

AN INVESTIGATION INTO CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION ON INTER-PARENTAL CONFLICT AND SELF-ESTEEM

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate children's perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem. Descriptive survey research method was applied and quantitative data analysis was executed in this study. For inter-parental conflict, three instruments with 65 items were used. For self-esteem, two instruments with 58 items were used. A total of 843 students from basic education schools (435 males and 408 females) were randomly selected. Grade 6 & 7 students in Shan State, Mandalay Region and Magway Region were examined. The descriptive statistics, the independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were conducted. Besides, Post-Hoc test, Pearson's Product-Moment correlation, and regression analysis were undertaken. According to descriptive statistics, children's perception of inter-parental conflict was quite prominent and their self-esteem was relatively high. Based on the result of the independent sample t-test, there was no significant difference in children's perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem according to gender and grade. According to the result of One-way ANOVA, there was no significant difference in children's perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem. The result of Pearson's Product Moment correlation showed that there was a significant relationship between children's perception on inter-parental conflict and their self-esteem. Regression was conducted to investigate the best prediction of self-esteem scores.

Keywords: perception, inter-parental conflict and self-esteem

Introduction

One of the primary goals of education is to promote a child's holistic development. It seeks to grow the overall personality of the children. These include psychological and social growth. Every child has the capacity to do something remarkable for his or her life. When a child's imagination is unlocked, possibilities are opened up and they can also be flexible in any situation.

Family environment is the most critical development of a child's personality, psychological and physical growth. The family is an effective social agent; especially parents play a primary role in many areas of a child development such as self-esteem. In contrast, the conflict in the family has the impact on the child's development. So, Inter-parental conflicts are present in all societies across the globe. The conflicts between parents and how they will continue to develop associations potentially affect the children in many ways.

Inter-parental conflict is a term that represents a continuum of parental behaviours ranging from verbal disagreements to physical violence (Grych & Finchman, 1993). The children may accept their parents' conflict in different ways. Moreover, children of parents who engage in significant conflict are more likely to experience internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Buehler et al., 1997). Child internalizing symptoms refer to difficult feelings that are turned inward, such as anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms, while externalizing symptoms typically refer to negative behaviors directed at others, such as verbal and physical aggression, destruction of property, and theft (Mash & Dozois, 2003).

One of the possible answers become "conflicts" between individuals. If an individual cannot return to the reality world, he or she can lose consciousness, cannot pay attention to people in his or her environment, and cannot give carefulness to his or her child if he or she were a parent. At this time, the problems of inter-parental conflicts become enlarged; as a consequence, their

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children may be the victims of their conflicts. In this situation, the children may suffer from their parents' conflicts and they may try to get freedom themselves by maladjustment factors such as blaming themselves, growing threats, low self-esteem.

Purpose of the study

- To investigate children's perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem
- To investigate children's perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem by gender, grade and age
- To explore the relationship between inter-parental conflict and self-esteem of children
- To explore the factors affecting the self-esteem of children

Definition of Key Terms

Inter-parental Conflict. Inter-parental conflict is a term that represents a continuum of parental behaviors ranging from verbal disagreements to physical violence (Grych & Finchman F, 1993).

Children's Self-esteem. Self-esteem of children is rather difficult to define, but a skeleton definition of it relates to the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that a kid has about himself/herself (Kernis, 2013).

Perception. Perception is a process where we take in sensory information from our environment and use that information in order to interact with our environment (Jennifer Levitas, 2022).

Review of Related Literature

Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict: When examining the effects of community violence on early childhood behavior, it is important to consider that young children may have concurrent exposure to family conflict. Family conflict is defined as interparental or interpartner aggression that is characterized by a range of behaviors from verbal or emotional abuse to physical abuse, such as hitting a partner (Straus, 1979). Family conflicts are related to human love, and literature is about human feelings and behavior, also love and romance. That's the reason why inter-parental conflicts can be constructive or destructive, depending on whether their impact on children's development is positive or negative (McCoy *et al.*, 2009).

