




Prediction of Self-Efficacy and Aggression in Adolescents Based on Marital Conflicts and Mothers' Problem-Solving Styles

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the predictive role of maternal marital conflict and mothers' problem-solving styles on adolescent self-efficacy and aggression.

Methods and Materials: The research employed a descriptive-correlational design and was conducted on a sample of 352 mother-adolescent daughter dyads selected through multi-stage cluster sampling from public secondary schools in District 5 of Tehran during the 2023–2024 academic year. Data were collected using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE-17), the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), the Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ-R), and the Problem-Solving Styles Inventory by Cassidy and Long. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients, and multiple regression analyses using the stepwise method were performed via SPSS version 27.

Findings: The results showed that maternal marital conflict significantly predicted adolescent self-efficacy negatively ($B = -0.205$, $\beta = -0.407$, $p < .001$) and adolescent aggression positively ($B = 0.202$, $\beta = 0.409$, $p < .001$). Among maternal problem-solving styles, avoidance was the strongest positive predictor of aggression ($B = 8.421$, $\beta = 0.602$, $p < .001$) and a significant negative predictor of self-efficacy ($B = -8.289$, $\beta = -0.580$, $p < .001$). Conversely, control, creativity, confidence, and approach orientation in problem-solving positively predicted adolescent self-efficacy and negatively predicted aggression. Helplessness was also a significant negative predictor of self-efficacy and a positive predictor of aggression, though with smaller effect sizes.

Conclusion: Maternal marital conflict and problem-solving styles significantly influence adolescents' psychological outcomes. Constructive maternal problem-solving traits act as protective factors, enhancing self-efficacy and reducing aggression, whereas avoidant or helpless styles exacerbate negative outcomes.

Keywords: Adolescent self-efficacy; adolescent aggression; marital conflict; maternal problem-solving styles; family dynamics; parenting.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by increased autonomy, identity formation, and emotional fluctuation. During this period, adolescents are particularly sensitive to the quality of family relationships and parental behavior, both of which play an integral role in shaping psychological outcomes such as self-efficacy and aggression. Parental conflict and problem-solving styles, particularly those exhibited by mothers, are increasingly being recognized as key determinants in adolescent adjustment. Numerous studies have emphasized the mediating or moderating effects of familial factors on developmental trajectories in adolescents, highlighting the complex interplay between the family environment and adolescent psychosocial functioning (Ju et al., 2024; Kim & Park, 2025; Tuohy et al., 2025).

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments, is crucial during adolescence, a time when individuals must cope with academic, social, and personal challenges. Empirical evidence shows that the development of self-efficacy is deeply rooted in the parenting environment, with supportive and nurturing parental behavior enhancing adolescents' belief in their own capabilities (Qonitatin et al., 2022; Wachs et al., 2020; Yap & Baharudin, 2015). Conversely, exposure to high levels of parental conflict or poor parental problem-solving abilities may hinder the development of self-efficacy and instead foster maladaptive outcomes such as aggression (Liu et al., 2019; McCauley et al., 2018; Parsa et al., 2015).

Parental conflict, particularly marital conflict, has long been identified as a significant stressor for children and adolescents. It not only undermines their sense of security but also impairs their social-emotional regulation, academic performance, and behavioral outcomes. As reported by numerous scholars, adolescents who are frequently exposed to interparental conflict are more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior and reduced self-efficacy, especially when such conflict is unresolved or hostile in nature (Eini et al., 2020; Song, 2025; Wang et al., 2023). Parental conflict creates an emotionally toxic environment where adolescents struggle to internalize constructive coping strategies, thereby increasing their vulnerability to impulsive and externalizing behaviors (Tang, 2024; Wei et al., 2024; Zhang, 2025).

Importantly, not all adolescents exposed to familial conflict experience negative outcomes to the same extent. Emerging research suggests that parental communication

style, parenting practices, and problem-solving competencies—particularly those of mothers—can buffer or exacerbate the effects of interparental discord. Mothers often serve as the primary emotional and behavioral regulators in the home, and their ability to model adaptive problem-solving strategies is critical for adolescent social and emotional development (Adams & Golsch, 2022; Healy et al., 2020; Öztornacı et al., 2024). For instance, maternal avoidance or helplessness in solving everyday problems may be internalized by adolescents, diminishing their sense of agency and escalating emotional dysregulation and aggressive tendencies.

