

The Role of Parental Mindfulness and Parenting Stress in Predicting Everyday Parent–Child Conflicts Among Elementary School Children in Shiraz

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the role of parental mindfulness and parenting stress in predicting everyday parent–child conflicts among elementary school children in Shiraz. In terms of its objective, this was an applied study, and in terms of methodology, it employed a correlational design. The statistical population consisted of all mothers of children aged 7–12 years residing in Shiraz during the 2025–2026 academic year whose children were enrolled in public or private elementary schools in the city. Using convenience sampling, 180 individuals from the statistical population were selected as the study sample. The research instruments included the McCaffrey Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire, the Abidin Parenting Stress Index, and the Straus Parent–Child Conflict Questionnaire (1990). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the inferential level, the hypotheses were tested using simultaneous multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that the dimensions of parental mindfulness collectively explained 18% of the variance in everyday parent–child conflict scores. Among the dimensions of parental mindfulness, mindful discipline and being in the moment with the child negatively and significantly predicted everyday parent–child conflicts. The findings also demonstrated that the dimensions of parenting stress collectively explained 24% of the variance in everyday parent–child conflict scores. Among the dimensions of parenting stress, parental distress, dysfunctional parent–child interaction, and having a difficult child positively and significantly predicted everyday parent–child conflicts.

Keywords: parental mindfulness, parenting stress, everyday parent–child conflicts

1. Introduction

The parent–child relationship constitutes one of the most influential developmental contexts in childhood and provides the primary setting in which children acquire

emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal competencies. Through repeated daily interactions with parents, children learn how to identify and regulate emotions, respond to limits, negotiate disagreements, internalize social norms, and develop expectations regarding

the availability and responsiveness of significant others. During the elementary-school years, these processes become particularly important because children experience increasing academic expectations, broader peer relationships, greater behavioral autonomy, and more complex emotional demands. Although disagreements between parents and children are a normal feature of family life, the frequency, intensity, and manner in which such disagreements are managed determine whether conflict serves a constructive developmental function or becomes a persistent source of psychological strain. Everyday parent-child conflict may involve disputes over schoolwork, household responsibilities, bedtime, screen use, compliance with parental rules, sibling relationships, leisure activities, and the child's increasing demand for independence. When these conflicts are recurrent, emotionally intense, or resolved through coercive and hostile strategies, they may weaken relational security, impair communication, and contribute to behavioral and emotional maladjustment. Longitudinal evidence indicates that hostile child-parent conflict can be shaped by the cumulative interaction of maternal, child, and broader family characteristics across development, suggesting that conflict should not be understood as an isolated behavioral event but as the product of enduring relational processes (Harries et al., 2025). Developmental research has similarly demonstrated that parent-child conflict changes in form and intensity across the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, highlighting the importance of examining conflict within its specific developmental and sociocultural context (Son et al., 2024).

The elementary-school period represents a critical stage for studying everyday parent-child conflicts because children at this age remain strongly dependent on parental guidance while simultaneously developing greater self-management, cognitive independence, and emotional autonomy. Parents are expected to supervise academic activities, establish routines, monitor social behavior, and provide emotional support, whereas children increasingly seek opportunities to express preferences and participate in decisions. Tension may therefore emerge when parental demands are experienced as excessive or inconsistent or when children's behaviors are interpreted as oppositional, inattentive, or irresponsible. The quality of parent-child interaction during this stage is closely associated with children's self-management and emotional self-regulation strategies, indicating that relational patterns within the family may directly affect how children cope with developmental demands (Ghasemi Tousi, 2025).

Furthermore, conflict within the family and maladaptive parenting styles may contribute to children's behavioral problems, partly through heightened anxiety and emotional insecurity (Tabatabaie & Koraei, 2025). Difficulties in emotion regulation and the presence of negative automatic thoughts have also been associated with maladaptive parent-adolescent conflict-resolution tactics, demonstrating that conflict is influenced by both emotional processes and cognitive interpretations (Hosseini et al., 2018). Although the latter evidence has often focused on adolescents, the foundations of conflict-management patterns are likely established earlier, making the elementary-school years an important period for identifying parental factors that may prevent recurrent and escalating conflict.

Everyday parent-child conflict is also embedded in the organization of family routines and the demands of daily life. Predictable routines provide children with structure, clarify behavioral expectations, and reduce uncertainty regarding responsibilities and transitions. Conversely, disrupted routines may increase irritability, noncompliance, and opportunities for disagreement. Research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that disruptions in daily routines were associated with greater parent-child conflict and increased psychological maladjustment among children and adolescents (Liu et al., 2021). Related findings showed that children's daily living routines mediated the association between the quality of parent-child relationships and child adjustment problems during school suspension, indicating that family organization may serve as a pathway through which relational quality affects psychological outcomes (Wu et al., 2025). During periods of educational disruption, parents of elementary-school children were required to assume expanded instructional, supervisory, and developmental roles, often while managing occupational and domestic pressures. The role of parents in addressing children's virtual educational and developmental difficulties consequently became more demanding and complex (Amirkhani Dehkordi et al., 2024). These findings illustrate how changes in environmental demands can increase the likelihood of daily friction and emphasize the need to examine parental psychological resources that may facilitate adaptive responses to children's behavior under both ordinary and stressful conditions.

