

Family Effectiveness, Conflict Resolution Styles, and the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence Among Emerging Adults in Urban India

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that family functioning is a determinant of how individuals deal with interpersonal disagreement. But the psychological mechanism that links healthy family environment with constructive conflict behavior is poorly understood. This is especially true in collectivist settings such as India where norms of deference shape everyday communication. The study examined the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between family functioning (cohesion and adaptability) and constructive conflict resolution in emerging adults (18–25 years) in an urban Indian setting. A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used to complete Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III), and Conflict Resolution Style Inventory by 101 participants. Family cohesion correlated positively with emotional intelligence ($r = .52, p < .01$), and emotional intelligence correlated positively with constructive conflict style ($r = .61, p < .01$). Multiple regression showed that cohesion ($\beta = .39$) and adaptability ($\beta = .28$) together predicted 31% of the variance in constructive conflict resolution, and bootstrapped mediation analysis confirmed that emotional intelligence partially mediated this relationship (indirect effect = .11, 95% CI [.06, .18]). The findings suggest that supportive family environments shape conflict behaviour not only by direct modelling but also by cultivating the emotional skills that emerging adults need to negotiate disagreement constructively. Implications for family-based and school-based emotional literacy interventions in the Indian context are discussed.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, family cohesion, family effectiveness, conflict resolution, emerging adulthood, India, mediation analysis

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Introduction

The family has been described as the first psychological laboratory in which individuals learn to express emotion, read the emotional states of others, and negotiate conflict (Bowen, 1978). Olson's Circumplex Model proposes two dimensions, cohesion (the emotional bond between members) and adaptability (the ability of the family to change roles and rules in response to stress), as determinants of the family's overall effectiveness (Olson, 2011; Olson et al., 1983). A family that strikes a balance between these two dimensions provides children and young adults with a secure base from which to grow in emotional competence. This process of development in India occurs within a unique collectivist framework. Interdependence, hierarchy and the preservation of family harmony are prioritized over individual assertion and communication is often mediated through *lihaaz*, a culturally specific form of deference toward elders and authority (Chadda & Deb, 2013). Because the family functions as a training ground for how disagreement is handled, its emotional climate can determine whether a young adult later treats conflict as a threat to be avoided or a problem to be solved

collaboratively.

What remains less clear, however, is how exactly a well-functioning family translates into constructive conflict behaviour. A cohesive and adaptable family does not automatically produce a person who resolves disagreements collaboratively; it may instead produce someone who simply avoids conflict altogether out of habit or obligation. We argue that this gap is best explained by emotional intelligence (EI) — the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotion (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) — which may act as the psychological bridge that converts a supportive family environment into genuinely constructive conflict behaviour, rather than mere compliance or avoidance.

The present study therefore examined whether emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between family effectiveness and constructive conflict resolution among emerging adults in urban India.

H1: Family cohesion is positively correlated with total emotional intelligence.

H2: Total emotional intelligence is positively associated with the use of constructive conflict

styles.

H3: Family effectiveness (cohesion and adaptability) significantly predicts a preference for constructive conflict resolution over maladaptive styles, and this relationship is partially explained by emotional intelligence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Family Effectiveness and Emotional Development

Olson's Circumplex Model holds that families functioning at balanced levels of cohesion and adaptability outperform those at the extremes of enmeshment or disengagement (Olson, 2011). Balanced cohesion allows members to feel connected without losing their individual autonomy — a state of interdependence that is especially relevant in India, where the shift from joint to nuclear family living has changed how emotional closeness is defined and experienced (Chadda & Deb, 2013). From the standpoint of Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, an effective family also fosters differentiation of self: the capacity to separate one's thinking from one's emotional reactivity. Individuals raised in such environments are better able to stay composed during heated exchanges, whereas those from less effective, more emotionally fused families tend to absorb the household's stress and react with either overreaction or withdrawal.