Children's Self-esteem: Self-esteem is defined as the set of positive or negative evaluations of individuals about their own selves (Rosenberg 1965). Self and self-esteem constitute two different dimensions of personality. The self represents the cognitive part of the personality, whereas self-esteem represents the affective and psychologic dimension. Self-esteem also plays a significant role in students' participation in schools and formal activities as those with high self-esteem appear to be more active and enthusiastic than those with low self-esteem (Zuffiano, *et. al.*, 2011). A high level of perceived satisfaction indicates that the individual has high self-esteem, whereas a low level of satisfaction indicates low self-esteem. Berg and Kelly (1979) compared the self-esteem of children from three different family types. Children classified their families as either intact or satisfactory, intact but unsatisfactory (i.e., "my family fights a lot"), and divorced. Children who viewed their families as intact but unsatisfactory had the lowest self-esteem. Interestingly, children from divorced families were not different from the children from intact, satisfactory families.

Method

Sample of the Study

In this research 843 students (435 males and 408 females) were selected using simple random sampling method. Grade 6 & 7 students from Shan State, Mandalay Region and Magway Region were examined.

Instrumentation

In order to study the children's perception of inter-parental conflict, the researcher used "Children's Perception of Inter-parental Conflict Scale" which was validated by the researcher. Total number of items in inter-parental conflict is 65 items with three subscale; 21 items for conflict properties, 17 items for self-blame and 27 items for threat.

And then, in order to study the children's self-esteem, the researcher used "the State Self-Esteem Scale" which was validated by the researcher. Total number of items in Self-esteem is 58 items with three subscales; 22 items for performance self-esteem, 23 items for social self-esteem and 13 items for physical self-esteem. These items are measured on 4 point Likert scales such as 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Agree) and 4 (Strongly Agree).

Procedure

Firstly, the related literature was studied through intensive reading from a variety of sources such as books, journals, thesis, research papers and internet sources. Next, research instruments were prepared under the guidance of the supervisor to collect data. In order to validate the prepared instruments, expert reviews were requested. According to the suggestion, some items were modified. And then, pilot testing was carried out to assess the reliability coefficient of the respective questionnaires. After the pilot testing, factor analysis was carried out and the researcher analyzed the received data. Factor analysis is used as a tool to investigate the underlying concepts or aspects that the tests or groups of tests are measuring. And then, in order to explore the difference between gender and grade, the independent sample t-test was used. Then, one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to investigate the differences among ages. And Pearson's Product-Moment correlation analysis was undertaken in order to find out the relationship between children's perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem. Simultaneous Regression analysis was conducted to investigate the best prediction of self-esteem scores.

Descriptive Statistics of the Children's Perception on Inter-parental Conflict

Descriptive analysis revealed the differences in means and standard deviations with respect to each variable and total perception on inter-parental conflict. To find out the children's perception on inter-parental conflict, descriptive statistics was carried out and the results were shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Children's Perception on Inter-parental Conflict

Variables	Number of Items	Mean Percentage	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Conflict Properties	6	56.33%	3.93	6	24
Threat	9	76.42%	5.25	9	36
Self-blame	6	57.60%	3.29	6	24
Perception on Inter-parental Conflict	21	62.45%	8.880	21	81

Since the number of items included in each subscale of perception on inter-parental conflict questionnaire were not the same, the mean scores were transformed to the corresponding mean percentages. According to Table 1, the total mean percentage of perception on inter-parental conflict was 62.45%, the mean percentage of conflict properties, threat and self-blame were slightly different. The threat was the highest mean percentage and it was (76.42%) greater than conflict properties and self-blame. Besides, the mean percentage of the self-blame was (57.60%) slightly greater than conflict properties. After descriptive statistics was conducted, the independent samples *t*-test was used to examine differences in the mean scores of the study sample for the test of children's perception on inter-parental conflict in relation to the gender variable.

Comparison of Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Gender

In order to explore the differences in children's perception of inter-parental conflict by gender, descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-test were conducted. Descriptive analyses revealed the differences in means and standard deviations with regard to each variable of perception on inter-parental conflict by gender. The results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Mean Comparison of Children's Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Mean difference
Conflict Properties	Male	430	13.62	3.76	.791*	841	.032	.214
	Female	413	13.42	4.09				
Threat	Male	430	27.23	5.54	1.582**	841	.006	-.571
	Female	413	27.80	4.92				
Self-blame	Male	430	11.61	3.31	1.655	841	.524	.375
	Female	413	11.23	3.26				
Perception on Inter-parental Conflict(Total)	Male	430	52.46	8.56	.028	841	.301	.017
	Female	413	52.45	9.21				

