

# THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN YOUNG SPOUSES' INTERACTION IN CONFLICT AND THEIR PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD FAMILY LIFE

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the connection between young spouses' conflictual interactions and their parents' attitudes toward family life, with a focus on the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission.

The research aimed to uncover how parental behaviour models influence the conflict dynamics within young couples' marital relationships. The study employed the methodologies of the Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) by E. Schaefer and R. Bell, as well as the Nature of Spousal Interaction in Conflictual Situations (NSICS) instrument. A total of 180 participants, including both conflictual and harmonious couples and their parents, were involved in the study.

The findings revealed that conflictual couples often inherit conflict patterns from their parents, particularly in areas such as child-rearing, role expectations, and behavioural norms. In contrast, harmonious couples tend to reflect their parents' cooperative behaviour. The main conclusion is that marital disagreements are frequently rooted in intergenerational transmission, highlighting the need for a systemic approach to address these issues.

The study emphasises the value of family counselling in helping couples identify inherited patterns, reevaluate roles, and build emotionally stable relationships. It is recommended that future research should examine the influence of cultural and social changes on family dynamics.

**Keywords:** Young spouses, family conflicts, intergenerational transmission, parental behaviour, role expectations, rearing.

# ԿՈՆՖԼԻԿՏՆԵՐԻ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿ ԵՐԻՏԱՍԱՐԴ ԱՄՈՒՍԻՆՆԵՐԻ ՓՈԽԱԶԴԵՑՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԵՎ ԸՆՏԱՆԵԿԱՆ ԿՅԱՆՔԻ ՆԿԱՏՄԱՄԲ ՆՐԱՆՑ ԾՆՈՂՆԵՐԻ ԴԻՐՔՈՐՈՇՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ՓՈԽԴԱՐՁ ԿԱՊԸ

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## Համառոտագիր

Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում է երիտասարդ ամուսինների կոնֆլիկտային փոխազդեցության և նրանց ծնողների ընտանեկան կյանքի նկատմամբ դիրքորոշումների փոխկապակցվածությունը՝ կենտրոնանալով սերնդային փոխանցման հոգեբանական մեխանիզմների վրա:

Հետազոտության նպատակն է՝ բացահայտել, թե ինչպես են ծնողական վարքի մոդելներն ազդում երիտասարդ զույգերի ամուսնական հարաբերություններում կոնֆլիկտայնության վրա: Որպես մեթոդական գործիքներ՝ օգտագործվել են Ե. Շեֆերի և Ռ. Բելլի ծնողական դիրքորոշումների ուսումնասիրության (PARI) և կոնֆլիկտային իրավիճակներում ամուսինների փոխազդեցության բնույթի (ԿԻԱՓԲ) ուսումնասիրության մեթոդիկաները 180 հետազոտվողների շրջանում: Ընդգրկվել են կոնֆլիկտային և ոչ կոնֆլիկտային զույգեր ու նրանց ծնողներ: Արդյունքները ցույց են տվել, որ կոնֆլիկտային զույգերը ժառանգում են ծնողների կոնֆլիկտային օրինաչափությունները, հատկապես՝ երեխայի դաստիարակության, դերային սպասումների և վարքի նորմերի ոլորտներում: Մինչդեռ ներդաշնակ զույգերն արտացոլում են ծնողական փոխհամաձայնեցված վարք:

Հիմնական եզրահանգման համաձայն՝ ամուսնական տարաձայնությունները հաճախ արմատավորված են սերնդային փոխանցման կապերի մեջ և պահանջում են համակարգային մոտեցում: Հետազոտությունն ընդգծում է ընտանեկան խորհրդատվության դերը՝ օգնելու զույգերին ճանաչել ժառանգված վարքի մոդելները, վերաիմաստավորել դերերը և ձևավորել հուզական կայուն հարաբերություններ: Առաջարկ-

վում է հետագա ուսումնասիրություններում ուշադրություն դարձնել մշակութային և սոցիալական փոփոխությունների ազդեցությանը ընտանեկան փոխհարաբերությունների դինամիկայի վրա:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** երիտասարդ ամուսիններ, ընտանեկան կոնֆլիկտներ, սերնդային փոխանցում, ծնողական վարք, դերային սպասումներ, դաստիարակություն:

## Introduction

The study of marital conflicts remains a relevant issue in the psychology of the modern family. Particularly among young couples, conflictual relationships and the factors contributing to their formation require in-depth analysis. The family, as a social system, faces significant challenges, reflecting the impact of societal changes. Modern young families, in a transitional phase, often face a clash between traditional and contemporary values, resulting in role discrepancies.

