing a problem and remaining silent. While awareness of conflict signs is crucial, effective management demands active engagement. That means how the message is perceived and how we deliver our responses during the conflicting situation. Individuals develop unique styles for handling conflicts, shaped by various psychological and social factors (Jordan, 2000). Several theoretical frameworks explain differences in conflict management approaches:

1. **Social Context Perspective** - An individual's behavioral responses in conflict situations are significantly influenced by the behaviors of others within their social environment (Dhiman, 2023).
2. **Attachment Theory** - This emphasizes the profound impact of early infant-caregiver relationships on conflict resolution patterns. The quality of these foundational bonds establishes templates for interpersonal interactions throughout life (Bowlby, 1969; Holmes & Holmes, 2014).

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3. **Dual Concern Theory** mainly focuses on balancing the interests of both parties, where the realization of a person's own goals and the realization of the other's goals need to be considered (Blake & Mouton, 1964)

These perspectives collectively demonstrate how early developmental experiences shape an individual's approach to conflict resolution. Rather than being static, these patterns evolve through continued social interactions and personal growth opportunities (Salvatore et al., 2011).

### 2.4 Style of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution refers to behavioral responses, which means how we handle and respond to the situation (Courtain & Glowacz, 2019a). Many models describe it in many ways; however, according to Blake and Mouton (1964), dealing with interpersonal conflict can be classified into five categories: problem-solving, smoothing, forcing, withdrawal, and sharing (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Later on, this model was reinterpreted by Thomas (1976) and, in 1978, developed by Thomas and Kilman (Ergun & Eğinli, 2024). This model is shown in Figure 3 below:

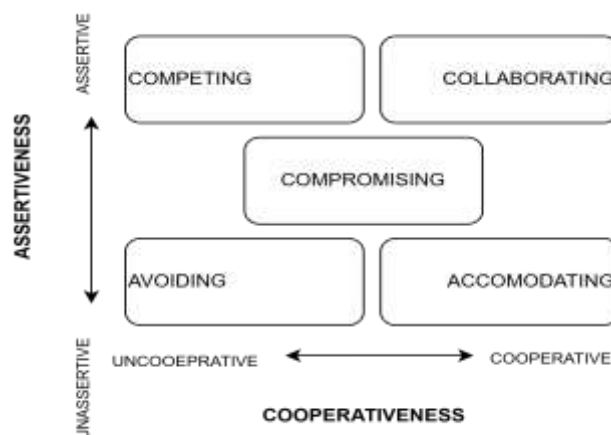


Fig. 3: Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Resolution Model (Thomas, 1974)

This model describes people's behavior in two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. When individuals are in an uncooperative mode, they exhibit competing and avoiding behaviors (Afzalur Rahim, 2002; Thomas, 1974), whereas they display collaborating and cooperative tendencies when in a mutual mode (Sorenson et al., 1998). According to this model, assertiveness indicates a concern for our needs, while cooperation refers to how much we attempt to address the other party's concerns about the conflict. The accommodating style arises when we cooperate closely with the other person, even if it comes at our own expense or contradicts our objectives (Locke et al., 1976). In other words, we demonstrate cooperative yet unassertive behavior. This approach is most effective when the other party presents a better solution to the problem (Bloomfield & Reilly, 1998). Conversely, the avoiding style entails evading the issue that triggered the conflict and is typically used for trivial matters. In this scenario, an individual shows neither assertive nor cooperative behavior. Moreover, collaborating occurs when both parties work together to satisfy their perspectives (Van De Vliert et al., 1999). This approach is commonly employed in complex situations where the goal is to develop an innovative solution for conflict resolution. When we opt not to cooperate and focus solely on achieving our objectives, this is referred to as the competing style. The compromising style is characterized by moderate levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness in resolving a conflict (Riasi & Asadzadeh, 2015).