p* < .05, *p* < .01

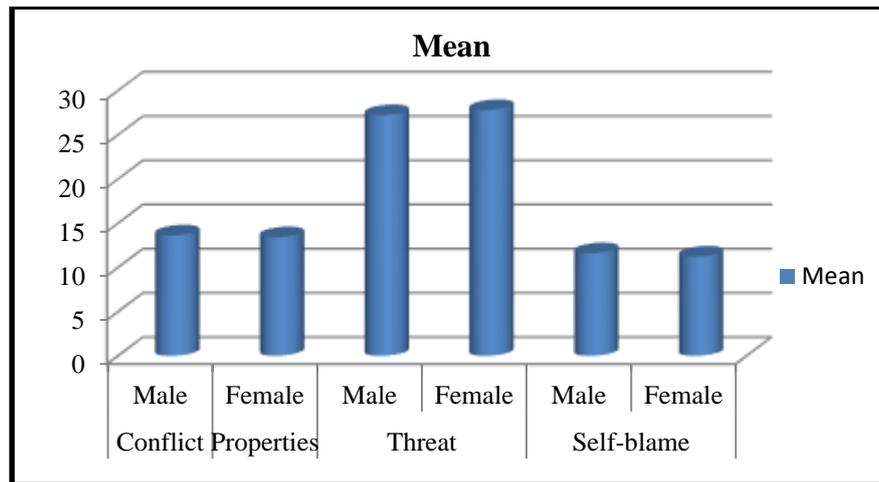


Figure 1 Mean Comparison of Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Gender

According to Table 2, the total mean scores of inter-parental conflicts were almost similar by gender (male = 52.46, female = 52.45). In the subscale of conflict properties, the mean scores of male students were slightly greater than female students and it was found that there was significant difference at the 0.05 level ($t = .791, p = .032$). It can be concluded that male students were significantly higher than female students in conflict properties.

In the subscale of threat, female students were higher than the male students and it was also found that there was significant difference between male and female at 0.01 level ($t = -1.582, p = .006$). It can be concluded that female students had been more highly threatened by their parents than male students in conflicts. It was congruent with the previous study in which there was a highly significant main effect on threat of boys and girls when they perceive inter-parental conflicts (Yahya, 2014). The findings indicated that boys reported lower level of threat than girls. The possible reason may be that female students are more frightened to be shamed by something in their nature than male students. In Myanmar culture, girls solve the problems silently and thus other people have the opportunity to threaten to them.

In the subscale of self-blame, the mean scores of male students were higher than the female students but there was no significant difference between them. Moreover, it was found that there was no significant difference in the perception of inter-parental conflict.

Table 3 Mean Comparison of Children’s Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Grade

Variables	Grade	N	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Conflict Properties	Grade - 6	386	13.60	.579	841	.131
	Grade - 7	457	13.45			
Threat	Grade - 6	386	27.18	-1.712	841	.427
	Grade - 7	457	27.80			
Self-blame	Grade - 6	386	11.72	2.393*	841	.029
	Grade - 7	457	11.18			
Perception of Inter-parental Conflict	Grade - 6	386	52.50	.129	841	.942
	Grade - 7	457	52.42			

* $p < .05$

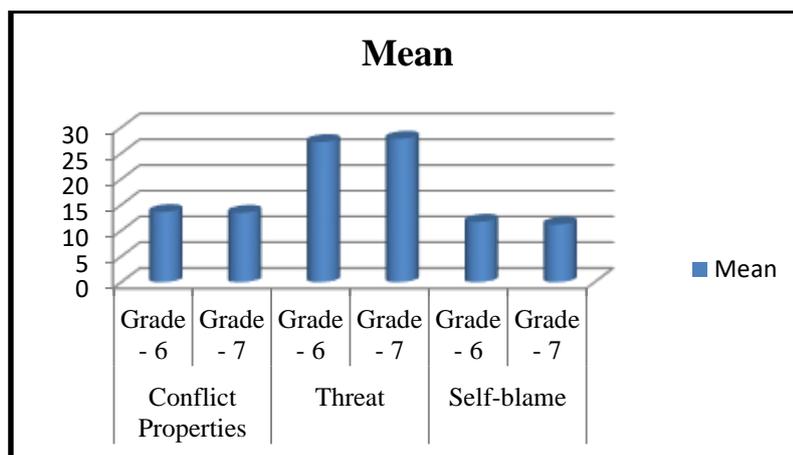


Figure 2 Mean Comparison of Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Grade

According to Table 3, the total mean scores of inter-parental conflicts by grade were slightly different. In the conflict properties, the mean score of Grade-6 students were slightly higher than the mean score of the students of Grade-7, there was no significant difference between them. In the subscale of threat, the mean score of Grade-7 students was higher than that of Grade-6 students, there was also no significant difference between them.