In our society, the family is considered the main bearer of national and cultural values. From this perspective, young couples, while trying to consider the traditional models of their parental families, simultaneously strive to adopt modern approaches such as gender equality and individual self-expression. This process is often accompanied by internal and external tensions, which aggravate marital conflicts.

## Theoretical and Methodological Bases

From the perspective of family systems theory, the influence of parental behaviour models and their transmission across generations plays a decisive role in the formation of marital relationships (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

According to attachment theory, inconsistencies in the parent-child bond shape “internal working models,” which affect trust and perceptions of conflict in marital relationships (Bowlby, 1969).

Social learning theory emphasises that young individuals model their parents’ conflictual behaviours, reproducing communication styles and conflict resolution strategies (Bandura, 1977).

According to the emotional security theory, the impact of parental conflicts is linked to children’s emotional regulation, which later manifests in their relationships through passive-aggressive reactions (Davies & Cummings, 1994).

John Gottman’s model of relationship dynamics reveals that the “Four Horsemen” of marital conflict (criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling) often reflect the pathological patterns of parental interactions (Gottman, 1999).

According to the theory of generational differentiation, unresolved emotional ties with parents hinder young individuals’ autonomy, increasing the frequency of conflicts (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003).

Family structural theory focuses on the clarity of boundaries and roles, asserting that dysfunction in the parental system leads to “multigenerational enmeshment” (Minuchin, 1974).

Social exchange theory links conflict management to the evaluation of “profitability” inherited from parental models (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Symbolic interactionism explains how parental conflict scenarios become “significant symbols” for young spouses, influencing forms of mutual understanding (Blumer, 1969).

According to feminist family theory, inherited gender stereotypes exacerbate conflicts due to role disagreements (Hochschild, 1989).

The eco-systems approach highlights the role of macro-cultural factors in the interaction between parental attitudes and conflict dynamics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In systemic family therapy approaches, Varga and Drabkina (2001) emphasize the reproduction of parental attitudes in families formed by the younger generation.

Among Armenian psychologists, S. Sedrakyan (2019) examines family relationships from the perspective of role distribution and implementation, providing deeper insights into the dynamics of interaction within families and the mechanisms of family system formation.

Recent studies offer new perspectives on exploring generational transmission mechanisms. Chiang et al (2020) demonstrate that the quality of parental relationships significantly determines the level of conflict in their children’s future marital relationships. Donato and Crosno (2022) reveal that young spouses’ communication patterns, particularly in conflict resolution, often reflect the interactions observed between their parents,

Research by Karimi and colleagues (2021) on intergenerational trauma and its impact indicates that unresolved family conflicts can be transmitted across generations, affecting relationships. Zhang et al. (2024) meta-analysis confirms that parental conflict management styles significantly predict young spouses’ conflictual behavior, regardless of cultural and social factors.

The literature review highlights a research gap in understanding the mechanisms connecting young spouses’ conflictual interactions with their parents’ attitudes. Therefore, the innovative approach of this study lies in attempting to uncover not only the connections in marital interactions but also their specific manifestations.

### **Methodology and Methods**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the correlation between the conflictual interactions of young spouses and their parents’ attitudes toward family life.

The hypothesis of the study is that the nature of young spouses' conflictual interactions is significantly correlated with their parents' attitudes toward family life and roles.

The methodological foundation of the study is based on a systemic approach to family relationships, viewing conflicts not only as outcomes of interactions but also as broader manifestations of the family system, including intergenerational influences.

The research was conducted during 2022–2024 and involved four groups of participants:

1. 30 young couples (20–30 years old, married for 3–5 years) in conflictual relationships, all of whom had children.
2. The parents of these couples—30 pairs (aged 52–65).
3. A control group of 30 young couples with no recorded conflicts, all of whom also had children.
4. The fathers of the men and the mothers of the women in the control group—30 men and 30 women (a total of 60 participants).

