

## Relationship Between Anger Expression and Anger Control with Conflict Management Styles among College Students

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/17814> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/17814

**Published Date:** 17 December 2023

### Abstract

Anger leads to aggressive behaviour if one unable to control it. This study aims to determine relationship between anger expression and anger control with conflict management styles among college students. Participants consist of 54 college students. Two sets of questionnaires used in this study are the State Trait Anger Expression Inventory II and the Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Instrument. Data were analysed using descriptive and Pearson correlation analyses. Findings showed that there is no significant relationship between anger expression inwards with conflict management styles. However, there is significant relationship between anger expression outwards, anger control inwards and anger control outwards with conflict management styles. Implication of this study is for the mental health professionals to help adolescents in assessing their anger to express and control the anger effectively.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, Anger Control, Anger Expression, Conflict Management

### Introduction

Anger is a normal feeling that all humans would experience. It is an emotional response to frustration (Froggatt, 2005) and workload (Ingram & Pilla, 2007) faced by individuals. It leads a person to portray actions and behaviours beyond the bounds of humanity such as hitting or throwing objects. This feeling of anger, and angry expression is a common feeling experienced by individuals. No human being in this world is exempted from having a sense of anger and reacting to it. This is true as anger is not only displayed physically and verbally as people could see and judge its presence. The presence of revenge is also one of the forms of anger that exists in the self.

### Literature Review

The feelings of anger that exists in an individual is not only due to the emotional pressure from frustration experienced, but also due to the relationship conflict with others. According

to Rubin et al. (2011), conflict among adolescents occurs when there are dissatisfaction and lack of understanding surrounds the relationship or environment where they are in. For instance, it happens between an adolescent with his or her parents, family and peers. This is also agreed by Scannell (2010) who stated that conflict occurs between adolescents and people who are close to them due to the conflict of perceptions, goals and values of beliefs held. In addition, adolescents are in conflict between the two parties when there is confusion, dissatisfaction, disputes and issues in determining how to achieve desired goal despite having similar perspective. This in turn creates feelings of anger that arise from the relationship conflict experienced.

Undoubtedly, the existence of anger among adolescents is often due to conflict interest. Adolescents tend to engage in misbehaviour due to the challenges they have to face. According to Santrock (2008), the development of adolescence is a phase of challenges, full of storm and stress which is difficult to control as compared to other stages of human development. Subsequently, these challenging feelings known as storms and stress may affect adolescents in multiple aspects including physical, emotional, social and mental. This is specifically true as adolescents' actions are formed on the urges of curiosity; and their desire to seek for differences or uniqueness, as well as to have their own space and freedom.

According to Kroger (2007), adolescents who are still searching for self-identity are often influenced by the environment, physical changes, emotional changes as well as their relationships with parents or significant others. Adolescents feel confused about their roles and responsibilities, often feel misunderstood, blamed, unfairly treated, lonely, as well as have difficulty understanding emotions and making decisions. Due to this, they have greater tendency to express their feelings especially anger in many ways. Almost every day, there are coverages in the news about fighting among teenagers, which is not a good sign of any living community. Below are among the news reported on misbehaviours among adolescents which leads to anger, caused by conflicts with others.

**Table 1.**

*News Pertaining to Anger Among Adolescents*

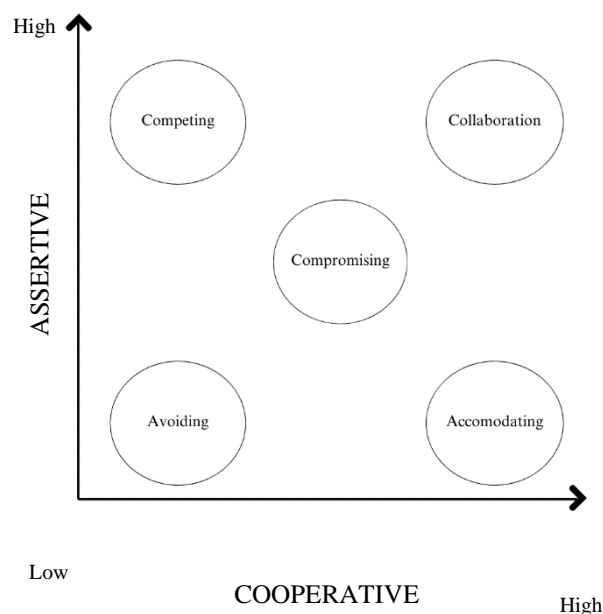
Date	Source	Reported Cases
30 October 2019	Astro Awani	Seven out of 13 teenagers, age 14 years old to 17 years old are arrested for having a fight in Lahad Datu. <i>Cause of problem:</i> Verbal accusation from female group of Kampung Pisang towards female group of Kampung Panji, stating that they are illegal immigrants and "always in and out of the hotel" nearby.
21 January 2021	The Star	Six teenagers are arrested for having a gang fight in Serdang. <i>Cause of problem:</i> One of the victims' girlfriend was harassed by other gangs. The boyfriend was attempted to protect his girlfriend, which later turns into a fight.
4 April 2021	Sinar Harian	Ten teenagers including four girls, age 14 years old to 17 years old are arrested for fighting. There is a video showing a teenage girl hitting and kicking

another teenage girl, which is believed to be due to dissatisfaction. Also seen in the video was two other teenage girls who witnessed the fight.