In the subscale of self-blame, it was found that there was significant difference between Grade-6 and Grade-7 students at 0.05 level ($t = 2.393, p = .029$) with the mean scores of Grade-6 students were 0.54 higher than that of Grade-7 students. It can be concluded that Grade-6 students were highly more blamed on themselves than Grade-7 students in inter-parental conflict.

In Piaget's cognitive development theory, Grade-6 students included in the concrete operational stage and they begin to start new feature of thinking and operating new things that challenges to them. Thus, boys make more mistakes than girls because they were interested in new things and they like to get new knowledge and experience by handling them whether it may be right or wrong. In this way, they gradually have the opportunity to get autonomy and responsibility for their life. Therefore, they blame on themselves whatever happen in their environment including their inter-parental conflicts. It was congruent with the previous study that there was a significant difference between six grade and seventh grade students. The finding suggested that the seventh-grade students more blamed on themselves by their parents and environment in their parental conflicts (Cummings et al., 2012). It was found that there were no significant differences between the total mean scores of students by grade.

Table 4 Mean Comparison of Children's Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Age

Variables	Age	N	Mean	SD
Conflict Properties	10-11 years	148	13.34	3.70
	12-13 years	634	13.58	3.96
	14-above	61	13.34	3.93
Threat	10-11 years	148	27.10	5.68
	12-13 years	634	27.76	5.04
	14-above	61	25.97	5.97

Variables	Age	N	Mean	SD
Self-blame	10-11 years	148	11.50	3.63
	12-13 years	634	11.40	3.18
	14-above	61	11.44	3.56
Perception on Inter-parental Conflict	10-11 years	148	51.94	9.17
	12-13 years	634	52.74	8.66
	14-above	61	50.75	10.26

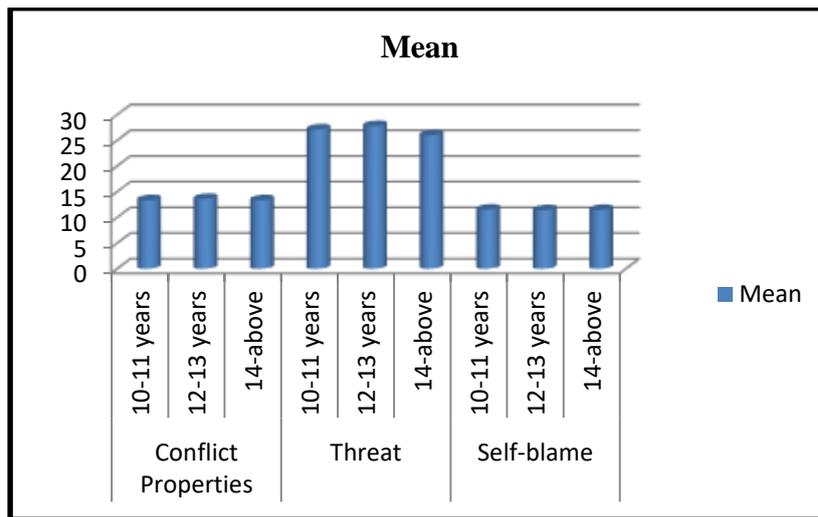


Figure 3 Mean Comparison of Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Age

According to Table 4, the 12-13 years old students had the highest mean score in the subscales of conflict properties; threat and the total mean scores of inter-parental conflict. In the subscale of self-blame, the students with the age of 10-11 years had the higher mean score than the other age group. Besides, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was worked out so that it would observe clearly the significant differences in inter-parental conflict. The ANOVA results were presented in Table 5.

Table 5 ANOVA Results for the Subscales of Inter-parental Conflict by Age

Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Conflict Properties	Between Groups	8.873	2	4.437	.287	.750
	Within Groups	12965.592	840	15.435		
	Total	12974.465	842			
Threat	Between Groups	208.612	2	104.306	3.814*	.022
	Within Groups	22970.007	840	27.345		
	Total	23178.619	842			
Self-blame	Between Groups	1.135	2	.567	.052	.949

Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
	Within Groups	9104.680	840	10.839		
	Total	9105.815	842			
Perception on Inter-parental Conflict	Between Groups	266.691	2	133.346	1.694	.184
	Within Groups	66126.300	840	78.722		
	Total	66392.992	842			

* $p < .05$

According to Table 5, it was found that there was a significant difference in threat at 0.05 level ($p = .022$). There were no significant differences in the subscales of conflict properties and self-blame and also no significant difference in the perception of inter-parental conflict. Therefore, the Post Hoc Test was calculated in terms of Games-Howell method in order to observe more detailed information about the significance. The Post Host Test results were described in Table 6.