Moreover, adolescents are more likely to mirror their parents' emotional regulation and conflict resolution styles. When mothers demonstrate confidence, creativity, and approach-oriented strategies in dealing with stress, adolescents are more likely to adopt these positive behaviors themselves, thereby reducing aggression and enhancing self-efficacy (Abadi et al., 2024; Kurniyawan et al., 2023; Lan et al., 2022a). These findings underscore the role of social cognitive modeling, as postulated by Bandura, in adolescent development. Observational learning from parents, especially primary caregivers, forms the foundation of behavioral and emotional regulation in young individuals (Wachs et al., 2020; Yap & Baharudin, 2015).

From a sociocultural perspective, parental problem-solving ability does not operate in a vacuum. Cultural expectations, gender roles, and socio-economic stressors often influence how conflict is managed in the family and how adolescents interpret and respond to it (Adams & Golsch, 2022; Avdeeva & Hoffman, 2019). For example, in some cultural contexts, open conflict between parents is considered taboo, resulting in passive-aggressive or avoidant communication styles. Adolescents exposed to such environments may struggle with ambiguous emotional cues, leading to internal conflicts and reduced confidence in social situations (Choi et al., 2020; Ju et al., 2024). On the other hand, in cultures that promote open communication and emotional expression, parental guidance in problem-solving can foster resilience and emotional competence in adolescents (Liu et al., 2019; Tuohy et al., 2025).

Research also suggests that the association between marital conflict and adolescent aggression may be mediated by adolescents' perceived sense of control or emotional self-regulation. Adolescents with higher self-efficacy are more likely to buffer the emotional toll of parental discord, mitigating the development of hostile or aggressive behavior (McCauley et al., 2018; Tian et al., 2018). Similarly, those

who lack a sense of control or are exposed to maternal avoidance may internalize a defeatist mindset, which increases their susceptibility to impulsive behavior, anger outbursts, and conflict with peers (Wei et al., 2024; Wu & Yaacob, 2016).

In addition, maternal coping mechanisms and their attitudes toward adolescent autonomy and discipline significantly affect adolescent behavioral outcomes. Evidence points to a strong association between maternal emotional competence and adolescent self-perception. Adolescents who perceive their mothers as emotionally competent, nurturing, and consistent are more likely to develop robust self-regulation and prosocial behavior (Kim & Park, 2025; Yap & Baharudin, 2015). Conversely, when maternal behaviors are erratic, punitive, or passive, adolescents may experience increased psychological distress, leading to heightened aggression and reduced belief in their capacity to manage challenges effectively (Choi et al., 2020; Wachs et al., 2020).

Several studies have provided empirical support for the centrality of parent-adolescent interactions in shaping adolescent outcomes. For instance, research by Chang et al. emphasizes the moderating role of adolescent self-control in buffering the adverse effects of interparental conflict, especially in contexts where parental attachment is weak (Chang et al., 2020). Similarly, Tuohy et al. reported that quality communication between parents and adolescents plays a mediating role in enhancing adolescents' self-efficacy in chronic illness management, highlighting the broader implications of parental relational quality across behavioral domains (Tuohy et al., 2025).

In recent years, there has also been increasing attention to the gendered aspects of parental influence. Some studies indicate that maternal behaviors might have a more pronounced effect on daughters, while paternal behaviors may be more influential for sons, although findings are mixed and often culturally contingent (Qonitatin et al., 2022; Zhang, 2025). This complexity emphasizes the need for context-sensitive research that considers not only the presence of conflict but also the quality of maternal interaction and problem-solving as distinct constructs impacting adolescent functioning.

