

Avoidant Conflict Behaviour and Social Resources for Working Adults

Vidya V¹, Kavya Vijayan²

¹Supervisor, JAIN (Deemed to be University), Degree of Master of Science in Psychology (PRVENO-001214632)

²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, JAIN (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru

Abstract: *This study looks at how avoidant conflict behavior relates to the social resources available to working adults. Avoidant conflict behavior means withdrawing from, delaying, ignoring, or downplaying a disagreement instead of addressing it directly. Social resources cover the emotional, informational, practical, and companionship-based support people draw on from family, friends, colleagues, supervisors, and other social networks. The underlying idea is fairly simple: supportive relationships tend to make open communication and healthier coping easier, whereas habitually avoiding conflict can wear down trust and communication over time. Using a correlational design, the study surveyed working adults aged 22 to 50. Avoidant conflict behavior was measured with a scale adapted from the passive-aggression literature, and perceived social support was measured using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). A Pearson correlation was then run to test the relationship between the two variables. The results showed a statistically significant, moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.467, p < .001, N = 55$) - in other words, participants who scored higher on avoidant conflict behavior tended to report fewer social resources. This supported the research hypothesis.*

Keywords: Avoidant Conflict Behavior, Social Resources, Social Support, Working Adults, Conflict Management

1. Introduction

People live inside a web of personal, social, and professional relationships, and wherever opinions, expectations, values, needs, or goals differ, there is room for conflict. In that sense, conflict is simply a normal part of being around other people — what actually matters is how someone perceives it, responds to it, and manages it. At work, conflict can come from clashing work styles, communication habits that do not quite mesh, unclear responsibilities, competing demands, organizational change, or a simple misunderstanding. Handled well, conflict can sharpen communication and problem-solving; handled poorly, it tends to breed dissatisfaction, stress, withdrawal, and strained relationships.

Avoidant conflict behavior is one particular way people respond to disagreement. It shows up as withdrawing, postponing a difficult conversation, staying silent, changing the subject, downplaying the problem, or simply not saying what one actually needs. Avoidance is not automatically a bad thing — stepping back from a heated exchange for a moment can give someone time to cool down. The trouble starts when avoidance becomes the default response: concerns pile up unresolved, and frustration, misunderstanding, and emotional distance build up over time.

Social resources, meanwhile, are the interpersonal resources a person can draw on through their relationships and networks. This includes emotional support (empathy, reassurance), informational support (advice, guidance), instrumental support (practical help), and companionship or feedback. These resources can come from family, friends, colleagues, supervisors, mentors, professional networks, or community groups, and supportive relationships more broadly offer a sense of security, belonging, fresh perspective, and practical help when things get difficult.

Why look at the relationship between the two? People who feel supported likely have more chances to talk through problems and ask for guidance, while people who feel unsupported may withdraw further and feel more isolated. That said, strong social resources do not guarantee that someone will avoid conflict less — personality, communication skills, past experiences, cultural background, and workplace climate all play a role too. So this is not something to simply assume; it needs to be tested empirically.

2. Theoretical Background and Significance

Conflict management is usually described in terms of five broad strategies: competing, collaborating, compromising, accommodating, and avoiding. None of these is universally “right” - which one works depends on the situation. Avoidance can be a reasonable choice when an issue is minor or when addressing it right away might make things worse emotionally, but relying on it repeatedly tends to block real communication and resolution.

From a psychological standpoint, avoidant conflict behavior has been linked to fear of confrontation, fear of being judged negatively, low assertiveness, a need to regulate one's emotions, past experiences of being criticized or of conflict resolution simply not working out, and beliefs that conflict inevitably damages relationships. Social resources can help someone cope with exactly these challenges, by offering reassurance, advice, practical help, and honest feedback.

This is relevant to both counselling and workplace psychology. A counsellor might explore when and why someone avoids conflict, what thoughts and feelings come up around confrontation, what happened to them before, how they typically communicate, where their assertiveness breaks down, and what social resources they have to lean on. Depending on what the person needs, this could lead to assertiveness training, work on communication skills,

problem-solving practice, emotion-regulation strategies, or simply examining unhelpful beliefs about conflict. The goal is not to eliminate avoidance altogether- it is to help people build more flexibility in choosing how they respond.

This study matters because conflict-management style and social support are usually studied separately, and the relationship between the two has received less attention in working adults specifically. The findings could be useful to counsellors, psychologists, educators, HR professionals, and organizations interested in communication and workplace relationships, and they add to the broader academic understanding of conflict management, social resources, and interpersonal functioning.

3. Review of Literature

Perry and Flannery (1982) described patterns of passive-aggressive behavior and what they mean for learning and adaptation - their work offers a conceptual starting point for thinking about indirect, avoidant responses to interpersonal difficulty.

