

## INVESTIGATING THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT IN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, SELF-ESTEEM, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*In the high-pressure world of university life, romantic relationship conflicts can quietly erode students' mental well-being, self-esteem, and academic success. This study investigated the relationship between study variables as well as examined the predictive role of romantic relationship conflict in psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance among university students. A convenience sample of 200 students participated in a cross-sectional, quantitative research design utilizing standardized measures: the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (PWS), and the Academic Performance Scale (APS). Correlational analysis revealed that romantic relationship conflict was significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance. Additionally, self-esteem was positively associated with both psychological well-being and academic performance, while psychological well-being also showed a modest positive correlation with academic outcomes. Regression analyses confirmed that romantic conflict significantly predicted reductions in psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance. These findings highlight the detrimental impact of relationship conflict on students' mental health and academic functioning, emphasizing the need for supportive interventions that promote healthy interpersonal dynamics during emerging adulthood.*

**Keywords:** Romantic Relationships, Conflict, Self-Esteem, Psychological Well-being, Academic Performance, Partner, Students

### Introduction

The complex interplay between romantic relationships, self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance has garnered growing academic interest due to its significant influence on the lives of university students and graduates. These interconnected factors not only impact an individual's emotional and psychological health but also shape their academic success and future career trajectories (Baumeister et al., 2003; Orth & Robins, 2014). Romantic relationships play a crucial role in fostering emotional well-being, personal development, and life satisfaction (Twenge & King, 2005). However, depending on relationship dynamics, they may also act as sources of stress and interpersonal conflict. Fincham (2001) emphasizes that romantic relationships often alternate between periods of intense emotional distress and fleeting moments of joy—experiences that are rare in other forms of stress. These emotional fluctuations are frequently shaped by daily interactions and individuals' interpretations of their partner's intentions and behaviors.

According to Oxford Languages (n.d.), a relationship is defined as a connection between two or more individuals, often based on emotional bonds, shared experiences, or legal ties. Healthy romantic relationships are typically characterized by empathy, mutual understanding, and effective communication, forming a foundation for trust and resilience. Conversely, poor conflict resolution and unresolved disagreements are closely linked to dissatisfaction in romantic partnerships (Cramer, 1998). When communication breaks down and one or both partners feel invalidated or unheard, relational bonds are strained, and conflict intensifies. Twenge and King (2005) further argue that meaningful and satisfying

relationships are critical for psychological well-being. Partners who feel fulfilled in their relationship report higher levels of life satisfaction, while unresolved conflict can result in emotional strain. In term of homosexual relationships, factors such as perceived social support and acceptance from peers are particularly influential in shaping relationship satisfaction (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003).

Attachment theory offers a useful framework for understanding communication patterns within relationships. According to Evolve Therapy (2023), individuals with secure attachment styles are more likely to experience trust, emotional safety, and effective communication. In contrast, those with insecure attachment often struggle with emotional expression and conflict management, which can undermine relationship quality (Drescher, n.d.). Effective communication, built on respect and emotional attunement, is essential for mitigating conflict and fostering relational strength. Conflict within romantic relationships commonly stems from divergent beliefs, values, and interests. Coser (1956) defined conflict as a confrontation between opposing viewpoints, while Austin (1972) described it as a disagreement rooted in the desire for validation. Hocker and Wilmot (1985) expanded this view, explaining that conflict arises when individuals seek to affirm the superiority of their perspectives, often resulting in interpersonal tension.

This study acknowledges the dual nature of romantic relationships. On one hand, healthy romantic bonds can enhance self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance by promoting resilience and emotional support. On the other hand, unresolved relational conflict can contribute to psychological distress and academic decline. These outcomes underscore the necessity for support mechanisms that empower young adults to manage relational challenges while safeguarding their mental and academic health.

University students often experience significant emotional and academic challenges, particularly when involved in romantic relationships. While such relationships can provide emotional support, unresolved conflicts may negatively affect students' psychological functioning and academic success. Existing literature highlights that romantic relationship conflict can contribute to lower self-esteem, increased psychological distress, and reduced academic performance (Baumeister et al., 2003; Crede & Niehorster, 2012). However, limited research has comprehensively examined the interrelations among these variables within the context of emerging adulthood in university settings. This study addresses this gap by exploring how romantic conflict, self-esteem, and psychological well-being collectively influence academic performance.