Among the variables that may contribute to recurrent parent-child conflict, parenting stress occupies a central position. Parenting stress refers to the psychological strain experienced when the demands associated with the parental role are perceived as exceeding the parent's personal,

emotional, relational, or material resources. It may arise from characteristics of the parent, characteristics of the child, dysfunctional interaction patterns, limited social support, economic pressures, marital difficulties, or the accumulation of routine caregiving burdens. Parenting stress is not merely a temporary emotional state; when persistent, it may influence parents' perceptions of their children, reduce emotional availability, impair behavioral consistency, and increase the likelihood of harsh, reactive, or controlling responses. A comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis across different clinical groups demonstrated that parenting stress is a substantial and recurrent concern, particularly in families of children with behavioral, developmental, or psychological difficulties (Barroso et al., 2018). Evidence from mothers of children with autism has likewise shown that parenting stress and social stigma are related to the quality of parent-child interactions, suggesting that stress can compromise relational functioning when parents face chronic caregiving challenges (Nikbakht & Haghaegh, 2020). In families of children with type 1 diabetes, parental stress and anxiety have also been associated with patterns of parent-child interaction during mealtimes, whereas parental trait mindfulness may operate as a protective psychological resource (Van Gampelaere et al., 2020). Collectively, these findings suggest that parenting stress may shape both the emotional tone and behavioral organization of routine parent-child exchanges.

The influence of parenting stress on conflict may be explained through several interconnected mechanisms. First, stressed parents may be more likely to interpret ordinary child behavior as intentional disobedience, disrespect, or evidence of parental failure. Such interpretations can increase negative affect and promote rapid, punitive responses. Second, parenting stress may reduce tolerance for ambiguity and developmental mistakes, leading parents to impose demands that are poorly matched to the child's age or regulatory capacity. Third, chronic stress can diminish parents' ability to monitor their own emotions, communicate calmly, and maintain consistent limits. As a result, minor disagreements may escalate into cycles of criticism, resistance, coercion, and withdrawal. Parenting stress may also function as a mediator between broader psychological conditions and parenting behavior. For example, emotional distress arising from work-family conflict has been linked to lower mindful parenting through increased parenting stress, indicating that stress can transmit the effects of contextual pressures into everyday parenting practices (Moreira et al., 2019). Among new mothers, parenting stress

has similarly been found to mediate the relationship between positive mental health and mindful parenting, suggesting that even when parents possess psychological strengths, elevated stress may interfere with their capacity to remain emotionally present and responsive (Oliveira et al., 2024). Parenting stress is therefore likely to be particularly relevant to everyday parent-child conflict because it affects both parents' internal emotional states and their observable interactional behavior.

The Parenting Stress Index conceptualizes parenting stress through dimensions such as parental distress, dysfunctional parent-child interaction, and difficult child characteristics. Parental distress reflects the parent's experience of restriction, inadequacy, emotional burden, or reduced personal well-being in the parenting role. Dysfunctional parent-child interaction refers to the extent to which the parent perceives the relationship as failing to meet expectations for closeness, reinforcement, or mutual responsiveness. The difficult child dimension concerns behavioral or temperamental characteristics that parents experience as challenging to manage. Each of these dimensions may contribute to everyday conflict through a different pathway. Parental distress may heighten irritability and reduce patience; dysfunctional interaction may create negative expectations and mutual dissatisfaction; and perceptions of the child as difficult may increase controlling or coercive parenting. The importance of interactional skills is also evident in intervention research. Trauma-informed parenting interventions have been shown to improve parental interaction skills in adoptive families, emphasizing that parents' interpretations of children's behavior and their regulatory responses can be modified through targeted training (Parchami & Bahramipour, 2025). Such findings support the view that conflict is not determined solely by the child's behavior but is partly shaped by the parent's psychological condition, interpretive framework, and capacity to respond effectively under stress.

In contrast to the reactive and automatic processes associated with parenting stress, parental mindfulness represents a potentially protective approach to parent-child interaction. Parental mindfulness refers to parents' ability to bring deliberate, receptive, and nonjudgmental awareness to their interactions with their children. It involves attending carefully to the child's verbal and nonverbal signals, remaining aware of one's own emotional reactions, accepting the child and the self without premature judgment, and responding to difficult situations with intentionality rather than impulsivity. Mindful parenting does not imply

permissiveness or the absence of discipline; instead, it involves setting limits while maintaining emotional awareness, relational sensitivity, and behavioral consistency. Parent mindfulness has been associated with more adaptive parenting practices and lower levels of child psychopathology, indicating that mindful awareness may influence children partly through its effects on parental behavior (Han et al., 2021). Research among mothers of elementary-school children has also demonstrated that maternal mindfulness and self-efficacy are associated with more constructive parent-child interactions, particularly under the demanding conditions of home quarantine (Hashemi et al., 2022). These findings suggest that parental mindfulness may enable parents to recognize their own stress reactions, understand the child's developmental needs, and prevent ordinary disagreements from escalating into repeated conflict.