Jolly, Kong, and Kim (2021) reviewed the research on social support at work and found that it is linked to stronger workplace relationships, more positive affect, and better performance, while also cushioning some of the negative effects of a stressful job. Support from coworkers and supervisors in particular stood out as important.

Ilies et al. (2011) looked at interpersonal conflict as a workplace stressor and found it was tied to more negative affect- and that this effect was stronger for employees with less social support at work, suggesting that support can buffer the emotional toll of workplace conflict.

The passive-aggression questionnaire served as a reference point for building the avoidant conflict behavior measure used here, since its behavioral themes- holding back communication, putting off responsibilities, hesitating to voice disagreement- line up closely with how conflict avoidance actually shows up behaviorally.

Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) developed the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), a 12-item scale measuring perceived support from family, friends, and a significant other. The original version uses a seven-point response format and has held up well in terms of reliability and validity. It forms the basis for measuring perceived social resources in this study.

4. Methodology

Title of the Study: A Study of Avoidant Conflict Behaviour and Social Resources among Working Adults.

Research Design: This is a correlational study examining the relationship between Avoidant Conflict Behaviour and Social Resources, with Social Resources treated as the predictor variable and Avoidant Conflict Behaviour as the outcome variable.

Objectives:

- 1) To assess the level of avoidant conflict behaviour among working adults.
- 2) To assess the level of perceived social support among working adults.
- 3) To examine the relationship between avoidant conflict behaviour and social resources among working adults.

Hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant relationship between avoidant conflict behaviour and social resources among working adults.

H0: There is no significant relationship between avoidant conflict behaviour and social resources among working adults.

Population and Sample: The population is avoidant adults aged 22–50, drawn from government, private, self-employed, and non-profit settings. The study aimed for a sample of 50; the final analysis includes 55 participants.

Inclusion criteria: Participants had to be 22–50 years old, currently working or occupied in some capacity, able to understand the questionnaire's language, willing to take part voluntarily, and able to give informed consent.

Exclusion criteria: Anyone below 22 or above 50, not currently working, unwilling to give informed consent, returning a substantially incomplete questionnaire, or unable to understand the questionnaire adequately was excluded.

Tools: The avoidant conflict behavior measure was adapted from the Test of Passive Aggression. The Social Resources measure was based on the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), covering 12 items across family, friends, and significant-other support.

Reliability and Statistical Analysis: The internal consistency of the researcher-developed Avoidant Conflict Behaviour Questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were computed, and Pearson's correlation was used to test the relationship between Avoidant Conflict Behaviour and Social Resources, with significance set at $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations: The study followed standard ethical practice throughout- informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence, and secure, appropriate use of data.

5. Results and Discussion

Pearson's Product–Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship between Avoidant Conflict Behavior and Social Resources among working adults.

Table 1: Correlation between Avoidant Conflict Behavior and Social Resources

Variable Pair	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Avoidant Conflict Behavior– Social Resources	–0.467	0	55

The analysis found a statistically significant, moderate negative relationship between the two variables, $r = -0.467$, $p < .001$, $N = 55$. Since p falls below .05, the relationship is significant, meaning H_1 is supported and H_0 is rejected.

The negative correlation means that participants who scored higher on Avoidant Conflict Behavior tended to score lower on Social Resources, and vice versa- those with stronger social resources tended to avoid conflict less. This lines up with what the study expected going in: that having supportive relationships to draw on is connected to more constructive ways of handling disagreement. That said, this is a correlation, not proof that one variable causes the other.

It also fits with the wider literature reviewed earlier. Jolly et al. (2021) pointed to the role social support plays in workplace relationships and in coping with a stressful job, and Ilies et al. (2011) found that social support can soften the emotional impact of interpersonal conflict. Both provide useful context for the negative association found in this sample.

There are some practical implications here too, both for counselling and for workplace interventions. Looking at someone's interpersonal support, communication patterns, assertiveness, and typical conflict responses could help pinpoint where to intervene. Programmes aimed at strengthening communication, problem-solving, supportive relationships, and the use of social resources could be worth pursuing for working adults.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the relationship between Avoidant Conflict Behavior and Social Resources among working adults, and found a statistically significant, moderate negative correlation between the two ($r = -0.467$, $p < .001$, $N = 55$) — supporting the research hypothesis.

In short, participants who reported avoiding conflict more also tended to report fewer social resources, and those with more social resources tended to avoid conflict less. This points to how much interpersonal support and communication matter in understanding how working adults handle conflict. Future research with larger, more diverse samples and additional variables could give a fuller picture of what drives conflict avoidance and how social resources factor into it.

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