The objective of the study was to investigate the association between study variables and predictive role of romantic relationship conflict, self-esteem, and psychological well-being in determining academic performance among university students.

### Research Questions

- What is the link between romantic relationship conflict and the academic performance, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance of students?
- To what extent do romantic conflicts influence self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance?

### Hypotheses

1. Romantic relationship conflict will significantly negatively predict the academic performance, self-esteem, and psychological well-being of students.
2. There will be a positive relationship between Psychological Wellbeing, Self-Esteem, and Academic Performance in University Students
3. Romantic conflict will significantly predict self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance among students.

## Literature Review

A study at Oregon State University by Siegert and Stamp (1994) used open-ended interviews and grounded theory to examine factors influencing adolescents' conflict over Facebook use. They identified four key causes: uncertainty over commitment, jealousy, personality differences, and thematic conflict, and distinguished between "survivors" and "non-survivors" based on how individuals handled these issues. Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002) found that the way couples handle conflict, more than the conflict topic itself, affects relationship quality. Negative interactions and emotional withdrawal predicted greater dissatisfaction, with men more affected by negativity and women by a lack of positive connection. Simon and Furman (2010) linked adolescents' romantic conflict behavior to their perceptions of inter-parental conflict, finding that self-blame and perceived threats in the family setting influenced partner interactions.

Feeney and Karantzas (2017) reviewed romantic conflict through the lens of attachment theory, emphasizing that insecure attachment styles often result in conflict behaviors and relationship dissatisfaction, although more research is needed to examine contextual moderators like emotional bonding. Domingue and Mollen (2009) showed that couples with secure attachment styles displayed more constructive communication, whereas those with insecure attachments exhibited avoidant or demand-withdraw behaviors. McIsaac et al. (2008) found gender differences in conflict behavior, with girls' autonomy tied to their own conflict styles and boys' autonomy shaped by both their own and their partner's behavior. Zuroff and Duncan (1999) noted that self-criticism was associated with negative relational schemas and hostility, particularly among women, leading to increased partner distress. Keener and Strough (2012) explored gender roles in conflict management, showing women favored relational strategies while men tended toward agentic ones, especially in romantic relationships. Collins, Welsh, and Furman (2009) mapped the development of romantic relationships from adolescence to adulthood, stressing the influence of parents and peers on early romantic attachment and functioning.

Aloia and Solomon (2015) observed that individuals exposed to verbal aggression in childhood displayed heightened physiological stress responses (cortisol reactivity) during romantic conflicts. Knee et al. (2005) demonstrated that personal and partner autonomy predicted more constructive conflict resolution and greater post-conflict satisfaction, emphasizing self-determination theory in relationship contexts. Cramer (2000) found that conflict style had a stronger impact on relationship satisfaction than conflict frequency. Negative conflict behaviors were significantly linked to dissatisfaction. Domingue and Mollen (2009) reaffirmed the relevance of attachment style to conflict communication, using ANOVA and ANCOVA on data from heterosexual and same-sex couples. Meyer and Sledge (2022) identified key conflict topics in U.S. couples' communication, parenting, and finances, as major contributors to relationship dissatisfaction, while time management was linked to positive outcomes. Reese-Weber, Kahn, and Nemecek (2015) validated the Topics of Conflict Scale (TCS) and identified money, trust, and sex as central themes of romantic conflict among emerging adults.

Arikewuyo et al. (2022) explored how jealousy, monitoring, and infidelity moderate the link between social media use and romantic conflict, though social media use itself did not predict infidelity. Feldman and Gowen (1998) analyzed conflict tactics in teens, finding girls used more overt anger and social support, while boys leaned toward avoidance. Older teens exhibited more maturity in conflict resolution. Darling et al. (2008) linked adolescents' conflict styles in romantic relationships to patterns observed in family settings, especially when aggressive or ineffective problem-solving was modeled at home.