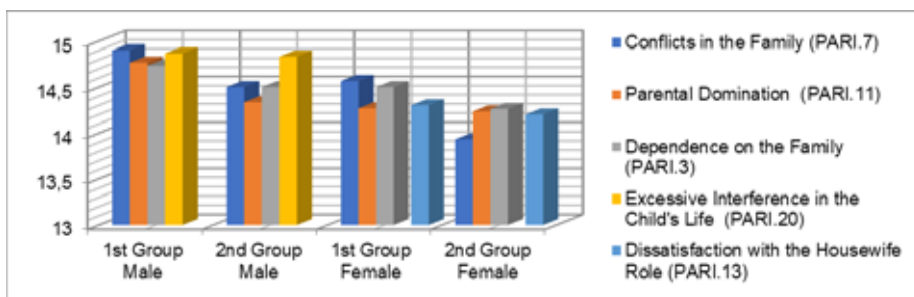
A total of 180 individuals participated in the study.

To conduct the research, the following methods were applied:

1. E. Schaefer and R. Bell's "Parental Attitude Research Instrument" (PARI). The PARI methodology is designed to study parents' attitudes toward various aspects of family life (family roles) (Raigorodsky, 2001).
2. The "Nature of Spousal Interaction in Conflict Situations" (NSICS) questionnaire, developed by Yu. E. Aleshina and L. Ya. Gozman. This questionnaire includes descriptions of 32 marital interaction scenarios, all of which have a conflictual nature (Leaders, 2006).

## Results

The study results reveal the specific characteristics of attitudes toward family roles and parent–child relationships across the four groups, as assessed using the PARI methodology.



**Histogram 1.** Averaged PARI results for Groups 1 and 2

In Groups 1 and 2 (young couples with conflictual relationships and their parents), high scores were recorded for the following factors: dependency on the family (3), family conflicts (7), parental dominance (11), excessive interference in the child’s life (20), and, among women, dissatisfaction with the housewife role (13).

The obtained data indicate heightened levels of tension related to family roles, conflicts, and control over the child, which may hinder the formation of healthy emotional bonds.

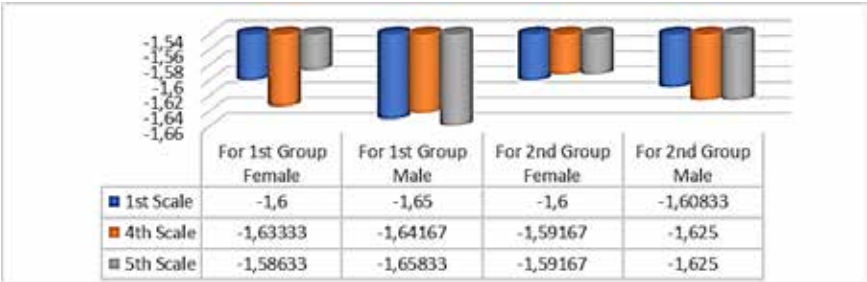
In contrast, high scores were not recorded in Groups 3 and 4 (non-conflictual couples and their parents), indicating a more balanced attitude toward family roles and child-rearing.

The differences between men and women in Groups 1 and 2 highlight the influence of gender roles—women more frequently express dissatisfaction with domestic roles, while men tend to focus more on control.

As can be seen from the histogram, conflictual relationships are observed in the same scales among both young spouses and their parents. Due to role identification, behavioural patterns are repeated. This indicates that young spouses have not developed individual behavioural models for marital life. We can say that, as a result of deep identification with their parents’ behavioural patterns, we are dealing with a repetition of old models. Until a personal model of marital relationships is formed, young spouses tend to replicate the acquired behavioural norms.

The picture is different in the third and fourth groups. The process of identification with non-conflictual parental families forms similar marital relationships. Although this model is socially regarded as acceptable, even in this case, we are reluctant to consider such relationships psychologically complete, as they are based on a behavioural model formed through identification.

Dealing with the reproduction of social models, we can assert that marital conflicts should be defined as repetitions of internalised models.



**Histogram 2.** Averaged data for Groups 1 and 2 according to the NSICS methodology

The histogram presents the results of the “Nature of Spousal Interaction in Conflict Situations” methodology across the four groups, focusing on three main scales (child-rearing, disruption of role expectations, and disagreements in behavioural norms).

In **Group 1** (young couples in conflictual relationships), high scores were recorded across all three scales: -1.56 (role expectations), -1.54 (child-rearing), and -1.54 (behavioural norms). These results indicate significant disagreements, with couples facing differences in child-rearing, role mismatches, and divergent perceptions of behavioural norms, which escalate conflicts. In **Group 2** (parents of Group 1 couples), similarly high scores were observed: -1.54 (child-rearing), -1.56 (role expectations), and -1.55 (behavioural norms). This highlights the intergenerational transmission of conflictual patterns.