Two dimensions of parental mindfulness appear especially relevant to everyday parent-child conflict: mindful discipline and being in the moment with the child. Mindful discipline involves parental awareness during limit-setting, correction, and behavioral guidance. Parents who employ mindful discipline may be more likely to pause before reacting, distinguish between the child's behavior and the child's overall character, and choose responses that are proportionate to the situation. This approach may reduce yelling, threats, humiliation, and inconsistent punishment. Being in the moment with the child refers to sustained attention and emotional presence during interaction. Parents who remain psychologically present may better detect signs of fatigue, anxiety, frustration, or misunderstanding and may therefore respond before tension intensifies. Mindful presence can also communicate respect and availability, which may reduce the child's need to seek attention through oppositional behavior. Evidence indicates that mindful parenting can mediate the association between maternal perceived stress and child adjustment, highlighting its role as a process through which parental stress is translated into child outcomes (Cheung & Chao, 2022). Mindful parenting has also been associated with recurrent conflict and adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems, suggesting that lower mindful awareness may contribute to repeated conflict cycles that affect psychological adjustment (Park, 2020). Thus, mindful parenting may reduce conflict both directly, by improving interactional quality, and indirectly, by weakening the influence of parental stress on parenting behavior.

Intervention studies further support the protective role of mindful parenting. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that mindfulness interventions for parents were associated with reductions in parenting stress and improvements in youth psychological outcomes, although the magnitude of effects varied across studies and intervention formats (Bergdorf et al., 2019). Mindful parenting training has been shown to reduce anxiety and parent-child conflict while increasing parenting self-efficacy among mothers of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Sharifi Rigi et al., 2018). A mindfulness-based parenting education program also improved parent-child relationship quality and reduced parenting stress among parents of preschool children (Hosseini Sahi, 2024). Similarly, mindfulness-based parenting was effective in reducing parenting stress among mothers of children with hearing loss, a group that may experience substantial communication and caregiving demands (Kabirifard et al., 2024). An educational package specifically designed around mindful parenting also improved the parent-child relationship, reduced parenting stress, and alleviated loneliness (Attar et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings indicate that parental mindfulness is not only a dispositional characteristic but also a modifiable set of skills with potentially meaningful implications for family interaction and conflict prevention.

Nevertheless, the relationship among mindfulness, parenting stress, and parent-child conflict may be more complex than a simple protective model implies. Recent daily-diary evidence suggests that mindful parenting can function both as a buffer and, under certain conditions, as a sensitizer in the association between parent-child conflict and parental stress (Fang et al., 2026). This finding indicates that heightened awareness may not always eliminate distress; rather, mindful parents may become more conscious of relational difficulties while also possessing greater capacity to regulate their responses. The consequences of mindfulness may therefore depend on the intensity of conflict, available coping resources, parental expectations, and the broader family context. This complexity reinforces the need to examine specific dimensions of mindful parenting rather than relying solely on a global score. Mindful discipline may be particularly relevant when parents must respond to rule violations, whereas present-moment awareness may be more important for recognizing and repairing emotional disconnection. Similarly, the dimensions of parenting stress may not contribute equally to conflict. A parent's personal distress,

dissatisfaction with the relationship, and perception of the child as difficult may each explain distinct aspects of everyday conflict. Examining these components concurrently can provide a more precise account of the psychological processes underlying parent-child disagreements.

Despite growing international and Iranian interest in mindful parenting and parenting stress, several gaps remain. Much of the existing research has focused on parents of children with clinical diagnoses, disabilities, chronic illnesses, or elevated behavioral problems. Although these studies are valuable, their findings may not fully represent everyday conflicts within community samples of elementary-school children. Other studies have examined the effects of mindfulness-based interventions without simultaneously evaluating the independent predictive contributions of specific mindfulness and stress dimensions. Furthermore, research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized unusual conditions such as school closure, home confinement, virtual education, and disruption of routines. Although this work demonstrated the importance of parental mindfulness and stress under crisis conditions, it remains necessary to examine these variables within ordinary educational and family contexts. Cultural factors are also important because expectations regarding obedience, parental authority, emotional expression, academic achievement, and family responsibility may affect both the experience of parenting stress and the interpretation of parent-child conflict. Research conducted in Shiraz can therefore contribute context-specific evidence regarding how mothers' mindful parenting skills and parenting-related stress are associated with everyday conflicts among elementary-school children.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to examine the role of parental mindfulness and parenting stress in predicting everyday parent-child conflicts among mothers of elementary-school children in Shiraz.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