Hojjat (2000) studied gender perceptions of conflict behavior and found women viewed themselves as more active and negative, yet demonstrated better understanding of their partner's strategies. Mutual understanding correlated with relationship satisfaction. González-Rivera and Hernández-Gato (2019) validated a scale assessing Facebook-related romantic conflict, confirming jealousy, intrusion, and communication issues as key dimensions. Murray et al. (2006) showed that individuals in emotionally supportive relationships experience enhanced self-worth and resilience, while Papps and O'Carroll (1998) found that dysfunctional relationships erode self-esteem. Whisman et al. (2000) demonstrated that relationship satisfaction is linked to improved psychological well-being, while Davila et al. (2003) reported that conflict and breakup experiences predicted depressive symptoms. Zhang and Lu (2012) found that supportive romantic partners contributed positively to academic outcomes, whereas Felmlee (2001) argued that emotional distractions from intense romantic involvement could undermine academic performance.

### Methodology

#### Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to examine the relationships between romantic relationship conflict, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance among university students. The goal was to identify how interpersonal dynamics within romantic contexts influence students' emotional health, self-esteem, and academic outcomes.

#### Research Design

A quantitative research design was employed to examine the associations among romantic relationship conflict, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance. Additionally, regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive influence of romantic relationship conflict on psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance. A convenience sampling technique was used for data collection.

#### Participants

The sample comprised 200 university students (aged 18–27 years) enrolled in various undergraduate programs from different institutes. The demographic profile included students from diverse socioeconomic and academic backgrounds, providing a balanced representation for generalizability within the university context. Written approval was taken from the institute, BORS, and other institutes where the data was collected. Ethical considerations were maintained during the entire process.

#### Measures

**Demographic Questionnaire:** A self-constructed demographic questionnaire was administered to gather basic participant information, including age, gender, academic year, family structure, and socioeconomic status. The instrument also included questions on relationship status, conflict frequency, and perceived effects of romantic conflict on emotional well-being and academic engagement. Verbal informed consent was obtained before participation.

**Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS):** Romantic conflict was assessed using the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) developed by Zacchilli et al. (2009). The RPCS is a 39-item self-report inventory designed to measure the frequency and management of conflict within romantic relationships. The RPCS has demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and construct validity for use in relational research. It includes five subscales, such as Compromise (14 items), Avoidance (3 items), Interactional Reactivity (6 items), Separation (5 items), Dominance (6 items), and Submission (5 items).



**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965, 1979), a widely validated instrument consisting of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale. It measures global self-worth by assessing positive and negative self-perceptions. The scale has shown excellent reliability, with a Guttman reproducibility coefficient of .92 and test-retest correlations ranging from .85 to .88, confirming both internal consistency and temporal stability.

**Academic Performance Scale:** Academic outcomes were assessed using the Academic Performance Scale developed by Birchmeier, Grattan, Hornbacher, and McGregory (n.d.). This 8-item instrument measures academic behaviors, including GPA, engagement in academic activities, and study habits, using a 5-point Likert format. The scale exhibits strong psychometric properties, with an internal consistency coefficient of  $\alpha = .89$  and a test-retest reliability of .85.

**Psychological Well-Being Scale:** Psychological well-being was evaluated using the 18-item version of the Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Ryff (1989; revised 2010). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The scale has demonstrated high internal consistency and robust construct validity in diverse populations. This multidimensional tool assesses six key areas of well-being: such as Self-acceptance (3 items), Positive relations with others (3 items), Autonomy (3 items), Environmental mastery (3 items), Purpose in life (3 items), and Personal growth (3 items).

#### Statistical Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to evaluate bivariate relationships among romantic conflict, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive influence of romantic conflict and self-esteem on academic performance.