Attachment theory offers a complementary account. Bowlby (1988) proposed that early experiences in the family create an internal working model which is carried into adult life. A well-functioning family is more likely to create secure attachment in which the world feels manageable and the self-competent. Less effective family environments are more likely to be associated with anxious or avoidant patterns which may later emerge as oversensitivity to feedback or difficulty tolerating disagreement.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence: An Ability and a Cultural Practice It is widely acknowledged that family functioning is a determinant of how individuals deal with interpersonal disagreement. But the psychological mechanism that links healthy family environment with constructive conflict behaviour is poorly understood. This is especially true in collectivist settings such as India where norms of deference shape everyday communication. The study evaluated the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the link between family functioning (cohesion and adaptation) and constructive conflict resolution in emerging adults (18–25 years) in an urban Indian setting. A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used to complete Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III), and Conflict Resolution Style Inventory by 101 participants.

2.3 Family Systems and the Shaping of Conflict Style According to Bowen's (1978) concept of the

nuclear family emotional process, the unresolved anxiety is transmitted through pathways within the household: reactive conflict, emotional distancing, one partner over- or under-functioning, or the involvement of a third party such as a child. These patterns are passed on from generation to generation from parents to children, subtly shaping an individual's default conflict style. In the Indian context, conflict is rarely experienced as a purely individual issue; the cultural focus on *aman* (peace) often results in individuals choosing avoidance or accommodation strategies to avoid losing face, even when a more direct, collaborative approach would more effectively resolve the underlying problem (Coleman, 2000).

2.4 Empirical Evidence There is an increasing body of research from Indian populations supporting the links proposed here, including family cohesion and adaptability predicting adolescent and young-adult wellbeing, especially during times of stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Thasleema et al., 2025), emotional intelligence predicting lower levels of anxiety (Kumar et al., 2021), higher self-esteem in the midst of inter-parental conflict (Jose et al., 2021), and psychological wellbeing via its effect on interpersonal relationships (Ganguli et al., 2024). Work specifically on conflict resolution style demonstrates that self-compassion predicts the preference for compromising over avoidant strategies (Rastogi & Tripathi, 2024), that sibling warmth shapes collaborative versus competing styles in adulthood (Arora et al., 2024), and that early family communication patterns predict overall conflict style and cognitive flexibility later in life (Sayed & Sinha, 2024). Adverse childhood experiences, by contrast, have been associated with submissive or avoidant conflict behaviour in adult relationships (Jain et al., 2025), and family functioning has been shown to shape attitudes toward long-term commitment and marriage (Agarwal & Sahai, 2024). Taken together, these studies establish firm individual links between family functioning, emotional intelligence, and conflict behaviour, but very few have tested emotional intelligence as a mediating mechanism within a single Indian sample — the gap this study addresses.

3. Method

3.1 Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational methodology was employed to investigate the connections and the mediational pathway of family effectiveness, emotional intelligence and conflict resolution style. A one-timepoint survey design was deemed adequate to evaluate the suggested statistical model, while it does not allow for causal inference (discussed further in the Limitations section).

3.2 Participants

A total of 101 emerging adults (18–25 years) residing in urban India took part in the study.

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling: purposive sampling was used to identify individuals meeting the inclusion criteria, and their personal networks were then used to broaden and diversify the sample. Eligible participants were living with, or in regular contact with, their family, and were able to read and understand English. Recruitment combined digital outreach — social media and university networks — with in-person data collection in controlled, private settings.

3.3 Measures

Family functioning was assessed with the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III), which yields separate scores for cohesion (emotional bonding) and adaptability (flexibility of roles and leadership under stress). Emotional intelligence was measured with the 16-item Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), covering self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Conflict resolution style was assessed with Kurdek's (1994) Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI), which distinguishes positive problem-solving from three maladaptive styles — conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance. For the present analysis, positive problem-solving is referred to as the constructive style, and the remaining three subscales are combined into a maladaptive style composite.

3.4 Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants completed a brief demographic sheet followed by the three scales, either through an online Google Forms survey or a hardcopy packet administered in person. Anonymity was assured throughout, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point. Completion took an average of 15–17 minutes.