Given the increasing rates of adolescent aggression and emotional dysregulation, understanding the predictive roles of maternal marital conflict and problem-solving styles is of paramount importance. Despite growing literature in this field, studies specifically examining these variables within a single comprehensive model—particularly in cultural

contexts where maternal roles are emphasized—remain limited. The present study aims to address this gap by investigating how maternal marital conflict and six specific problem-solving styles (helplessness, control, creativity, confidence, avoidance, and approach orientation) predict adolescent self-efficacy and aggression.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a basic research design using a descriptive-correlational and non-experimental methodology. The target population included all female high school students in the second grade of secondary education, along with their mothers, residing in District 5 of Tehran during the 2023–2024 academic year. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was used to select participants. Initially, a list of public girls' high schools in District 5 was compiled, including Professor Hesabi 1, Imam Jafar Sadegh 1, 22 Bahman 1, Somayeh, Aeen Tarbiat, Ekhlās, Vahdat Eslami 1, Hejab 1, Shaheed Avini 1, Marhoom Sarfaraz, Hedavand, Niyayesh, Hazrat Nabi Akram, Hazrat Fatemeh 1, Shaheed Shamloo, Maryam 1, Sepideh Kashani, Iman 2, Mahdavih Kan 1, Modarres, Edalat 2, and Shaheed Bahonar 1. From this list, five schools were randomly selected—Professor Hesabi 1, Somayeh, Ekhlās, Hejab 1, and Vahdat Eslami 1—while considering geographical and demographic diversity. Within each selected school, second-grade classes were identified, and students from those classes were randomly selected along with their mothers. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, a sample size of 350 adolescent-mother pairs was estimated to be sufficient, which was increased to 352 pairs to ensure statistical power and account for potential attrition.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (GSE-17)

The GSE-17, developed by Sherer and colleagues in 1982, was used to assess adolescents' general self-efficacy. The original scale consisted of 36 items; however, after conducting factor analysis, 17 items were retained that demonstrated satisfactory factor loadings. These 17 items measure expectations of general efficacy in areas such as social skills, professional competence, initiative, perseverance, and task persistence despite setbacks. Respondents rate their perceived efficacy for each item, and

the average score for these items in prior studies was 57.99 with a standard deviation of 12.08. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this subscale was reported to be 0.86, indicating strong internal consistency. The scale was originally normed on a sample of 376 psychology students, who completed the GSE alongside six personality inventories, highlighting its psychometric robustness for measuring efficacy-related beliefs across varied domains.

2.2.2. *Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)*

The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire, a revised version of the original Hostility Inventory, was employed to measure adolescent aggression. The revised BPAQ, introduced in 1992, consists of 29 self-report items and four subscales: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very unlike me" to "very like me," with two reverse-coded items (items 9 and 16). The total aggression score is computed by summing the scores across all subscales. The physical aggression subscale includes items 2, 5, 8, 11, 13, 16, 22, 25, and 29; verbal aggression includes items 4, 6, 14, 21, and 27; anger includes items 1, 9, 12, 18, 19, 23, and 28; and hostility includes items 3, 7, 10, 15, 17, 20, 24, and 26. The questionnaire demonstrates high reliability, with test-retest coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.89 and Cronbach's alpha values between 0.73 and 0.89. Studies conducted in Iran have further validated its psychometric properties, reporting alpha coefficients of 0.80 overall and 0.72 to 0.78 across subscales, alongside test-retest correlations between 0.79 and 0.84.

2.2.3. *Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ-R)*

To assess marital conflict from the mothers' perspectives, the 54-item Marital Conflict Questionnaire developed by Barati and Sanaei (1999) was utilized. This scale encompasses eight dimensions of conflict: reduced cooperation (5 items), reduced sexual relations (5 items), increased emotional reactions (8 items), increased child support-seeking behavior (5 items), increased personal relationships with relatives (6 items), reduced family relations with spouse's relatives and friends (6 items), separation of financial matters (7 items), and decreased effective communication (12 items). Items are rated on a five-point frequency scale ranging from "never" to "always," with some items reverse-coded. Higher scores indicate greater conflict severity. Score interpretation ranges from 79–129 (normal marital relationship), 130–186 (above-

normal conflict), and 187 and above (severe or highly damaged relationship). The scale has shown excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 for the total scale and between 0.70 and 0.89 for subscales. In the current study, the total scale's alpha was 0.70, and subscale alphas ranged from 0.55 to 0.80.