### 3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Conflict represents an inherent aspect of human interaction, arising from differing values, objectives, perspectives, and communication styles. In academic institutions, professional workplaces, community settings, and personal relationships, ineffective conflict management can result in increased stress, reduced productivity, and damaged interpersonal connections (Owan, 2018). However, conflict can foster individual development, drive innovation, and strengthen relational bonds when addressed constructively (Miller & King, 2005; Taher et al., 2018).

Despite its ubiquity, many individuals and organizations lack the essential skills to manage conflicts successfully. Poor conflict resolution often intensifies tensions, creates hostile environments, and obstructs progress (Elgoibar et al., 2017). These consequences highlight the crucial need to understand conflict's root causes and employ evidence-based resolution strategies—essential skills for fostering effective communication, meaningful collaboration, and lasting success (Adekunle et al., 2019).

Handling conflict is central to maintaining healthy, productive, and respectful environments. Existing research has explored conflict resolution styles among various demographic groups; yet, significant gaps remain in the contribution of the psychosocial determinants that influence the development. A deeper investigation into the determinants of different resolution approaches and the reasons for their variations represents a valuable area of scholarly inquiry.

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## 4. METHOD

### 4.1 Search strategy

Based on the objectives and research questions, the paper searches various databases related to conflict resolution. PubMed and Google Scholar were utilized to verify whether indexing and citations were properly applied. In the current study, we reviewed papers from diverse journals. The various journals are listed below:

- a. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin
- b. Journal of Youth and Adolescence
- c. Journal of Counseling Psychology
- d. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, the American Psychological Association
- e. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology
- f. SAGE Publications
- g. Journal of Interpersonal Violence
- h. MDPI Journals

### 4.2 Formulating Research Question

In modern society, conflict is becoming increasingly prevalent, and managing it poses a significant challenge, often leading to negative consequences in individuals' lives. As a result, investigating the factors influencing conflict resolution styles and exploring effective management strategies is a worthwhile research endeavor.

This study formulates its research questions using the PICo framework, which stands for Population/Problem, Interest, and Context. Specifically, the research focuses on:

- Population: Adults (age above 18)
- Interest: Psychosocial factors
- Context: Personal and professional life

Guided by these components, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What psychosocial factors contribute to conflict resolution styles?
2. Are there gender differences in conflict resolution styles?

### 4.3 Selection criteria

Initially, the goal was to select a database to identify relevant papers. Existing keywords helped locate related articles using thesauri, and the search was later expanded with advanced keywords to find more pertinent studies. Thorough search strings were developed using Google Scholar, PubMed, Web of Science, and (Table 1). Based on the research questions, keywords are used for searching. These databases are particularly valuable for a comprehensive literature review due to their sophisticated search functions, extensive coverage, quality-controlled articles, and multidisciplinary focus.

**Table 1: Searching Keywords**

	Main keywords	Enriched Keywords
Keywords	Conflict Conflict Resolution Style Psycho-social factors	Attachment Psychological factors Social factors Developmental factors
Database	Google Scholar PubMed Web of Science MDPI	
Time Frame	2002 to 2024	

### 4.4 Screening

After screening 123 papers, a few papers were excluded that were not related to the objective of the literature review, and 46 papers were initially included based on some critical assessment, like date, language, sample, accuracy of method, interpretation, and impact of the research, research gap related to conflict resolution style, etc. The table below shows the screening criteria:

