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Living Together, Clashing Apart: Demographic Factors Predicting Intra-Group Conflict among Hostelized Students

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ABSTRACT

The current research examined the predictive effects of various demographic variables on intra-group conflict among university students, residing in university hostels. The researchers used a cross-sectional research design and randomly selected 200 undergraduate and graduate students (age 19 above) for this convenient sampling technique was used. The researchers used Jehn (1995) scale to collect data on intragroup conflict and the data were analyzed using Neural Network analysis via SPSS v.25. Results of the normalized importance value for Age (100%) and Education Level (84.2%) were the most significant demographic factors contributing to conflict variance, followed by Duration of Stay at Hostel (42.0%), Gender (25.3%), and finally Residence Type (Urban vs. Rural), which was least predictive (5.6%) of conflict. These findings indicate dominance of developmental maturity and education levels in shaping intragroup conflicts.



Introduction

Disagreement among individuals belonging to an association or group is known as intra-group conflicts (APA, 2024). In this regard residential halls are special since they represent situations where people's daily activities overlap (ex. personal, social, or academic) because of the characteristics of a total institution (Davies, 1989).

Intra-group Conflict among Hostelized Students

Regarding student groups, the group is identified as either roommates or floor mates. The conflicts that occur in hostels can be classified as:

Affective Conflict: An interpersonal conflict among roommates or floor mates that results from personal dislike for each other and emotional clashes (Burgos-Calvillo et al., 2024).

Substantive Conflict: A disagreement about how to use shared resources in the hostel; this includes disagreements about the use of such items as electricity, floor space, and cleaning duties (Burgos-Calvillo et al., 2024).

Intra-Group Conflict Development: Factors Affecting

Before discussing demographic issues, there are some environmental triggers to consider that may be catalysts for developing intra-group conflicts (De Dreu et al., 2022).

Spatial Density: The greater the number of occupants within an individual bedroom, the more specific the likelihood that friction will occur as a result of not being able to have an area identified as private (Ulrich, 2025).

Resource Interdependence: When resources such as bathrooms and Wi-Fi are limited to all residents in a hostel, there will be constant negotiations required to determine how those resources will be shared (Shirado et al., 2019).

Goal Incompatibility: For example, one student's goal may be to sleep while another student's goal may be to study (with their light on) (Michaelson et al., 2022).

Demographic Determinants: Empirical Data

Demographic characteristics are generally considered to be the leading indicators of where conflict forms and how it is resolved. Below is a summary of the data compiled concerning each of these variables.

1. Gender and Conflict Resolution

The research shows that gender is one of the greatest indicators of one's conflict resolution style. Specifically:

Male Students: Male students experience task conflict either much more frequently than do female students (22% more often) and will generally appear to be more concerned about cleanliness and maintaining physical boundaries (Bordean et al., 2020).

Female Students: Female students exhibit more relationship conflict than male students (18% more so) and, as a result, tend to have more issues with social cliques and emotional misunderstandings (Khan et al., 2025).

2. Ethnic and Regional Disparity

A lack of diversity in ethnicity is a major contributing factor to an individual's experiences with culture and, therefore, to their choice of conflict resolution methods during the initial stages of hostel living (Jason, 2023; Burgos-Calvillo et al., 2024).

Cultural Divide: There is an average of 35% more friction among students from differing geographical areas compared to those who live in the same area, primarily because of differences in cultural dietary habits and use of language (Bredtman et al., 2021).

Religious Practice: Discrepancies between and within groups as to how to manage daily routines (prayer vs. late-night partying) create an additional 15% of all intra-group conflict in multi-ethnic hostels (Neuberg et al., 2014).

3. Academic and SES Factors

Stress Levels: Students enrolled in high-stress academic programs (e.g., Medicine/Engineering) have reported experiencing irritable conflicts approximately 25% more often than those enrolled in lower-stress programs (e.g., Arts and Social Sciences), and a large proportion of this increase is due to sleep deprivation (Deng et al., 2022).