2.2.4. *Problem-Solving Styles Questionnaire (PSS)*

The Cassidy and Long (1996) Problem-Solving Styles Questionnaire was used to assess maternal problem-solving styles. The scale includes 24 items measuring six distinct problem-solving dimensions: helplessness, control, creativity, confidence, avoidance, and approach. Each dimension consists of four items. The helplessness subscale captures a lack of belief in one's ability to solve problems, whereas control refers to perceived self-regulation in problematic situations. Creativity measures one's ability to devise diverse solutions; confidence refers to one's belief in their problem-solving skills. Avoidance captures tendencies to evade problems, while the approach dimension reflects a positive and direct attitude toward confronting issues. Respondents answer using "yes," "no," or "don't know," with scoring coded as 1, 0, and 0.5 respectively. Cronbach's alpha coefficients from Cassidy and Long's original validation ranged from 0.52 to 0.71. Subsequent studies in Iran reported alpha coefficients above 0.50 for all subscales except the approach style, and total reliability coefficients as high as 0.79. The scale also demonstrates good convergent validity, supported by significant correlations among subscales and other related constructs.

2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis included the computation of frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize the sample characteristics and variable distributions. Prior to conducting inferential analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to confirm the normality of the data distribution, justifying the application of parametric tests. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to examine bivariate relationships among key variables, while multiple regression analysis using the stepwise method was employed to determine the predictive power of marital conflict and maternal problem-solving styles on adolescent self-efficacy and aggression. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was set for all statistical tests. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27.

3. Findings and Results

The descriptive analysis of the variables in this study revealed that the adolescents had a moderate level of general self-efficacy, with a mean score of 53.31 ($SD = 7.226$) on a scale ranging from 31 to 70. Regarding aggression, physical aggression had a mean of 25.86, verbal aggression averaged 14.76, anger was 21.68, and hostility was 24.44. The overall aggression score ranged from 51 to 126, with a mean of 86.73 ($SD = 11.552$), indicating a varied distribution of aggressive behaviors among the adolescents. Marital conflict, as reported by mothers, showed relatively high

levels, with the total marital conflict score averaging 160.62 ($SD = 23.460$), suggesting the presence of considerable tension in many families. The highest subscale mean was observed for reduced effective communication ($M = 35.62$), followed by increased emotional reactions ($M = 23.55$) and separation of financial matters ($M = 20.98$), pointing to multiple domains of conflict. In terms of mothers' problem-solving styles, the highest mean was in confidence ($M = 2.423$), followed by creativity ($M = 2.328$) and approach ($M = 2.280$), while helplessness had the lowest mean ($M = 1.588$), indicating variability in how mothers perceive and manage problem situations (Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Adolescent Self-Efficacy, Aggression, Marital Conflicts, and Mothers' Problem-Solving Styles (n = 352)

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
General Self-Efficacy	31	70	53.31	7.226
Physical Aggression	9	39	25.86	4.878
Verbal Aggression	6	25	14.76	2.848
Anger	12	33	21.68	3.639
Hostility	14	39	24.44	4.024
Total Aggression	51	126	86.73	11.552
Reduced Cooperation	5	24	14.84	3.551
Reduced Sexual Relations	5	22	14.23	3.269
Increased Emotional Reactions	11	34	23.55	4.238
Increased Child Support-Seeking	5	24	15.43	3.659
Increased Personal Relations with Relatives	6	26	17.81	4.402
Separation of Financial Matters	8	29	20.98	3.641
Reduced Effective Communication	16	47	35.62	4.675
Total Marital Conflicts	82	203	160.62	23.460
Helplessness in Problem-Solving	0.0	4.0	1.588	0.7703
Control in Problem-Solving	0.0	4.0	1.933	0.7571
Creativity in Problem-Solving	0.0	4.0	2.328	0.8873
Confidence in Problem-Solving	0.0	4.0	2.423	0.7789
Avoidance in Problem-Solving	0.0	4.0	2.151	0.8261
Approach to Problem-Solving	0.0	4.0	2.280	0.9030