Table 6 Multiple Comparison for the Subscales of Perception on Inter-parental Conflict by Age

Variable	(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Threat	10-11 years	14-above year	1.790*	.029
	12-13 years			

* $p < 0.05$

According to Table 6, it was found that 10-11 years and 12-13 years old students and 14-above years old students at the .05 level were significantly difference ($p = .029$) in threat. It can be concluded that 10-11 years and 12-13 years old students had been more threatened than the 14-above years old students.

The reason may be that students in the age of 12-13 years included in the formal operational stage of Piaget's cognitive development. They start to think about not only tangible objects and events, but also hypothetical or abstract ones. On the other hand, they begin to think themselves like an adult. Thus, they want to participate in every situation especially in their family affairs. At this situation, the time when they consider something went wrong and when their parents' emotion may be in high rate, they may be the victims of their parents' conflicts. There were some previous studies in which adolescence were more exposed to interparental conflict and violence than young adulthood (Martin et al., 2017), and preschool children experience more fear and threats than older children when exposed to interparental conflict (Kitzmann et al., 2003).

Descriptive Statistics for Components of Self-esteem

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics for Components of Self-esteem

Variables	Number	Mean Percentage	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Performance Self-esteem	843	76.36%	3.027	6	24
Social Self-esteem	843	72.49%	4.904	10	39
Self-esteem (Total)	843	74.04%	6.624	18	60

Since the number of items included in each subscale of self-esteem questionnaire were not the same, the mean scores were transformed to the corresponding mean percentages. According to Table 7, the total mean percentage of self-esteem was 74.04%, the mean percentage between variables were slightly different. The performance self-esteem was (76.36%) higher than the social self-esteem. Therefore, it was found that the performance self-esteem was better than social skill self-esteem among students.

Table 8 Mean Comparison of Self-esteem by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Performance Self-esteem	Male	430	18.05	-2.748**	841	.006
	Female	413	18.62			
Social Self-esteem	Male	430	26.00	-.645	841	.519
	Female	413	26.22			
Self-esteem (Total)	Male	430	44.05	-1.730	841	.084
	Female	413	44.84			

** $p < 0.01$

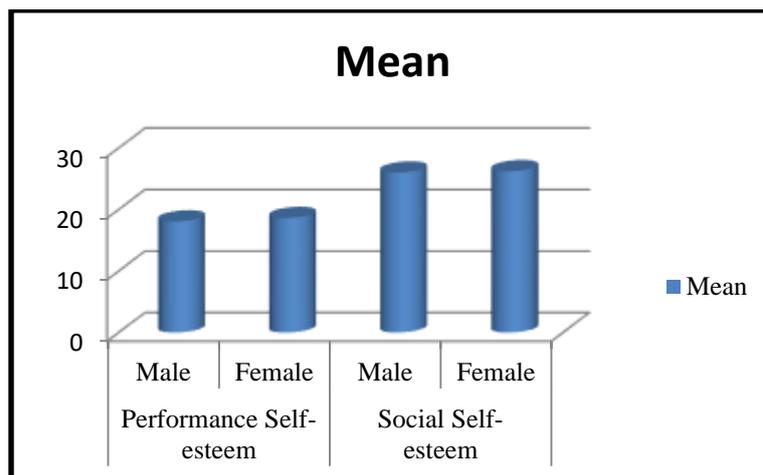


Figure 4 Mean Comparison of Self-esteem by Gender

According to Table 8, the total mean scores of self-esteem for female students were higher than male students. Moreover, the mean score of female students were also higher than male students in the performance self-esteem and social self-esteem. Besides, the performance self-esteem of female students was significantly different from male students at the 0.01 level ($t = -2.748, p=.006$). From the observation of the mean scores for the whole sample, it can be concluded that female students were significantly higher in performance self-esteem than male students.