In terms of its objective, this was an applied study, and in terms of methodology, it employed a correlational design because the researcher sought to describe the existing status of the variables—parental mindfulness, parenting stress, and parent-child conflicts—and to examine the relationships and strength of the correlations among them. In this type of research, data are generally collected through

questionnaires, and statistical analyses such as regression are used to assess the predictive effects and relationships between the independent and dependent variables. The statistical population consisted of all mothers of children aged 7–12 years residing in Shiraz during the 2025–2026 academic year whose children were enrolled in public or private elementary schools in the city. According to statistics provided by the Fars Provincial Department of Education, the number of these students was estimated to be approximately 75,000. Considering at least one parent for each student, the statistical population was estimated to include approximately 75,000 individuals. Because access to all members of the statistical population was difficult, 180 participants were selected using cluster random sampling. Based on the formula of multiplying the number of study components—six components—by 30, a sample of 180 participants was selected. First, one district was randomly selected from the four educational districts of Shiraz. Subsequently, participants were selected through convenience sampling from one girls' elementary school and one boys' elementary school, resulting in a final sample of 180 mothers. The data were analyzed using simultaneous multiple regression analysis in SPSS version 26. All stages of the study were conducted in full accordance with ethical considerations and professional research principles. Participation by the mothers was entirely voluntary. Before entering the study, the research objectives, procedures for completing the instruments, and methods of using the collected data were transparently explained to the participants. Written informed consent was then obtained to ensure that participation occurred with full awareness and without any form of coercion or pressure. During data collection, participants were assured that their responses would remain strictly confidential and that no names or personally identifying information would be included in the reports or findings. All data were analyzed anonymously and reported exclusively as aggregate and group-level findings. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without experiencing any negative consequences. The rights of the participants were respected throughout all stages of the research, and the mothers were not exposed to any psychological harm or pressure because the instruments were questionnaire-based and noninvasive. Furthermore, the study was approved by the university ethics committee, and all relevant ethical guidelines issued by educational and research organizations were followed.

2.2. Measures

The Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire is a validated instrument designed to assess different levels of mindfulness among parents. It was developed by McCaffrey, Reitman, and Black in 2017 and has been employed in numerous studies. The questionnaire consists of 28 items organized into two principal dimensions: “mindful discipline” and “being in the moment with the child.” The first dimension comprises 15 items that assess how parents respond to their children’s behaviors and the extent to which they employ mindful disciplinary practices. The second dimension contains 13 items that evaluate the degree of parental attention and present-moment awareness during everyday interactions with the child. Psychometric analyses have indicated that the two-factor structure of the instrument explains 42.3% and 43.4% of the variance in the mindful discipline and being in the moment with the child dimensions, respectively. Cronbach’s alpha was reported to be .87 for the total scale and ranged from .73 to .87 for the subscales, indicating satisfactory reliability. The construct validity of the questionnaire was also confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis. Significant positive correlations were reported between scores on this questionnaire and scores on the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale and the revised Parental Authority Questionnaire, indicating adequate convergent and discriminant validity. The Persian version of the questionnaire has also been examined in Iran, and its validity and reliability have been confirmed. In a study conducted by Sharif Mohammadi et al. (2020), Cronbach’s alpha was .85 for the total scale and ranged from .72 to .86 for its dimensions, indicating satisfactory reliability in an Iranian population. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the McCaffrey Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire was .84, demonstrating satisfactory reliability and internal consistency in the study sample.

The Parenting Stress Index was developed by Richard Abidin in 1990 to assess the level of stress experienced by parents in their interactions with their children and its effects on their psychological and social well-being. The instrument is available in several versions, including a 120-item full version and a 36-item short form. The short form consists of 36 items categorized into three principal dimensions: parental distress, dysfunctional parent–child interaction, and difficult child characteristics. Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Evaluations of the instrument’s psychometric

properties have demonstrated satisfactory content validity, as confirmed by experts in psychology. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .90 have also been reported across different studies, indicating satisfactory reliability. The questionnaire has been validated in Iran. In a study conducted by Tahmasian et al. (2013), Cronbach’s alpha was .89 for the total scale and ranged from .70 to .88 for the subscales, indicating satisfactory reliability for the Persian version among an Iranian population. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the Abidin Parenting Stress Index was .78, demonstrating satisfactory reliability and internal consistency in the study sample.