As presented in Table 2, the regression analysis demonstrated that maternal marital conflict significantly and negatively predicted adolescent self-efficacy ($B = -0.205$, $\beta = -0.407$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that the more intense the marital conflict perceived by the mother, the lower the self-efficacy reported by the adolescent. Furthermore, certain maternal problem-solving styles were significantly related to adolescent self-efficacy. Specifically, helplessness and avoidance were negative predictors, suggesting that when mothers experience greater helplessness ($B = -1.304$, $\beta = -0.085$, $p = .022$) and avoidant

tendencies ($B = -8.289$, $\beta = -0.580$, $p < .001$) in problem situations, their children tend to report lower self-efficacy. Conversely, control ($B = 1.775$, $\beta = 0.114$, $p = .004$), creativity ($B = 1.824$, $\beta = 0.137$, $p < .001$), confidence ($B = 1.653$, $\beta = 0.109$, $p = .005$), and approach orientation ($B = 1.801$, $\beta = 0.138$, $p = .001$) in problem-solving all emerged as positive predictors of higher self-efficacy in adolescents. The multicollinearity diagnostics (Tolerance and VIF) confirmed the model's statistical robustness, with all VIF values well below the common threshold of 10, ensuring the reliability of regression coefficients.

Table 2

Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Coefficients for Predicting Self-Efficacy from Maternal Marital Conflict and Problem-Solving Styles

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized)	SE (Standard Error)	Beta (Standardized)	t	p-value	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	121.923	3.987	—	30.581	< .001	—	—
Maternal Marital Conflict	-0.205	0.025	-0.407	-8.342	< .001	1.000	1.000
Helplessness in Problem-Solving	-1.304	0.568	-0.085	-2.295	.022	0.980	1.021
Control in Problem-Solving	1.775	0.605	0.114	2.933	.004	0.895	1.117
Creativity in Problem-Solving	1.824	0.507	0.137	3.601	< .001	0.929	1.076
Confidence in Problem-Solving	1.653	0.590	0.109	2.801	.005	0.889	1.125
Avoidance in Problem-Solving	-8.289	0.552	-0.580	-15.022	< .001	0.904	1.106
Approach to Problem-Solving	1.801	0.520	0.138	3.463	.001	0.852	1.174

As illustrated in Table 3, maternal marital conflict was found to be a strong and positive predictor of adolescent aggression ($B = 0.202$, $\beta = 0.409$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of conflict between parents are associated with increased aggressive behaviors in their adolescent children. Among the maternal problem-solving styles, several variables significantly contributed to the prediction of aggression. Helplessness in problem-solving negatively predicted aggression ($B = -1.473$, $\beta = -0.098$, $p = .010$), meaning that adolescents exhibited less aggression when their mothers reported higher helplessness—though this relationship was weak and inverse, possibly due to indirect coping or emotional disengagement mechanisms.

Notably, control ($B = -2.031$, $\beta = -0.133$, $p = .001$), creativity ($B = -1.406$, $\beta = -0.108$, $p = .006$), and confidence ($B = -1.577$, $\beta = -0.106$, $p = .008$) in problem-solving were

all significant negative predictors of adolescent aggression, suggesting that when mothers possess constructive problem-solving capabilities, their children demonstrate reduced levels of aggression. Conversely, avoidance was the most powerful positive predictor ($B = 8.421$, $\beta = 0.602$, $p < .001$), indicating that mothers who tend to avoid confronting problems are significantly more likely to have children exhibiting aggressive tendencies. Lastly, approach orientation in problem-solving also showed a significant negative association with adolescent aggression ($B = -1.811$, $\beta = -0.103$, $p = .018$), reinforcing the notion that proactive coping strategies in mothers are protective factors against youth aggression. Multicollinearity diagnostics again confirmed the model's reliability, as all Tolerance values remained above 0.85 and VIF values were comfortably below the threshold of concern.