*Cause of problem:*

The incidents took place in an open space near a school in Tanah Merah, caused by a boyfriend fight.

From Table 1 above, it shows that small conflicts and misunderstanding can cause anger and aggression; for certain cases, it may even become a cause of death. Teenagers who are not yet fully matured to deal with conflicts tend to be easily influenced by their surroundings. According to Fernandez (2013), children and adolescents are unable to calm their feelings down with positive monologue. They would take an easy and quick way to respond, which is by expressing their feelings aggressively without thinking on the negative impact they would face afterwards. This behaviour demonstrates the unhealthy thinking styles and social lives among adolescents.



**Diagram 1.0:** Thomas-Killman Model of Conflict Management Styles

Diagram 1.0 above is the Thomas-Killman Conflict Management Styles model. According to this theory, there are five conflict management styles which are: Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating. Competing style explains on people who are brave to raise up voice in order to defend own belief on certain issues. Its category falls on high assertive with low cooperative. Collaborating style explains on both parties put efforts to find solution and work together. Its category falls on high assertive with high cooperative. Compromising style explains where finding quick solutions to mutually satisfies both parties. Its category falls on moderate on assertive and cooperative. Avoiding, on the other hand explains on both parties avoid dealing with issues or conflict. It means, both parties might

come up with the decision separately nor it is delay without any decisions. Its category falls on low on assertive as well as cooperative. Lastly, Accommodating explains on one side party neglecting his own views and only concerns on others. Its category falls on low assertive and high cooperative. Among all five styles of conflict management, mentions on being assertive. According to Van Kleef and Cote (2007), teenagers who have less power or assertiveness, do not have the advantage of giving views in making decisions which is fall under the Avoiding and Accommodating. While those who have too much power or assertiveness will impact the negative effect in relationships due to focusing on his own views rather than others. It is fall under the Competing.

According to Spielberger (2017) anger is not only seen physically. Anger is also calculated internally like revenge and negative self talk or negative thinking. According to Syed Muhammad Sajjad Kabir (2017), even though Accommodating seems to avoid conflict by pleasing the other parties, this style of conflict may increase the inward anger or suppress anger. Most of the adolescents prefer to have Compromising in dealing with conflicts (Segal & Smith, 2018). However, Compromising is vulnerable too due to inability to differentiate whether it is good assertive or bad assertive when compromising. The ambiguity of conflict management styles and anger expression is where this research comes in. There is no evidence to confirm that having Compromising enables good anger expression and anger control among adolescents.

Often people see that adolescents who are better in term of academic achievement hardly express their anger and they can manage it well. However according to Santrock (2008), adolescents are easily become rebellious and have the energy to react aggressively with no consideration on their level of education. Such aggressive actions serve as their means to show anger (Reevy et al., 2010). However, adolescents' failure to deal with anger increases their potential to have anger traits in themselves (Gambetti & Giusberti, 2016).

Thus, this study is significant as it reflects with every day real life situation. Many people are not aware that anger is the last emotion felt, which is resulted from any emotions which appears prior to stress, hate, guilt and sadness. The inability to manage anger may lead to destructive behaviours such as kicking, punching, cursing and murdering. There is little empirical study or prior knowledge in managing anger for counselling profession. Hence, it is very important to conduct a preliminary study to investigate anger behaviour among Malaysian college adolescents to gain further insights. The purpose of this study are: (1) To determine the level of gender, ethnic and parent's marital status among adolescents; (2) To investigate the relationship between anger expression and conflict management styles; and (3) To investigate the relationship between anger control and conflict management styles.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Design for this study is quantitative research using a correlational method. The descriptive data are used to determine the level of adolescents' background and mean for two variables: anger and conflict. The inferential data are used to determine the correlation between the variables. This study is conducted at two community colleges, which one located at the northern Malaysia and the other one is located at the southern Malaysia.

### **Participants**

The two community colleges are selected using random assignment. The counsellors at the two selected community colleges assisted with the questionnaire's distribution and

administration. The respondents are randomly selected from the criteria determined, which are first semester students from skills-based courses. Thus, only 54 students out of 73 students are selected after data cleaning process.

### Instrumentations

There are three sections consist in the questionnaires used in this study. Section A is on demography data, Section B is on anger and Section C is on conflict. Section A is on demographic information such as gender, ethnicity, parents' marital status, college course and age.

Section B is on anger questionnaire, which utilized the State Trait Anger Expression Inventory II (STAXI II). There are 56 items using four-point Likert scale, which 1 means "never", 2 means "sometimes", 3 means "often" and 4 means "almost always". The STAXI II inventory is developed by Charles D. Spielberger to determine the anger expression.