In the present study, conflicts were measured using the questionnaire developed by Murray and Straus (1990). This questionnaire consists of 15 items that measure three dimensions—reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical aggression—across two sections concerning the respondent and the mother. Only the mother section was used in the present study. The items are scored using a six-point frequency-based scale. A score of 0 indicates “never”; a score of 1 indicates “once a year”; a score of 2 indicates “two or three times a year”; a score of 3 indicates “often, but less than once a month”; a score of 4 indicates “approximately once a month”; and a score of 5 indicates “more than once a month.” In responding to each item, respondents evaluate the frequency with which each behavior is exhibited by themselves and by the other person involved in the conflict. Higher scores indicate greater levels of conflict. Straus (1990, as cited in Sanaei, 2008) confirmed the internal consistency of the reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical aggression subscales. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .62 to .88 for verbal aggression and from .42 to .96 for physical aggression. Zabeli (2004) used the scale to assess conflicts between daughters and their mothers. In that study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for daughters and mothers were .58 and .49, respectively, for the reasoning subscale; .65 and .65, respectively, for the verbal aggression subscale; .82 and .74, respectively, for the physical aggression subscale; and .74 and .73, respectively, for the total scale. The content validity of the scale was also confirmed by Zabeli (2004). In that study, a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .78 was obtained. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the Straus Parent–Child Conflict Questionnaire was .80, indicating satisfactory reliability and internal consistency in the study sample.

2.3. Data Analysis

The raw data were analyzed using SPSS and appropriate statistical techniques at both descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, indices such as the mean and standard deviation of the scores were calculated. At the inferential level, Pearson's correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used to test the assumptions and examine the research hypotheses.

3. Findings and Results

The mean and standard deviation of the participants' parental distress scores were 31.98 and 5.64, respectively.

The mean and standard deviation of the participants' dysfunctional parent-child interaction scores were 27.02 and 4.38, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the participants' difficult child scores were 26.18 and 4.11, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the participants' mindful discipline scores were 44.84 and 6.78, respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the being in the moment with the child scores were 41.63 and 5.34, respectively. Finally, the mean and standard deviation of everyday parent-child conflict scores were 36.79 and 6.45, respectively.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Variables

Variable	Dimension	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Parenting stress	Parental distress	31.98	5.64	15	51
Parenting stress	Dysfunctional parent-child interaction	27.02	4.38	14	48
Parenting stress	Difficult child	26.18	4.11	12	44
Mindful parenting	Mindful discipline	44.84	6.78	23	64
Mindful parenting	Being in the moment with the child	41.63	5.34	20	60
Everyday parent-child conflicts	—	36.79	6.45	18	59

Table 2 presents the results of Pearson's correlation analysis examining the relationships among the study variables. As shown, the dimensions of parenting stress were positively and significantly correlated with everyday parent-

child conflicts, whereas the dimensions of mindful parenting were negatively and significantly correlated with everyday parent-child conflicts.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix for the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Parental distress	1					
2. Dysfunctional parent-child interaction	.345	1				
3. Difficult child	.434	.298	1			
4. Mindful discipline	-.412	-.322	-.289	1		
5. Being in the moment with the child	-.332	-.209	-.321	.509	1	
6. Everyday parent-child conflicts	.433	.229	.432	-.332	-.298	1

Multiple regression analysis was used to predict everyday parent-child conflicts based on the dimensions of parental mindfulness, and the results are presented in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .435$, and the coefficient of determination was $R^2 = .189$. In other words, the dimensions of parental mindfulness

collectively explained approximately 18% of the variance in everyday parent-child conflict scores. Mindful discipline negatively and significantly predicted everyday parent-child conflicts ($\beta = -.319$, $p = .001$). Being in the moment with the child also negatively and significantly predicted everyday parent-child conflicts ($\beta = -.287$, $p = .005$).

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Everyday Parent-Child Conflicts Based on the Dimensions of Parental Mindfulness

Predictor	R	R ²	F	Model <i>p</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Mindful discipline	.435	.189	39.663	.001	-.319	3.323	.001
Being in the moment with the child	—	—	—	—	-.287	3.009	.005

Multiple regression analysis was used to predict everyday parent–child conflicts based on the dimensions of parenting stress, and the results are presented in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, the multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .498$, and the coefficient of determination was $R^2 = .248$. In other words, the dimensions of parenting stress collectively explained approximately 24% of the variance in everyday

parent–child conflict scores. Parental distress positively and significantly predicted everyday parent–child conflicts ($\beta = .287$, $p = .005$). Dysfunctional parent–child interaction also positively and significantly predicted everyday parent–child conflicts ($\beta = .300$, $p = .001$). Furthermore, the difficult child dimension positively and significantly predicted everyday parent–child conflicts ($\beta = .232$, $p = .010$).