The possible reason may be that females may be highly extroverted than males. Some of the previous studies showed that females reported highly extroversion than males (Weisberg et al.,

2011) and females found to be more agreeable than males (Feingold, 1994). Therefore, females may be more sociable and in good communication in their society. They may be preferable in showing their skills, excellent performance and mastery in front of a crowd with bravery than that of males. Moreover, they may be solved problems with tender kind hearted in any situation. On the other hand, they may adjust well in their environment that's why they may be higher performance self-esteem than males. The result was congruent with some previous studies in which females had higher levels of performance self-esteem than males (Vorbach, 2002).

Table 9 Mean Comparison of Self-esteem by Grade

Variables	Grade	N	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Performance Self-esteem	Grade - 6	386	18.35	.207	841	.836
	Grade - 7	457	18.31			
Social Self-esteem	Grade - 6	386	26.23	.645	841	.519
	Grade - 7	457	26.01			
Self-esteem	Grade - 6	386	44.58	.572	841	.567
	Grade - 7	457	44.31			

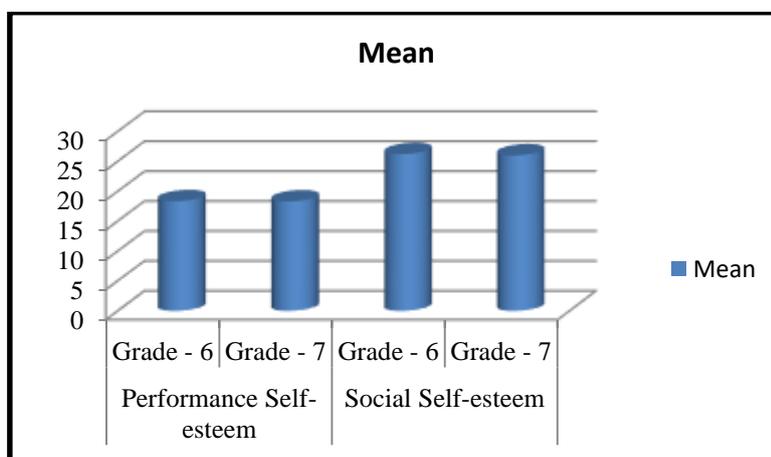


Figure 5 Mean Comparison of Self-esteem by Grade

According to table 9, the total mean score of self-esteem by grade were slightly different. It can be clearly found that there was no significant difference between Grade-6 and Grade-7 students in both performance self-esteem and social self-esteem. There was also no significant difference in the self-esteem. It can be concluded that the self-esteem of Grade-6 students may be similar in that of Grade-7 students.

Table 10 Mean Comparison of Self-esteem by Age

Variables	Age	N	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Performance Self-esteem	10-11 years	148	18.07	3.157
	12-13 years	634	18.44	2.912
	14-above	61	17.79	3.764
Social Self-esteem	10-11 years	148	26.38	5.075

	12-13 years	634	26.17	4.821
	14-above	61	24.79	5.209
Self-esteem	10-11 years	148	44.45	7.006
	12-13 years	634	44.61	6.440
	14-above	61	42.57	7.361

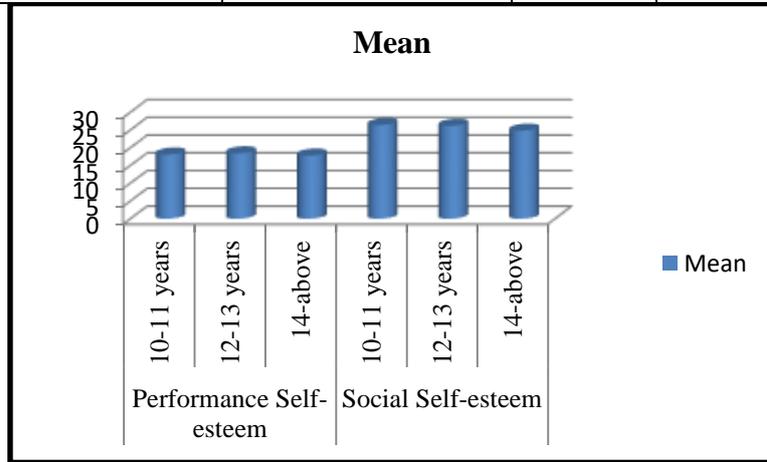


Figure 6 Mean Comparison of Self-esteem by Age

According to Table 10, the 12-13 years old students had the highest mean score and the least standard deviation in performance self-esteem. On the other hand, 10-11 years old students had the highest mean score in social self-esteem and 12-13 years old students had the lowest standard deviation. Besides, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was worked out so that it would clearly observe the significant differences in self-esteem. The ANOVA results were presented in Table 11.