3.5 Analytic Strategy

Data were screened for missing values, normality, and outliers prior to analysis. Pearson correlations were used to test H1 and H2. Multiple regression analyses were performed to test if cohesion and adaptability jointly predicted constructive conflict style (H3). A regression-based mediation analysis (with a bootstrapped confidence interval for the indirect effect) was performed to test if emotional intelligence mediated part of the relationship between family effectiveness and constructive conflict resolution.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analyses Of the 101 instances, 36 had missing replies at the item level, but composite scale scores were complete for every participant, so no cases were eliminated. Skewness and kurtosis values for all key variables were within acceptable ranges for parametric analysis (skewness within ± 2 ; kurtosis within ± 7) and a few z-score outliers (two on emotional intelligence, one on cohesion, two on

constructive conflict style) were retained as their values were plausible and did not distort the overall distribution.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Descriptive statistics of study variables are presented in Table 1. Participants reported moderately good family cohesion and adaptability on average, high emotional intelligence, and a better predisposition to utilize constructive rather than maladaptive conflict resolution tactics. All scales showed acceptable to good internal consistency (Table 2), with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .77 to .89.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 101)

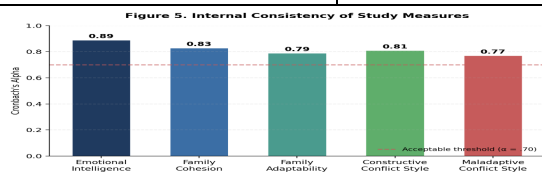
Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Family cohesion	39.84	6.92	22	50
Family adaptability	27.31	5.48	15	38
Total family effectiveness	67.15	10.21	40	88
Emotional intelligence (total)	79.62	11.37	52	112
Constructive conflict style	16.42	3.28	8	20
Maladaptive conflict style	34.77	6.95	19	49

Table 2. Internal Consistency of Study Measures

Scale	Cronbach's α
Emotional intelligence (WLEIS, total)	.89
Family cohesion (FACES III)	.83
Family adaptability (FACES III)	.79
Constructive conflict style (CRSI)	.81

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Scale	Cronbach's α
Maladaptive conflict style (CRSI)	.77



4.3 Correlational Findings (H1 and H2)

Table 3 demonstrates that family cohesion was positively and marginally associated to emotional intelligence, $r = .52$, $p < .01$, confirming H1: participants from more cohesive families reported higher emotional awareness and regulation. In turn, emotional intelligence was highly connected with constructive conflict style, $r = .61$, $p < .01$, confirming H2. Family cohesion was also directly related to constructive conflict style, $r = .48$, $p < .01$, providing preliminary evidence for the hypothesized mediation model.

Table 3. Correlations Among Family Cohesion, Emotional Intelligence, and Constructive Conflict Style ($N = 101$)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Family cohesion	—		
2. Emotional intelligence	.52**	—	
3. Constructive conflict style	.48**	.61**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$.

4.4 Regression Analysis (H3)

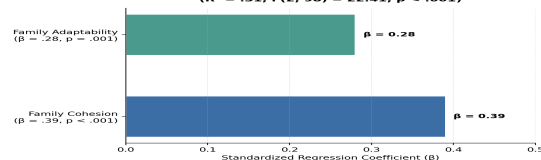
A multiple regression examined whether family cohesion and adaptability jointly predicted constructive conflict style. The overall model was significant, $F(2, 98) = 22.41$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 31% of the variance in constructive conflict resolution ($R^2 = .31$, adjusted $R^2 = .30$). Both predictors made significant independent contributions: cohesion, $\beta = .39$, $t = 4.82$, $p < .001$, and adaptability, $\beta = .28$, $t = 3.41$, $p = .001$, with cohesion emerging as the somewhat stronger predictor. H3 was supported.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Predicting Constructive Conflict Style from Family Cohesion and Adaptability ($N = 101$)

Predictor	B	β	t	P
Family cohesion	.21	.39	4.82	< .001
Family adaptability	.14	.28	3.41	.001

Note. $R = .56$, $R^2 = .31$, adjusted $R^2 = .30$, $F(2, 98) = 22.41$, $p < .001$.