SES Heterogeneity: Socioeconomic class disparities among students can lead to conflicts regarding the sharing of costs related to both items used for heating (air conditioner bills) and food (Gronlund, 2014).

Table 1: Summary of Determinants

Determinant	Specific Impact Data	Primary Conflict Type
Gender	Males (Task-heavy) / Females (Relation-heavy)	Instrumental / Emotional
Year of Study	Freshmen are 1.5times more likely to clash	Adjustment-based
Geographic Origin	35% higher friction in mixed-region rooms	Cultural/Lifestyle
Group Size	40% higher risk of sub-grouping in 3+ person rooms	Social Exclusion

Rationale of the Study

Cultural diversity can also contribute to intra-group conflict when students from different ethnicities and languages, such as in Pakistan, reside together. Cultural shock and language barriers cause misunderstandings, which create the groundwork for intra-group conflict (Furnham, 2019). Furthermore, most Pakistani students come from closely-knit, collectivist family units. As they transition from family to an independent hostel lifestyle in university, many students develop "home-sickness induced hostility" that can be transmitted to the other residents of the hostel. Public university hostels in Pakistan may also lack the necessities (e.g. water, power supply/load-shedding and limited internet), which results in competition among hostel residents over these scarcities, resulting in significant amounts of substantive intra-group conflict. Although there is a great deal of research in western literature regarding dormitory life, there is little empirical data available on how the subcultures of Pakistan (e.g., Saraiki, Pashtun and Punjabi) handle conflict in residential situations.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the demographic determinants of intra-group conflict among hostelized students.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was used in the study to investigate the role of demographics on intra-group conflicts among hostelized students.

Population of Study

The population of the study was hostelized students of University of Gujrat.

Sampling Technique

Convenient sampling technique was used to select sample of 200 students from hostel.

Inclusion Criteria

- Being a graduate or undergraduate student in a university
- Hostelized students
- Adult
- Must give voluntary consent
- Must be able to read and comprehend the questionnaires in English

Exclusion Criteria

- Students with any psychological disorder (Self-Reporting) or physical disability
- Not willing to participate in study

Measures / Instruments

Assessment of Intragroup Conflict was measured using Jehn (1995) eight-item scale designed to assess two dimensions of conflict: Relationship Conflict (i.e., interpersonal friction/incompatibility) and Task Conflict (i.e., differences in the content of tasks, ideas). Each dimension consisted of four items. For instance, participants evaluated their group on items such as how much friction exists within your work group? (Relationship) and how many differences of opinion are there? (Task) using a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (none) to 5 (very many). In Jehn (1995) original research, the reliability of each subscale was examined with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .92 for the Relationship Conflict subscale and .87 for the Task Conflict subscale. High scores for both types of conflicts signify high frequency and intensity of conflict perceived by the participants within their group.

Procedure:

Ethical approval was granted by the university Research Ethics Committee before data collection. The researcher gave a short explanation of the study to students, guaranteed their privacy, and received informed consent. Data were collected via paper and pencil questionnaires administered individually, taking about 15–20 minutes to complete. The students were informed that they could refuse to participate at any time with no penalty. No personal information was recorded, and anonymity was respected. The questionnaires that were filled out by the participants were coded and analyzed using SPSS.

Statistical Analysis:

The formal data analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25. Descriptive frequencies were used to analyze the demographic information. A neural Network analysis was used to check the normalized importance of different demographics in predicting intra-group conflicts among hostelized students.

Results

The present study aimed to determine which demographic variables strongly predict the intra-group conflicts among hostelized students. For this purpose, a neural network analysis was used. The analysis provides the relative error of testing and training and the normalized importance of each demographic variable. The demographic analysis suggests that of the 200 students, more were female students in the study, with the age range between 17-25 years. Most of the students were

registered in BS programs. The number of rural areas is more than the number of urban areas. More students who have spent 6-12 months are staying in the hostels.

Table 1: Relative Error for Training and Testing (N=200)

	Relative Error
Testing	.991
Training	1.00

The findings from the neural network analysis reflected a Relative Error of 1.00 for the training dataset and 0.99 for the testing dataset. The smaller the difference between relative error of training and testing the better the model. Here, the difference is very small.