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Everyday Parent–Child Conflicts Based on the Dimensions of Parenting Stress

Predictor	R	R ²	F	Model <i>p</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Parental distress	.498	.248	41.663	.001	.287	3.112	.005
Dysfunctional parent–child interaction	—	—	—	—	.300	3.209	.001
Difficult child	—	—	—	—	.232	2.564	.010

4. Discussion

The present study examined the role of parental mindfulness and parenting stress in predicting everyday parent–child conflicts among mothers of elementary-school children in Shiraz. The findings showed that the dimensions of parental mindfulness were significantly and negatively associated with everyday parent–child conflicts and collectively explained approximately 18% of the variance in conflict scores. More specifically, mindful discipline and being in the moment with the child both emerged as significant negative predictors of everyday parent–child conflict. The results also indicated that all three dimensions of parenting stress were positively associated with everyday parent–child conflicts and collectively explained approximately 24% of the variance in conflict scores. Among these dimensions, dysfunctional parent–child interaction demonstrated the strongest standardized predictive coefficient, followed by parental distress and difficult child characteristics. Overall, the results suggest that everyday parent–child conflicts are less frequent or less intense when mothers approach discipline with awareness, remain psychologically present during interactions, and experience lower levels of parenting-related strain. Conversely, conflicts appear more likely when mothers experience emotional distress in the parental role, perceive their interactions with their children as unrewarding or ineffective, or view their children's behavioral characteristics as difficult to manage.

The finding that parental mindfulness negatively predicted everyday parent–child conflicts is consistent with the theoretical assumption that mindful parenting reduces automatic, impulsive, and emotionally reactive responses during challenging interactions. Parents who are mindful are more likely to notice their emotional arousal, pause before responding, and distinguish between the child's immediate behavior and broader negative judgments about the child's personality or intentions. This awareness may allow the parent to respond proportionately rather than escalating a minor disagreement through criticism, threat, or coercion. Previous research has similarly demonstrated that parental mindfulness is associated with more adaptive parenting behavior and lower levels of child psychopathology, suggesting that mindfulness influences children partly through improvements in the quality of parenting practices (Han et al., 2021). The present result also corresponds with evidence showing that mothers' mindfulness is positively associated with constructive parent–child interactions among families with elementary-school children (Hashemi et al., 2022). Thus, mindful parenting may contribute to a relational climate in which disagreements are managed through communication, emotional regulation, and developmentally appropriate limit-setting rather than hostility or reciprocal resistance.

Mindful discipline was the strongest parental mindfulness predictor of everyday parent–child conflicts. This dimension refers to parents' ability to remain aware and intentional while establishing rules, correcting behavior, and

responding to noncompliance. The negative association found in the present study may be explained by the fact that discipline is one of the most common contexts in which parent-child conflict arises. Disagreements concerning homework, sleep schedules, screen time, household duties, personal hygiene, and compliance with family expectations often require parents to impose limits. When discipline is delivered reactively, inconsistently, or harshly, children may respond with resistance, avoidance, argument, or emotional withdrawal. In contrast, mindful discipline involves recognizing one's emotional state, considering the child's developmental capacity, communicating expectations clearly, and selecting consequences without humiliation or excessive anger. Evidence from intervention studies supports this interpretation. Mindfulness-based parenting training has been found to reduce parent-child conflict and maternal anxiety while improving parenting self-efficacy among mothers of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Sharifi Rigi et al., 2018). Mindful parenting education has also been associated with improved parent-child relationship quality and reduced parenting stress (Hosseini Sahi, 2024). These findings suggest that mindful disciplinary responses can interrupt coercive interaction cycles and reduce the likelihood that routine behavioral correction will develop into recurrent conflict.

Being in the moment with the child also negatively predicted everyday parent-child conflicts. Psychological presence may reduce conflict by enabling parents to recognize children's emotional and behavioral signals before frustration escalates. A parent who is attentive to the child's verbal expressions, facial cues, fatigue, anxiety, or confusion may be better able to identify the underlying cause of resistance. For example, refusal to complete homework may reflect academic difficulty, fear of failure, or exhaustion rather than deliberate disobedience. When parents remain present and curious, they are more likely to respond to the underlying need, whereas distracted or preoccupied parents may interpret behavior more negatively and react more harshly. The present finding is compatible with research showing that mindful parenting mediates the association between maternal perceived stress and child adjustment, indicating that present-centered parental awareness may prevent parental stress from being directly transferred into maladaptive interactions (Cheung & Chao, 2022). Similarly, positive mental health has been associated with mindful parenting through reduced parenting stress, suggesting that the ability to remain present depends partly on parents'

emotional resources (Oliveira et al., 2024). Being in the moment may therefore function both as a relational skill and as a regulatory mechanism that protects parent-child interactions from the disruptive effects of competing demands and emotional overload.