Section C is on conflict, which utilized the Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Instrument (T-KCMI). The T-KCMI inventory consists of 30 items using five-point Likert scale, which 1 means "strongly disagree", 2 means "disagree", 3 means "unsure", 4 means "agree" and 5 means "strongly agree". Both questionnaires are adapted to suit with the Malaysian culture.

### Result

Data are analysed using descriptive analysis and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents' gender, ethnic and parents' marital status.

**Table 2.**

*Description on Respondents' Demography*

Respondents	Frequencies	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	23	42.6
Female	31	57.4
Ethnic		
Malay	46	85.2
Chinese	1	1.9
Indian	6	11.1
Others	1	1.9
Parents' Marital Status		
Married	48	88.9
Divorced	2	3.7
Single Father/Mother	3	5.6
Missing	1	1.9

The majority of the respondents are female (42.6%) and Malay (85.2%). Most of the respondents' parents are still in marriage (88.9%).

**Research Objective 1:** To investigate the relationship between anger expression and conflict management styles.

The STAXI-II questionnaire comprises six subscales. However, this research objective only considers the subscale on *Anger Expression Index*. The results are presented in Table 3 below. According to the results, there is a significant correlation between anger expression and compromising styles of conflict management ( $r=.367$ ,  $n=54$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

It means that, when someone is motivated to manage his/her conflict by compromising with others, the feelings of expressing anger still exists. According to Syed Muhammad Sajjad Khabir (2017), people who are in anger and willing to compromise with such the feeling might end up with no commitment to agree on something. The feelings of expressing anger cannot be demolished as the person is still negotiating on the event. According to Bo Shao et al. (2015), people who are called as negotiator are less likely to focus on performance at the end. Moreover, they have the tendency to suppress their anger due to inability to express their anger, when the level of compromising with others are high.

**Table 3.**

*Correlation between Anger Expression with Conflict Management*

Variables	Anger Expression		
	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	(2-tailed)
Avoiding	.242	.078	
Accomodating	.345	.011	
Compromising	.367	.006	
Competing	.324	.017	
Collaborating	.325	.017	

*r=correlation*

**Research Objective 2:** To investigate the relationship between anger control and conflict management styles.

To get the result of this research objective, the subscale used is Anger Control Index with Conflict Management Styles. The result is presented in Table 4 below. According to the result, there is a high significant correlation between anger control and compromising styles of conflict management ( $r=.539$ ,  $n=54$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Data demonstrates a parallel result with the previous finding. Due to expressing anger is somewhat has correlation with comprising, it also shows that they can control anger by compromising with it as well. Individuals are unable to express anger because they prefer to compromise or negotiate, therefore leads to ability to control anger.

**Table 4.**

*Correlation between Anger Control with Conflict Management*

Variables	Anger Control	
	<i>r</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Avoiding	.401	.003
Accomodating	.416	.002
Compromising	.539	.000
Competing	.406	.002
Collaborating	.486	.000

*r correlation*



**Discussion and Conclusion**

People have the tendency to be conflicts when there are certain needs which are unmet. When needs are unmet, the feelings immerge and those who fail to manage their emotion, would become angry towards others. Results from this study demonstrated that, even though most of the adolescents are likely to compromise in dealing with conflict, it would not lessen the anger intensity. Anger cannot be thrown away, but needs to be managed wisely to prevent from misdeeds or even worse become criminals. Data from this study have brought us to wide open our eyes on the importance of knowing and learning to manage anger. Anger is the last emotion that would occur after suffering from all other emotions such as frustration, sad or stress.

In conclusion, anger is pertaining to feeling, while on the other hand conflict management styles is about behaviour towards an activating event. These two are different, such that controlling ones' behaviours is different from managing emotions. The conflict management styles can be determined by naked eyes. This is because others may witness the behaviours associating with ones' conflict management styles, hence they are able to make judgements on these behaviours. Unlike anger, silent does not indicate an absence of anger, but rather an individual may be suppressing the anger. Thus, this study revealed that anger expression and anger control correlated with compromising conflict management styles. Such expressions of anger cannot be expressed because they are shielded by a compromised style of conflict management. The results however, also presents other point of view on anger and conflict management styles.

**Suggestions**

Based on the most crucial factors that have been identified in this study, there are several suggestions to enhance the current research. Firstly, future research may conduct a study on anger and conflict management among adults who are facing different challenges and conflicts in life such as marriage, work/career issues and personal matters. This group of study have different point of views in anger and conflict management styles. It is because, the level of maturity as well as challenges they are facing are totally different from one case to another. Secondly, this research may present a more accurate results if it is conducted using experimental studies; this can be completed by comparing before and after treatment given on anger and conflict management styles. Research on survey is not adequate to investigate more empirical data on emotion of anger. These days, research is not only cover on Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ), but also on Emotion Quotient (EQ).

Finally, future research may add on cognitive variables as mediator of anger expression and conflict management styles to enhance more interesting findings on the topic focussed. Future researchers could also explore the cognitive processes that contribute to the relationship between anger expression and anger management. This approach may allow for a deeper examination of the cognitive factors which may influence how individuals interpret and respond to anger-provoking situations.

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