#### Results

This study aimed to explore the relationships between conflicts in romantic relationships, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance among university students. The findings are presented below, starting with the demographic variables, followed by descriptive statistics and relationships between the study variables.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of the Demographic Variables (N=200)

Demographic Variables		M	N	S.D	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male		96		48.0%
	Female		104		52.0%
<b>Family system</b>	Joint		142		71.0%
	Nuclear		58		29.05
<b>Year of study</b>	First year		60		30.0%
	Second year		60		30.0%
	Third year		37		18.5%
	Forth year		43		21.5%
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>	Lower class		1		0.5%
	Middle class		173		86.5%
	Upper class		26		13.0%
<b>Birth order</b>	First born		44		22.0%
	Middle born		88		44.0%
	Last born		68		34.0%

<b>Father occupation</b>	Business man		81		40.0%
	Government job		46		23.0%
	Private job		10		5.0%
	others		63		31.5%
<b>Age</b>		21.03		2.01	
<b>Birth order</b>		2.12		0.74	

**Note:** N=No of participant, %=Percentile, M=Mean, S.D=Standard Deviation

The sample consisted of 200 university students, with a slightly higher proportion of females (52%) than males (48%). Most participants came from joint family systems (71%) and identified as middle class (86.5%). Students were fairly evenly distributed across academic years, with the highest representation in first and second year (30% each). In terms of birth order, 44% were middle-born, followed by 34% last-born and 22% first-born. The average age was 21.03 years (SD = 2.01). Regarding fathers' occupations, 40% were businessmen, 23% held government jobs, and 31.5% fell into the "other" category. These demographics reflect a diverse and balanced student population suitable for examining psychological and academic variables.

Descriptive statistics indicate moderate variability across all variables, with RPCS showing the highest mean and standard deviation, suggesting substantial differences in students' experiences of romantic conflict.

**Table 2:** Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) of Study Measures

Scale / Subscale	No. of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<b>Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS)</b>	39	.70
– Compromise	14	.70
– Avoidance	3	.71
– Interactional Reactivity	6	.74
– Separation	5	.78
– Dominance	6	.83
– Submission	5	
<b>Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)</b>	10	.92 (Guttman); .85–.88 (Test-retest)
<b>Academic Performance Scale</b>	8	.89
<b>Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWS)</b>	18	.89
– Self-Acceptance	3	.81
– Positive Relations with Others	3	.74
– Autonomy	3	.81
– Environmental Mastery	3	.87
– Purpose in Life	3	.74
– Personal Growth	3	.77

**Note:**  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency.

Internal consistency analyses revealed that all study instruments demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability. The overall Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha$  = .70), with subscale alphas ranging from .70 (Compromise) to .83 (Dominance), indicating reliable measurement across conflict strategies. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) exhibited excellent reliability, with a Guttman

coefficient of .92 and test-retest values between .85 and .88. The Academic Performance Scale also demonstrated strong internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Similarly, the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWS) showed high reliability overall ( $\alpha = .89$ ), with subscale alphas ranging from .74 to .87, supporting the robustness of the multidimensional construct. These findings confirm the reliability of the tools used to assess romantic conflict, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance among university students.

**Table 3:** *Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N=200)*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. RPCS	----	----	----	----
2. RSES	-3.27**	----	----	----
3. PWS	-2.93**	4.32**	----	----
4. APS	-3.89**	3.68**	.34**	----
S.M	111.61	27.89	22.61	54.70
S.D	31.21	8.29	7.98	17.41

**Note:** RPCS=Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, APS=Academic Performance Scale, RSES=Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, PWS=Psychological Well-being Scale,  $P < 0.01$  (2-Tailed).

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the four main variables: romantic partner conflict (RPCS), self-esteem (RSES), psychological well-being (PWS), and academic performance (APS). Significant negative correlations were found between RPCS and RSES, RPCS and PWS, and RPCS and APS, suggesting that higher levels of conflict in romantic relationships are associated with lower self-esteem, poorer psychological well-being, and lower academic performance.

RSES was positively correlated with both PWS and APS, indicating that students with higher self-esteem tend to have better psychological well-being and perform better academically. Similarly, PWS was positively associated with APS, though this effect was smaller in magnitude.

**Table 4:** *Multiple Regression Predicting Romantic Conflict in Psychological Well-Being, Self-Esteem, and Academic Performance (N=200)*

Outcome Variable	$\beta$ (Beta)	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p-value
Psychological Well-Being	-0.46	0.21	52.37	< .001
Self-Esteem	-0.39	0.15	34.82	< .001
Academic Performance	-0.31	0.10	21.45	< .001

**Note:** RPCS was the sole predictor in each regression model. All  $\beta$  values are standardized coefficients.

To investigate the predictive role of romantic relationship conflict, separate linear regression analyses were conducted for each outcome variable. The results revealed that romantic conflict significantly negatively predicted psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance. The models explained 21% of the variance in psychological well-being, 15% in self-esteem, and 10% in academic performance, respectively. These findings suggest that higher levels of romantic conflict are associated with lower levels of well-being, self-worth, and academic achievement among university students.