Table 11 ANOVA Results for the Subscales of Self-esteem by Age

Variable		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
Performance Self-esteem	Between Groups	35.636	2	17.818	1.948	.143
	Within Groups	7681.655	840	9.145		
	Total	7717.291	842			
Social Self-esteem	Between Groups	119.749	2	59.874	2.499	.083
	Within Groups	20128.643	840	23.963		
	Total	20248.391	842			
Self-esteem	Between Groups	230.487	2	115.224	2.636	.072
	Within Groups	36718.476	840	43.712		
	Total	36948.963	842			

According to Table 11, it was found that there was no significant difference in the self-esteem. Moreover, there were also no significant differences between performance self-esteem and social self-esteem ($p > .05$).

Table 12 Correlations between Variables of Teachers' Perception on Inter-parental Conflict and Self-esteem

Variables	CP	Threat	Selfblame	ICtotal	Per SE	Soc SE	SEtotal
CP	1	.243**	.496**	.769**	-.077*	-.219**	-.197**
Threat		1	.366**	.723**	.084*	-.130**	-.058
Selfblame			1	.628**	-.146**	-.348**	-.325**
Ictotal				1	-.038	-.302**	-.341**
Perfor					1	.359**	.723**
Social						1	.904**
Setotal							1

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

CP-conflict properties, IC-inter-parental conflict, Per SE-performance self-esteem
Soc SE-social self-esteem

According to the results of Table 12, it was found that there was significant relationship between children's perception on inter-parental conflict and children's self-esteem. The correlations are significant at the 0.001 level and at the 0.05 level. The social self-esteem scale highly correlates with self-esteem total scale ($r = .904$, $p < 0.01$). And then, the relationship between children's perception on total inter-parental conflict and performance self-esteem was low negative correlation.

Regression Analysis for Children's Perception on Inter-parental Conflict and Children's Self-esteem

Regressions were used to assess whether children's perception on inter-parental conflict significantly predicts children's self-esteem. Table 13 displayed the intercept, unstandardized regression coefficient (B), standardized regression coefficient (β) for model.

Table 13 Regression Analyses for Self-esteem and Inter-parental Conflict

Variable	B	β	t	R square	Adjusted R Square	F
Self-esteem	53.879					
Inter-parental Conflict (IC)	-.180	-.241	-7.214***	.058	.057	52.036

*** $p < .001$

The result indicated that the adjusted R Square was .057. This indicates only 5.7% of the variance in self-esteem was explained by inter-parental conflict, according to Cohen (1988). Inter-parental conflict significantly predicted self-esteem at $p < .01$. Therefore, the regression model can be defined as the following equation.

$$\text{Model Equation} \\ \text{SE} = 53.879 - .180\text{IC}$$

SE= Self-esteem

IC= Inter-parental Conflict



Figure 7 A Model Summary of the Results of Regression Analysis

Discussion

In this study, the independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA were conducted. Besides, Post-Hoc test, Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation, and regression analysis were undertaken. So, this study was very useful for the researcher to adapt the instruments to be more effective.

Conclusion

In this study, according to descriptive statistics, children’s perception of inter-parental conflict was quite prominent and their self-esteem was relatively high. And then, in order to explore the difference between gender and grade, t-test was used. Based on the result, there was no significant difference in children’s perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem according to gender and grade. Then, one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to investigate the differences among ages. According to the result, there was also no significant difference in children’s perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem. And Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation was undertaken in order to find out the relationship between children’s perception of inter-parental conflict and self-esteem. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between children’s perception on inter-parental conflict and their self-esteem. The social self-esteem scale highly correlates with self-esteem total scale ($r = .904, p < 0.01$). And then, the relationship between children’s perception on total inter-parental conflict and performance self-esteem was low negative correlation. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the children would have the lower performance self-esteem if they perceive the more children’s perception on total inter-parental conflict. Simultaneous Regression was conducted to investigate the best prediction of self-esteem scores. Only 5.7% of the variance in self-esteem was explained by inter-parental conflict. And then, this study adapted the instruments which are reliable to find out the children’s perception of inter-parental conflict and children’s self-esteem in Myanmar societies.

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