The negative relationship between parental mindfulness and conflict is also aligned with evidence from systematic reviews and intervention studies. A systematic review and meta-analysis indicated that mindfulness interventions for parents can reduce parenting stress and improve psychological outcomes among children and adolescents (Bergdorf et al., 2019). An Iranian study similarly found that a mindful parenting educational package improved the parent-child relationship and reduced parenting stress (Attar et al., 2023). Mindfulness-based parenting has also reduced parenting stress among mothers of children with hearing loss, who frequently encounter substantial communication and caregiving demands (Kabirifard et al., 2024). These findings are particularly relevant because they suggest that mindful parenting remains beneficial across different family contexts and child characteristics. The current study extends this body of evidence by showing that the dimensions of mindful parenting are associated with ordinary, everyday conflicts in a nonclinical sample of mothers of elementary-school children. Therefore, the protective function of mindful parenting may not be restricted to families experiencing severe psychological, developmental, or medical difficulties but may also operate in routine family life.

Nevertheless, mindful parenting should not be interpreted as a mechanism that entirely eliminates conflict. Parent-child disagreements are developmentally expected and may provide opportunities for children to learn negotiation, perspective-taking, and emotional expression. The central issue is whether conflict is managed constructively or becomes recurrent, hostile, and psychologically harmful. Research has shown that mindful parenting is related to recurrent conflict and adolescents' internalizing and externalizing problems, indicating that mindful parental responses may affect both the frequency and psychological consequences of conflict (Park, 2020). More recent diary-based evidence has suggested that mindful parenting may function as both a buffer and a sensitizer in the association between parent-child conflict and parental stress (Fang et al., 2026). One interpretation is that mindful parents may be more aware of relational tension and therefore report it more accurately, while their regulatory skills help prevent such tension from developing into destructive conflict.

Accordingly, the present negative associations may reflect not the absence of disagreement but the capacity to manage disagreement without prolonged hostility, emotional disengagement, or coercive escalation.

The second major finding was that parenting stress positively predicted everyday parent–child conflicts and accounted for a larger proportion of variance than parental mindfulness. This result is consistent with extensive evidence identifying parenting stress as a risk factor for maladaptive parent–child interactions. Parenting stress may reduce patience, increase irritability, narrow attentional capacity, and intensify negative interpretations of children’s behavior. Parents experiencing high stress may perceive ordinary developmental behaviors as intentional defiance, may react more rapidly to minor problems, and may have fewer emotional resources available for calm communication and consistent discipline. A systematic review and meta-analysis demonstrated that parenting stress is particularly elevated in families of children with clinical and behavioral difficulties and is closely connected to dysfunctional family processes (Barroso et al., 2018). Parenting stress has also been associated with poorer parent–child interaction among mothers of children with autism (Nikbakht & Haghaeigh, 2020). Although the current sample was not limited to clinical groups, the findings suggest that the disruptive effects of parenting stress also occur within the everyday interactions of families with elementary-school children.

Dysfunctional parent–child interaction emerged as the strongest parenting-stress predictor of everyday conflict. This dimension reflects the parent’s perception that interactions with the child are less reinforcing, satisfying, or effective than expected. When parents believe that their efforts do not produce closeness, cooperation, or positive change, they may develop frustration, hopelessness, or negative expectations concerning future interactions. These expectations can create a self-reinforcing cycle: the parent anticipates resistance, approaches the child with tension or criticism, the child responds defensively, and the resulting conflict confirms the parent’s belief that the relationship is dysfunctional. The importance of interactional patterns is supported by research demonstrating relationships among parent–child interaction, parenting styles, children’s self-management, and emotional self-regulation (Ghasemi Tousi, 2025). Parenting interventions that improve interaction skills have also been shown to enhance family functioning, including among adoptive families dealing with the consequences of childhood trauma (Parchami &

Bahramipour, 2025). Therefore, the predictive strength of dysfunctional interaction in the present study may reflect the inherently reciprocal character of conflict, in which the behavior and expectations of each participant influence the response of the other.

Parental distress was also a significant positive predictor of everyday parent–child conflict. Parental distress includes feelings of restriction, exhaustion, role overload, reduced competence, and emotional burden associated with parenting. A distressed mother may have difficulty maintaining emotional availability, particularly when simultaneously managing household responsibilities, employment, educational expectations, and concerns about the child’s future. Work–family conflict has been linked to lower mindful parenting through emotional distress and parenting stress, demonstrating how pressures outside the immediate parent–child relationship can affect parenting quality (Moreira et al., 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents also faced expanded educational and developmental responsibilities, especially while assisting elementary-school children with virtual learning (Amirkhani Dehkordi et al., 2024). Although the present research was conducted after the most acute period of pandemic-related disruption, similar pressures may remain relevant in families where mothers carry a disproportionate share of educational supervision and caregiving. Under such conditions, even minor behavioral challenges may trigger stronger emotional responses and lead to more frequent disagreements.