### Discussion of Findings

The present study investigated the relationship between study variables as well as examined the predictive role of romantic relationship conflict in psychological well-being, self-esteem, and academic performance among university students. Consistent with the study's hypotheses, both correlational and regression analyses revealed significant negative associations between romantic conflict and all three outcome variables.

The correlation matrix indicated that romantic partner conflict was significantly negatively correlated with self-esteem ( $r = -3.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ), psychological well-being ( $r = -2.93$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and academic performance ( $r = -3.89$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These findings suggest that students who experience more frequent or intense conflict in romantic relationships tend to report lower levels of self-worth, poorer psychological health, and diminished academic outcomes. Additionally, self-esteem was positively correlated with both psychological well-being ( $r = 4.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and academic performance ( $r = 3.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ), reinforcing the idea that internal self-evaluations play a protective role in students' mental and academic functioning. Psychological well-being was also positively correlated with academic performance ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ), albeit with a smaller effect size, indicating a modest but meaningful connection.

Regression analyses further confirmed that romantic relationship conflict significantly predicted decreases in psychological well-being ( $\beta = -0.46$ ,  $R^2 = .21$ ), self-esteem ( $\beta = -0.39$ ,  $R^2 = .15$ ), and academic performance ( $\beta = -0.31$ ,  $R^2 = .10$ ), all at the  $p < .001$  level. These findings demonstrate that romantic conflict not only relates to these outcomes but also accounts for a meaningful proportion of variance in each domain. Specifically, the strongest prediction was observed for psychological well-being, followed by self-esteem and academic performance. These results highlight the pervasive and multifaceted impact of romantic stressors on university students' lives.

The findings are in line with prior research suggesting that conflictual romantic interactions can undermine emotional regulation, trigger anxiety and depressive symptoms, and impair self-concept clarity (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Murray et al., 2002). The negative influence of relational distress on academic outcomes has also been documented, as students preoccupied with emotional turmoil may struggle to concentrate, meet deadlines, or perform cognitively (Creasey et al., 2009). Thus, the present study reinforces the critical need for psychosocial support and relationship education programs within university settings.

Collectively, these results emphasize the psychological and academic risks associated with romantic relationship conflict during emerging adulthood. Promoting healthy communication and conflict resolution skills in romantic relationships may serve as a protective factor for students' overall well-being and educational success.

**Theoretical Implications:** These findings lend support to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), which posits that relational security fosters emotional stability and cognitive functioning. Conflict in romantic relationships may activate attachment insecurities, leading to psychological distress and reduced academic focus. Additionally, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) highlights the role of self-esteem and psychological well-being as essential for optimal functioning and motivation—both of which are closely tied to academic performance in the current study.

**Practical Implications:** The results have several practical implications for mental health professionals and academic institutions. University counseling centers should provide resources to help students navigate romantic relationship challenges, as these issues significantly impact emotional and academic functioning. Furthermore, programs designed to



enhance self-esteem and emotional resilience may help buffer students against the negative effects of interpersonal stress.

**Limitations and Future Research:** While the study provides meaningful insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The use of a cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causality. It is unclear whether romantic conflict causes lower self-esteem and academic performance, or whether individuals with these vulnerabilities are more likely to experience relational problems. Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to better determine the directionality of these relationships.

Additionally, the sample was limited to male participants, reducing the generalizability of the findings. Subsequent research should include female and non-binary populations to assess gender differences in these associations. Exploring mediating variables such as coping styles, attachment patterns, and emotional intelligence could also deepen understanding of these relationships.

**Conclusion:** This study highlights the profound impact of romantic partner conflict on self-esteem, psychological well-being, and academic performance among male students. The results affirm the critical role of self-esteem and emotional well-being in fostering academic success. These findings underscore the importance of addressing relational and psychological factors in educational and counseling interventions aimed at improving student outcomes.

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