Table 3

Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Coefficients for Predicting Aggression from Maternal Marital Conflict and Problem-Solving Styles

Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized)	SE (Standard Error)	Beta (Standardized)	t	p-value	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	54.363	3.898	—	13.946	< .001	—	—
Maternal Marital Conflict	0.202	0.024	0.409	8.392	< .001	1.000	1.000
Helplessness in Problem-Solving	-1.473	0.567	-0.098	-2.599	.010	0.980	1.021
Control in Problem-Solving	-2.031	0.603	-0.133	-3.369	.001	0.895	1.117
Creativity in Problem-Solving	-1.406	0.505	-0.108	-2.785	.006	0.929	1.076
Confidence in Problem-Solving	-1.577	0.588	-0.106	-2.681	.008	0.889	1.125
Avoidance in Problem-Solving	8.421	0.550	0.602	15.313	< .001	0.904	1.106
Approach to Problem-Solving	-1.811	0.518	-0.103	-1.565	.018	0.852	1.174

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the predictive role of maternal marital conflict and mothers' problem-solving

styles in adolescent self-efficacy and aggression. The findings revealed two major patterns. First, maternal marital conflict was found to significantly and negatively predict adolescent self-efficacy while positively predicting adolescent aggression. Second, specific maternal problem-

solving styles, particularly avoidance and helplessness, were associated with reduced self-efficacy and increased aggression, while positive styles such as control, creativity, confidence, and approach orientation were linked to better self-efficacy and lower aggression in adolescents.

The negative impact of maternal marital conflict on adolescent self-efficacy is consistent with existing literature indicating that exposure to ongoing interparental conflict undermines adolescents' beliefs in their personal competence and ability to manage life challenges. Conflict between parents often generates an unpredictable and emotionally insecure home environment, reducing adolescents' access to supportive interactions and consistent emotional modeling (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang, 2025). As adolescents internalize family instability, they may begin to doubt their own capacities, a finding supported by studies showing that marital conflict adversely affects adolescents' self-appraisal and goal-directed behavior (Song, 2025; Tang, 2024). This also aligns with findings that interparental discord disrupts emotional regulation in youth, ultimately lowering their perceived self-efficacy (Lan et al., 2022a; Parsa et al., 2015).

In a complementary manner, the study demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between maternal marital conflict and adolescent aggression. This is consistent with social learning and cognitive-contextual models, which propose that children exposed to frequent marital hostility are more likely to model those behaviors and exhibit aggression themselves (Adams & Golsch, 2022; Eini et al., 2020). According to these perspectives, adolescents do not merely witness conflict but actively encode and replicate maladaptive interaction patterns. Research shows that when conflict is poorly managed or chronic, adolescents interpret aggression as a normative response to stress, reinforcing hostile schemas and reactive behaviors (Chang et al., 2020; Healy et al., 2020). Furthermore, chronic conflict may impair parental monitoring and emotional availability, which are protective factors against adolescent aggression (Wang et al., 2023).

This study further examined the influence of maternal problem-solving styles and found that avoidance and helplessness were strong negative predictors of adolescent self-efficacy and strong positive predictors of aggression. Avoidance, in particular, had the most powerful association with both outcomes. These results resonate with previous findings that avoidance-based parenting leads to emotional disengagement, lack of behavioral guidance, and reduced communication between mothers and children, thereby

fostering insecurity and hostility in adolescents (Ju et al., 2024; Öztornacı et al., 2024). When mothers habitually avoid problems or express helplessness, adolescents may perceive their environment as unstable or unsupported, leading them to adopt externalizing behaviors or internalize incompetence.

Conversely, maternal problem-solving traits such as control, creativity, confidence, and approach orientation were positively associated with adolescent self-efficacy and negatively associated with aggression. These findings suggest that when mothers demonstrate structured, goal-directed, and resilient problem-solving abilities, adolescents benefit from positive modeling, which reinforces their own capacities for emotional and behavioral regulation. These maternal behaviors may act as buffers against stress, teaching adolescents effective strategies for navigating conflict and adversity. Prior studies confirm that adolescents with supportive, emotionally competent mothers are more likely to display higher levels of self-efficacy and reduced externalizing symptoms (Kim & Park, 2025; Qonitatin et al., 2022; Yap & Baharudin, 2015). Similarly, adolescents who perceive their mothers as competent problem-solvers are more inclined to seek guidance, manage interpersonal difficulties, and regulate impulses, resulting in lower aggression (Avdeeva & Hoffman, 2019; Wachs et al., 2020).