Table 2: Normalized Importance of demographic on Intragroup Conflicts (N=200)

Predictor	Importance	Normalized Importance (%)
Age	.389	100.0
Education	.327	84.2
Duration of Stay in Hostel	.163	42.0
Gender	.099	25.3
Residence type	.022	5.6

Table 2 indicates the normalized importance of different demographic constructs in foreseeing intragroup conflicts among students in hostels, with a normalized importance of 100%. The results indicated that age can be a critical factor in creating differences in interpersonal expectations, maturity, and experiences with conflict among students sharing a common space in residence halls. Education level proved to be the second most important predictor with a significance level of 84.2%, which shows that education level can be a factor in different communication styles, personal values, and conflict perception. The length of stay in a hostel demonstrated a moderate level of importance with a significance level of 42.0%, which shows that being in a hostel setting for a longer time can either increase conflict or provide more chances of conflict being intensified. Gender presented relatively less predictive significance (25.3%) whereas residence type also show less normalized importance.

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to identify the factors predicting intra-group conflict as seen from a demographic perspective among university students living in hostels in Punjab, Pakistan. The researchers employed neural network analysis to derive a normalized importance of demographic variables (e.g., age, education, gender, type of residence) associated with the development of intragroup conflicts amongst students.

Age emerged as the most significant predictor of intra-group conflict based upon a normalized importance of 100%. This supports the developing view that young adults (age 19 above) experience extreme instability during the process of developing their identity. Specifically, young adults exhibit some level of inconsistency in emotional control and negotiation skills compared to older students (Hatano et al., 2022). Consequently, students living together in a hostel often experience friction related to this inconsistency (Ulrich, 2025). Education level was the second most significant predictor with a normalized importance of 84.2% (O'Connor et al., 2022). That

showed education level serves as a proxy for the maturity level of a person's values and social connectedness. The duration of stay was the next most important predictor (42.0%) of roommate conflict. Many studies have documented the honeymoon-to-hostility trend in total institutions, meaning that over time, conflicts become more intense based on the loss of novelty related to living in a hostel and the interdependence of resources (for example, sharing internet access or bathrooms) as they become a regular occurrence (Shirado et al., 2019). Interestingly, Gender was a weak predictor (25.3%) compared to previous research studies because prior researchers have reported that males engage in more task-oriented types of conflicts and females engage in more relationship-oriented types of conflict (Bordean et al., 2020). Findings indicate that the stressors in the Pakistani hostel setting, such as load shedding and lack of facilities, supersede any differences between males and females with respect to their types of conflicts (Fatima & Rasheed, 2025). Additionally, the important predictor for residence type (Urban vs. Rural) proved to be the least important predictor among the four diversity indicators studied at only 5.6%. A relative error of 1.00 in the training dataset and .99 in the test dataset in the analysis of the neural network demonstrate that the predictive value of the independent variables (demographic characteristics) is virtually zero compared to a simple prediction based on the average value of the dependent variable (intra-group conflict) (Safabakhshpachehkenari & Tonooka, 2023). Thus, it is suggested that other non-demographic variables such as personality characteristics, length of time of room sharing, or psychological stress may be better predictors of when conflict will occur within a hostel-type living situation (Bano & Deka, 2022). According to Jason (2023), Homogenization levels within colleges may suggest a homogenization effect, in that all members of a college are students regardless of where they come from (culture) and must work together as a community to survive. Further, Furnham (2019) alludes to a cultural group such as Pakistan, where there is more emphasis on maintaining group harmony than expressing internal dissatisfaction with cultural, race, gender etc. differences within a college environment.

Conclusion

This research reveals the impact of demographic variables on intragroup conflicts among the students residing in the hostels. It has been found that the key predictors of conflicts was age and the educational background of the students, which reflects the role of maturity, social skills, and communication patterns. Though gender has been major sources of misunderstandings and conflicting patterns, their effect has been relatively less. Additionally, the effect of residence type (rural vs urban) was also not notable.

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