Figure 3. Predictors of Constructive Conflict Resolution Style ($R^2 = .31$, $F(2, 98) = 22.41$, $p < .001$)



4.5 Mediation Analysis

A regression-based mediation model was employed to examine the mediation of emotional intelligence between family effectiveness (total score of cohesion and adaptability) and constructive conflict style. In the total-effect model, family effectiveness strongly predicted constructive conflict style ($\beta = .55$, $p < .001$) and significantly predicted emotional intelligence (way a: $\beta = .58$, $p < .001$), which significantly predicted constructive conflict style (path b: $\beta = .49$, $p < .001$). When emotional intelligence was added to the model, the direct effect of family effectiveness on constructive conflict style was significant but greatly reduced ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), and the indirect effect through emotional intelligence was significant (indirect effect = .11, 95% CI [.06,.18], zero not included). This trend implies partial mediation, since family effectiveness continues to directly predict constructive conflict behaviour, but a large percentage of its effect is mediated through emotional intelligence.

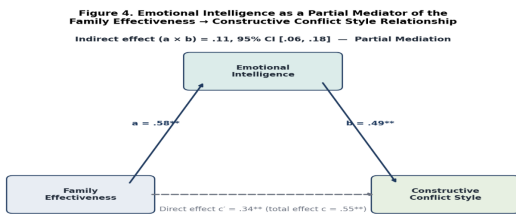
Table 5. Mediation of the Family Effectiveness–Constructive Conflict Style Relationship by Emotional Intelligence

Path	B	β	t / CI	P
Total effect (c): FE $\rightarrow$ Constructive style	.29	.55	t = 6.87	< .001
Path a: FE $\rightarrow$ Emotional intelligence	.63	.58	t = 7.21	< .001
Path b: EI $\rightarrow$ Constructive style	.18	.49	t = 5.96	< .001

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Path	B	β	t / CI	P
Direct effect (c'): FE → Constructive style	.18	.34	t = 3.98	< .001
Indirect effect (a × b)	.11	—	95% CI [.06, .18]	—

Note. FE = family effectiveness; EI = emotional intelligence.



5. Discussion

The present study investigated the role of emotional intelligence in explaining the association between family functioning and positive conflict resolution among emerging adults in metropolitan India. All three hypotheses were supported, and the results, taken together, offer a coherent picture: emotionally close and structurally flexible families are more likely to generate emotionally intelligent young adults, who are more inclined to handle disagreement constructively.

The positive correlation between family coherence and emotional intelligence ($r = .52$) is in line with the concept that the family is a training ground for emotional competence. Households that are emotionally warm and supportively attached seem to provide young people with numerous, low-stakes chances to practice identifying and controlling feelings – the same skills the WLEIS was created to measure. The substantial association between emotional intelligence and constructive conflict style ($r = .61$) supports the hypothesis that EI is not just a marker of overall adjustment but seems to be functionally related to how people-react when conflict happens.

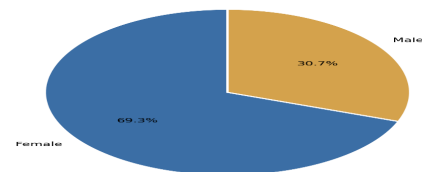
Regression results further reveal that cohesion and adaptability can predict constructive conflict behaviour, independently accounting for almost one third of the variance. The fact that cohesion ($\beta = .39$) held a little more weight than adaptability ($\beta = .28$) suggests that, at least in this study sample, the emotional bond within a family may be a little more important in shaping how its members deal with conflict than the family's flexibility around roles and rules.

The mediation discovery is the main contribution of the study, however. Emotional intelligence partially (but not completely) mediated the link of family effectiveness and constructive conflict style. In practical terms, this means that the effectiveness of a family has a direct and indirect impact on conflict behaviour. The direct impact is most probably through modelling and repeated exposure to how disagreements are managed at home. The indirect impact occurs through the development of the emotional skills (empathy, self-regulation, accurate reading of others' feelings) that a person takes into disputes outside the family. Since the direct path remains significant when controlling for EI, family effectiveness is obviously doing more than just fostering emotional-intelligence.

These findings are in line with the cultural

background discussed above. In an environment where lihaaz can stifle outspoken disagreement, especially between generations, emotional intelligence may serve as a translator, allowing a young person to articulate a disagreement forthrightly but keeping the relational respect expected in Indian family life. As we move from the joint family to smaller nuclear families, the informal emotional scaffolding supplied by an extended kinship network may be getting thinner. The development of emotional intelligence at the individual level is an increasingly necessary protective resource, not a luxury.