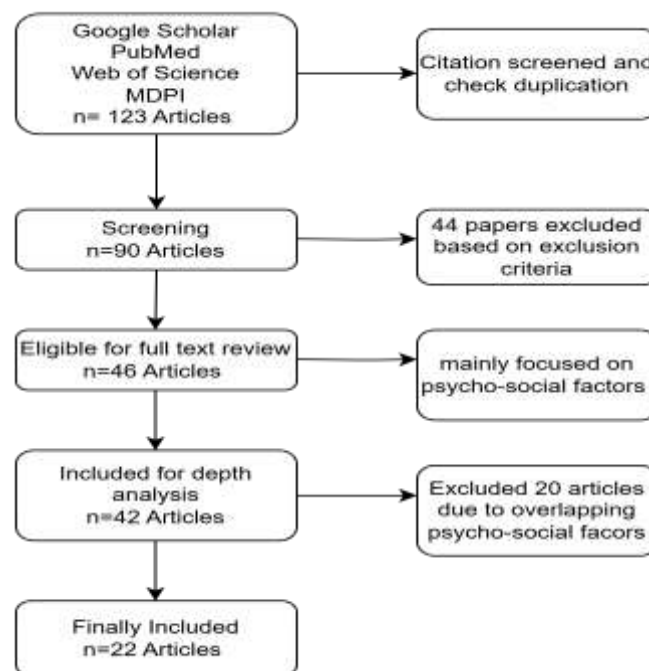
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**Table 2: Screening Criteria**

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time Line	2002 to 2024	<2002
Document Type	Article Journal	Book chapter, Conference paper Article review
Language	English	Non-English

### 5. ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility is a subsequent step involving the manual review of retrieved articles to verify their alignment with the predefined criteria. This process entailed examining the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles after screening. As a result, 33 papers were excluded from 123 papers due to duplication, non-English language, or being book chapters. Next, 90 papers underwent careful screening based on objectives and research questions. Of these, 46 met the inclusion criteria. For in-depth analysis, 42 papers were selected based on the psychosocial factors. Following further evaluation, 20 papers were excluded due to overlapping psycho-social factors, leaving 22 papers for final inclusion in the literature review interpretation. The flow chart is given below:



**Figure 4: The Flow chart of Eligibility**

### 6. RESULTS

Based on the research questions, the current study was reviewed rigorously. In this review, the target group was adults, and the psycho-social factors that contributed to conflict were examined. The reviewed studies reveal several key psychosocial factors that influence how individuals manage and resolve conflict. These factors shape emotional responses, communication strategies, and preferred conflict resolution styles. For instance, individuals with high neuroticism often struggle with managing emotions during conflict and prefer an avoidance style, while those high in agreeableness prefer cooperation and compromise (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). Moreover, the avoidance style creates frustration, self-reliance, and ambivalence (Brennan & Shaver, 1995). In the avoidant style, significant differences were found in males and females (Gbadamosi et al., 2014). Early anxious attachment style and accommodating conflict management have been positively correlated (Janghu & Bhau, 2023; Nguyen & Le, n.d.). The findings of psycho-social factors are given below:

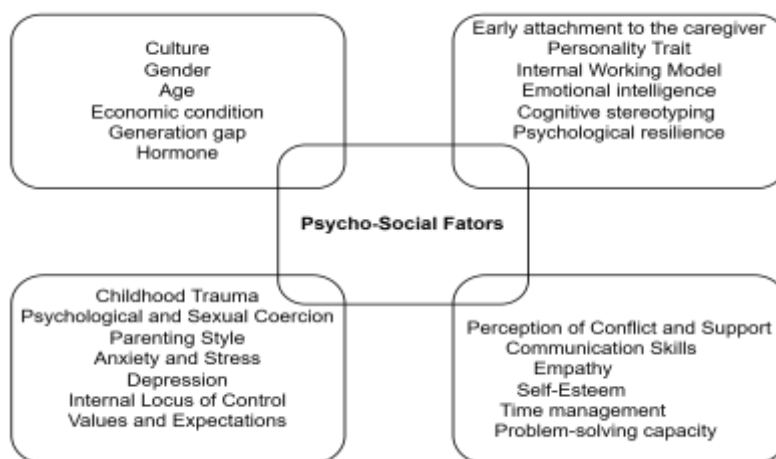


Figure 5: Psycho-Social Factors related to Conflict Resolution Style

7. DISCUSSION

The findings from the reviewed literature highlight the complex interplay of psychosocial factors that shape individuals' approaches to conflict resolution. The analyzed studies encompass a broad spectrum of contexts, including romantic relationships, adult conflict management styles, early attachment patterns, and more. Across these settings, key psychosocial dimensions—such as personality traits, attachment styles, emotional regulation, communication skills, and developmental stages—consistently emerge as significant determinants of conflict behavior. Major areas are discussed below:

a. Personality Traits as Predictors of Conflict Style

Personality traits, especially neuroticism and agreeableness, have negative impacts on interpersonal conflict resolution. People with neuroticism often adopt avoidant or emotionally withdrawn coping strategies. In contrast, those high in agreeableness tend to prioritize harmony and favor collaborative approaches (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). These findings suggest that personality assessments could enhance conflict management training and interventions, particularly in educational and workplace settings (Hendijani & Ahmadi, 2024; Tasew & Getahun, 2021).

b. Attachment Theory in Conflict Dynamics

Attachment style, rooted in early childhood experiences, significantly shapes adult conflict behavior. Research consistently demonstrates that securely attached individuals engage in open communication and cooperative conflict resolution (Bonache Recio et al., 2019). In contrast, those who are more prone to maladaptive responses, such as aggression or emotional disengagement, have an anxious or avoidant attachment (Sagone et al., 2023; Furman et al., 2002). These analytical reviews highlight the importance of incorporating attachment-based approaches into counseling and relationship education programs.

c. Emotional Intelligence and Communication Competency

Emotional intelligence (EI)—encompassing empathy, self-awareness, and emotion regulation—strongly predicts effective conflict management. Individuals with high EI are more adept at de-escalating tensions, asserting their needs effectively, and practicing active listening (Courtain & Glowacz, 2019). Conversely, poor emotional regulation is linked to impulsivity, increased reactivity, and verbal aggression (Creasey & Ladd, 2004). Those who focus on their intimacy will likely handle conflict within their romantic relationship using open discussion (Sanderson & Karetsky, 2002). These findings emphasize the need for early interventions to cultivate emotional and social skills, particularly during adolescence, when habits for conflict resolution are formed (Ross & Fuertes, 2010).

d. Developmental and Contextual Influences

Adolescents and young adults are particularly influenced by familial conflict models and peer interactions, often replicating observed behaviors in their relationships. This pattern supports the notion of intergenerational transmission of conflict styles and highlights the potential benefits of family-focused interventions (Campbell et al., 2005). Also, differences in preferred conflict management styles between males and females (Burgos-Calvillo et al., 2024; Mukundan et al., 2013). Additionally, contextual factors—such as relationship type (e.g., romantic vs. peer) and environment (e.g., school vs. home)—shape conflict expression and resolution, suggesting that tailored approaches are more effective than universal strategies (Branje et al., 2009; Jabeen et al., 2023). Overall, empirical evidence supports the efficacy of conflict resolution training in modifying behavioral patterns. Programs emphasizing empathy, self-regulation, and communication skills demonstrate notable improvements in conflict outcomes (Creasey, 2002). This indicates that while some psychosocial traits are stable, others can be cultivated through targeted education, offering promising avenues for intervention (Mwanzia, 2015). The training program on conflict resolution styles at different levels, such as for students, teachers, managers, doctors, and other professionals, would enrich their understanding of regulating emotions and empathy towards others.

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### 8. LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Despite valuable insights, the existing literature has notable limitations. First, cultural variability in conflict resolution remains underexplored, with most studies focusing on their own. Second, the scarcity of longitudinal research restricts the ability to examine behavioral changes over time.

### 9. CONCLUSION

In summary, conflict resolution styles are influenced by different psychosocial factors, including personality, attachment patterns, emotional intelligence, and contextual dynamics. A deeper understanding of these determinants can inform more effective conflict management programs and therapeutic interventions, which would help professionals to understand their clients. Addressing current research gaps will further advance efforts to promote adaptive conflict resolution, which will help people improve their well-being and maintain healthy relationships in personal and professional life, because when we are aware of a conflicting style that negatively hampers the relationship, it can be reframed from an unhealthy to a healthy pattern.

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