In **Groups 3 and 4** (non-conflictual couples and their parents), the scores were notably lower, ranging from -1.58 to -1.62. This suggests more harmonious relationships. In these groups, there is greater agreement on child-rearing, role expectations, and behavioural norms, contributing to the formation of a stable family environment.

The high scores in **Group 1** indicate that young couples have unrealistic expectations regarding roles, leading to frustration and tension. In **Group 2**, the intergenerational transmission of conflicts reflects the influence of parental models, where traditional roles and strict control intensify disagreements.

The lower scores in **Group 3** demonstrate mutual understanding and flexibility among couples regarding child-rearing and role expectations, which contributes to emotional stability. Similarly, **Group 4** exhibits a balanced approach, highlighting the role of these parents in fostering healthy family values.

Overall, the data emphasise the intergenerational nature of conflictual behaviour.

Since the Aemp1 and Eemp1 values from the NSICS methodology exceed the critical values (Acr and Ecr), confirming that the data do not follow a Gaussian normal distribution, Spearman’s non-parametric method was used instead of Pearson’s correlation.

**Table 1.**

**Correlation between PARI Scale 7 and NSICS Scales 1, 4, and 5**

NSICS Scales	Acr	Ecr	Aemp1	Eemp1	rs	p
Nº1	0,671	1,342	5,194	41,983	0,661	0,01
Nº4	0,671	1,342	4,696	36,701	0,665	0,01
Nº5	0,671	1,342	5,095	40,946	0,605	0,01

Table 1 presents Spearman's rank correlation between PARI.7 (family conflicts) and NSICS.1 (issues related to child-rearing), NSICS.4 (role expectation disruptions), and NSICS.5 (behavioural norm disagreements).

- For NSICS.1, the correlation is **rs=0.661**
- For NSICS.4, it is **rs=0.665**
- For NSICS.5, it is **rs=0.605**

All correlations are significant at the **p=0.01** level.

The positive correlation indicates that an increase in disagreements regarding child-rearing, role expectations, and behavioural norms is associated with a rise in family conflict levels. This suggests that these three aspects play a critical role in shaping family tension.

The high correlation for NSICS.4 (**rs=0.665**) highlights that disruptions in role expectations significantly influence conflicts. This may be related to the mismatch between traditional and modern roles among couples, which often leads to frustration and disputes.

The correlation for NSICS.1 (**rs=0.661**) indicates that disagreements over child-rearing also substantially exacerbate family conflicts. This reflects that value differences between couples regarding parenting can become a persistent source of arguments.

The correlation coefficient for NSICS.5 (**rs=0.605**) shows that while disagreements over behavioural norms are important, they have a relatively lesser impact on conflicts compared to role expectations. This could be explained by the fact that disagreements about behavioural norms are often easier to resolve than deeper issues related to role expectations.

The results indicate that family conflicts are closely tied to the absence of shared values and expectations between couples. Disruptions in role expectations, as the strongest factor influencing conflicts, reveal that couples often struggle to redefine their roles.

Disagreements related to child-rearing are also significant, as they are frequently associated with deep-seated values and parenting models.

The high significance of all three scales (**p=0.01**) underscores that these factors are not coincidental. The level of family conflict is shaped by the dynamics of the couple's relationships. Being systemic in nature, conflicts may also result from intergenerational transmission.

## Conclusion

The results obtained during the study highlight that the conflictual dynamics of young couples are closely tied to their parents' perspectives on family life. A mechanism of intergenerational transmission was identified: couples experiencing conflict tended to replicate their parents' conflict-prone models, encompassing role expectations, child-rearing practices, and



behavioural norms. Conversely, harmonious couples reflected their parents' consistent and cooperative behaviours.

Consequently, marital disagreements are often shaped not only by the couple's individual interactions but also by relational patterns inherited from the parental family.

The findings indicate that family conflicts should be understood as a systemic issue, with intergenerational factors exerting a profound influence on the dynamics of a couple's relationship.

The study provides a basis for suggesting that conflict prevention requires addressing not only the couple's issues but also those of the parental family to foster harmonious family interaction models.

It is noteworthy that the exchange of cultural and traditional values between generations can either impede or enhance the flexible understanding of marital roles.

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