The difficult child dimension also positively predicted everyday parent–child conflicts. This finding indicates that mothers who perceived their children as temperamentally demanding, behaviorally inflexible, emotionally reactive, inattentive, or difficult to manage reported greater conflict. Children’s characteristics can objectively increase parenting demands; however, the parent’s interpretation of those characteristics is also important. A child who requires repeated prompting, resists transitions, or reacts strongly to limits may generate more opportunities for disagreement, particularly when the parent is already distressed. Research has shown that disrupted daily routines are associated with increased parent–child conflict and psychological maladjustment among children and adolescents (Liu et al., 2021). Stable routines may therefore be especially important for children perceived as difficult because predictable schedules reduce transitions, ambiguity, and repeated negotiation. Related evidence indicates that children’s daily routines mediate the relationship between parent–child relationship quality and adjustment problems (Wu et al.,

2025). These findings suggest that some of the conflict attributed to difficult child characteristics may be reduced by improving environmental structure and parental responses rather than viewing the child's temperament as an unchangeable cause of family problems.

The correlations observed in the present study further indicated that parenting-stress dimensions were negatively related to mindful parenting dimensions. This pattern is theoretically meaningful because stress and mindfulness may operate as opposing processes during parent-child interaction. Stress directs attention toward threat, failure, and immediate control, whereas mindfulness promotes awareness, acceptance, and intentional responding. High parental stress may interfere with the parent's capacity to remain in the present moment, while low mindfulness may make parenting demands feel more overwhelming. Evidence from families of children with type 1 diabetes has shown that parental stress, anxiety, and trait mindfulness are associated with the quality of parent-child interactions (Van Gampelaere et al., 2020). The findings of the present study also align with research demonstrating that mindful parenting can reduce the effect of perceived stress on child adjustment (Cheung & Chao, 2022). Thus, parenting stress and parental mindfulness should not be viewed as entirely independent predictors. They may interact dynamically, with stress weakening mindful awareness and mindful parenting reducing the behavioral expression of stress.

5. Conclusion

Parent-child conflict during the elementary-school years may establish patterns that continue into adolescence, particularly when hostility and ineffective resolution strategies become habitual. Longitudinal research has shown that hostile child-parent conflict in later developmental periods is associated with earlier maternal, child, and family factors (Harries et al., 2025). Parent-child conflict also changes across adolescence and young adulthood, but relational patterns formed earlier may shape how families negotiate autonomy and closeness during later transitions (Son et al., 2024). In addition, parental conflict and maladaptive parenting styles have been associated with behavioral problems in children, with anxiety functioning as a mediating mechanism (Tabe Bordbar & Koraei, 2025). Difficulties in emotion regulation and negative automatic thoughts have also been associated with maladaptive conflict-resolution tactics (Hosseini et al., 2018). Consequently, reducing parenting stress and strengthening

mindful parenting during the elementary-school years may have preventive value by promoting healthier conflict-resolution patterns before children enter adolescence.

A limitation of the present study was its correlational and cross-sectional design, which prevents definitive causal conclusions regarding the relationships among parental mindfulness, parenting stress, and everyday parent-child conflicts. Data were obtained exclusively through mothers' self-reports, which may have been influenced by social desirability, recall bias, current mood, and shared-method variance. The sample was also restricted to mothers of elementary-school children in selected schools in Shiraz; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to fathers, parents in other geographical regions, rural families, families from different socioeconomic backgrounds, or parents of children in other developmental stages. Moreover, the study did not assess potentially relevant contextual variables such as marital conflict, family income, maternal employment, number of children, child temperament, academic difficulties, parental mental health, or the amount of social support available to the family.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to determine the direction and stability of the relationships identified in this study and to examine whether parenting stress predicts subsequent increases in conflict or whether repeated conflict contributes to greater parenting stress over time. Studies should include fathers, children, teachers, and independent observers to obtain a more comprehensive and multi-informant assessment of family interactions. Daily-diary and ecological momentary assessment methods could be used to examine fluctuations in stress, mindful awareness, and conflict across naturally occurring situations. Future studies could also test integrated models in which parental mindfulness moderates or mediates the relationship between parenting stress and parent-child conflict. Experimental and intervention research is needed to determine whether improving mindful parenting and reducing parenting stress lead to measurable changes in the frequency, intensity, and resolution of everyday conflicts.

From a practical perspective, school counselors, psychologists, and family-service providers should consider assessing parenting stress and mindful parenting skills when working with families experiencing repeated parent-child disagreements. Parent-training programs may be strengthened by incorporating present-moment attention, emotional awareness, nonjudgmental listening, mindful discipline, and strategies for pausing before reacting. Interventions should also help parents distinguish

developmentally normal child behavior from intentional opposition, establish predictable routines, communicate expectations clearly, and use proportionate consequences. Schools can support these efforts by offering parent workshops, brief counseling services, and educational materials focused on stress management and constructive conflict resolution. Particular attention should be given to parents reporting emotional exhaustion, dissatisfaction with the parent-child relationship, or persistent perceptions of the child as difficult, because these experiences may indicate an increased risk of recurrent and escalating family conflict.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. The research ethics approval code was IR.IAU.SHIRAZ.REC.1405.009.

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