It is also notable that maternal confidence and creativity in problem-solving emerged as significant contributors to adolescent outcomes. These two traits suggest a proactive and mentally flexible approach to parenting that likely translates into more adaptive family communication and adolescent coping strategies. Consistent with these results, previous research demonstrates that maternal flexibility and efficacy correlate positively with adolescent adaptability and negatively with behavioral issues (Abadi et al., 2024; Tuohy et al., 2025). When adolescents are exposed to a parent who believes in their own capacity to overcome challenges, they are more likely to internalize similar beliefs and feel empowered in their own problem-solving efforts (Lan et al., 2022b; Wu & Yaacob, 2016).

Interestingly, although helplessness was a weaker predictor than avoidance, its negative associations with both outcomes were statistically significant. This reinforces the view that even subtle expressions of maternal hopelessness or indecision can undermine adolescent development. In families where problem-solving is characterized by indecision or emotional withdrawal, adolescents may lack opportunities to learn resilience and confidence. These findings are consistent with those of studies examining the

role of perceived parental competence and emotional regulation in adolescent adjustment, where lower parental self-efficacy was associated with greater child dysfunction (Adams & Golsch, 2022; Liu et al., 2019).

Furthermore, these results underscore the dual impact of family functioning: direct emotional modeling and indirect environmental structuring. Mothers with high problem-solving efficacy not only serve as models of constructive behavior but also create a family atmosphere where adolescents feel safe, supported, and empowered to take initiative. In contrast, those with avoidant or helpless patterns may indirectly foster chaotic or emotionally distant environments that facilitate aggression and suppress self-confidence (Choi et al., 2020; McCauley et al., 2018). Such findings are especially relevant in sociocultural contexts where maternal roles in emotional caregiving are pronounced and deeply embedded in family life.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study extends previous literature by integrating conflict theory, self-efficacy theory, and cognitive-behavioral perspectives into a cohesive model. It supports Bandura's assertion that social modeling within the family unit significantly contributes to the development of self-efficacy beliefs (Wachs et al., 2020; Yap & Baharudin, 2015). Furthermore, it affirms that self-regulation and externalizing behaviors like aggression are not merely outcomes of personality or biology but are deeply shaped by social and relational experiences within the family system (Tian et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2024).

Another important contribution of the study lies in the methodological approach, which jointly considered the impact of marital conflict and distinct maternal cognitive-behavioral traits on adolescent behavior. While previous studies have often examined these variables in isolation, this study demonstrates how maternal behaviors and family dynamics interact in predicting both internal and external behavioral outcomes. This dual focus provides a more comprehensive understanding of the risk and protective factors influencing adolescent development (Liu et al., 2019; Zhang, 2025).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite the significant insights yielded by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, as the directionality of associations between variables cannot be definitively determined. Longitudinal data would be better suited for evaluating the temporal relationships among

maternal behaviors, conflict, and adolescent outcomes. Second, data were collected solely through self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccuracies in recall. Third, the sample was drawn from public high schools in a single urban district, limiting the generalizability of the findings to different educational, socioeconomic, or cultural contexts. Additionally, the exclusive focus on mother-child dyads does not account for the potentially significant role of fathers or other caregivers in adolescent development.

Future research should consider longitudinal studies to establish causal relationships and explore changes in adolescent behavior and self-efficacy over time in response to evolving family dynamics. Expanding the study to include diverse populations across different regions, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural contexts would provide more generalizable findings. Moreover, future investigations could incorporate observational data or multi-informant reports (e.g., teachers, fathers, or peers) to increase the reliability and ecological validity of findings. It would also be beneficial to explore potential mediators such as emotional regulation, attachment security, or peer relationships in the pathways from maternal behavior and marital conflict to adolescent aggression and self-efficacy.

The findings underscore the importance of supporting mothers in developing constructive problem-solving skills as a strategy to enhance adolescent well-being. Parenting interventions and psychoeducational programs could focus on reducing avoidance and helplessness while promoting confidence, creativity, and emotional regulation. Family counseling or therapy addressing marital conflict could also serve as a preventive tool to reduce its negative impact on adolescent behavior. Schools and community centers should implement programs that foster family resilience and equip adolescents with self-regulatory skills, thereby reinforcing both individual and familial protective factors against aggression and low self-efficacy.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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