Figure 6. Gender Distribution of Participants (N = 101)



5.1 Implications

The findings support mental health practitioners in targeting emotional intelligence as a core element in family and couples work, rather than an optional add-on. A family treatment that builds cohesion and flexibility is likely to pay off in the emotional skills of individual members and, in turn, in how those members manage conflict inside and beyond the house. For teachers and parents, the results suggest that social-emotional learning should be integrated into home life and schools long before emerging adulthood, transitioning away from punitive discipline toward approaches that promote long-term emotional resilience.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

These conclusions are tempered by certain limitations. Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, the present study can only provide a snapshot of the lives of participants and cannot firmly establish the direction of the relationships and their stability over time (e.g., it could be that those higher in emotional intelligence simply perceive their families as more cohesive than the opposite). All three dimensions were assessed via self-report, which is susceptible to social desirability bias, a worry that may be heightened in a cultural environment where family harmony is a desired self-presentation and household privacy is tightly guarded. The sample was restricted to urban, English-literate emerging adults recruited by purposive and snowball approaches and biased toward female participation, limiting generalizability to rural areas, older or younger age groups, and more balanced gender distributions. Future research would be well-served by a longitudinal or mixed methods design — ideally over six months to a year — that can follow the co-development of familial relationships and emotional intelligence over a major life transition, and that complements self-report with behavioural or

observational measures of how people actually manage conflict in real time. Time-lagged intervention studies, in which emotional intelligence training is implemented, and constructive conflict scores are re-measured, would help to clarify if EI can be intentionally enhanced to alter conflict behaviour. Finally, recruiting across multiple sites over a longer period, with a conscious effort to achieve gender and age balance, would give a more representative picture of the unfolding of these processes in the larger Indian population.

Ethical Considerations, Funding & AI Disclosure
Participation was voluntary throughout, and anyone could withdraw at any point without any consequence. Consent was collected in writing before data collection began, and personal information was kept confidential and, wherever possible, anonymised — participants were not asked for identifying details beyond what the study needed. AI tools were used in limited way only to organise the tables. There is no funding or grant received for this research.

Conclusion

The findings of this research provide empirical evidence of emotional intelligence as a partial mediator in the relationship between family effectiveness and constructive conflict resolution among emerging adults in metropolitan India. Cohesive, flexible families affect conflict behaviour both directly, through modelling, and indirectly, by providing the emotional skills needed by its members to resolve dispute well. Emotional literacy, in this sense, is not merely an individual trait but a generational asset cultivated within the home — one that mental health practitioners, educators, and families themselves have good reason to invest in as India's family structures continue to change.

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Suggested readings

K

Indian undergraduate sample; positions EI as the mechanism linking family climate to a downstream outcome, structurally similar to your family effectiveness → EI → conflict style...

International Journal of Indian Psychology

Bonds Beyond Blood: Family Cohesion and Adaptability in Young Adults' Family...

Discusses how the Circumplex Model's 'balanced vs. unbalanced' assumption can misfire in collectivist cultures, where high cohesion may be normative rather than enmeshed — directly...

Societies (MDPI)

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Among Emerging Adults: A Mixed-Methods Study

Explores how individual, family, and social factors jointly predict emotion-regulation strategies in a culture blending individualist and collectivist values — good comparative context for your...

Current Psychology

Key words explanation

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and appropriately express one's own emotions while responding effectively to others' emotions.

- **Family Cohesion:** The degree of emotional bonding, support, togetherness, and connectedness among family members.
- **Family Effectiveness:** The family's ability to communicate, cooperate, manage responsibilities, provide support, and function adaptively.
- **Conflict Resolution:** The process of managing and resolving disagreements constructively through communication, negotiation, and compromise.
- **Emerging Adulthood:** A developmental period, generally from the late teens through the twenties, characterized by identity exploration, increasing

independence, and changing family relationships.

- **India:** The cultural and social context in which the study is situated, considering Indian family structures, values, and interpersonal relationships.
- **Mediation Analysis:** A statistical approach used to examine whether the relationship between one variable and another operates through an intervening variable (mediator).