

## ACADEMICS' VIEWS ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

### *OPINIÕES DOS ACADÊMICOS SOBRE HABILIDADES DE RESOLUÇÃO DE CONFLITOS QUANDO SURGEM PROBLEMAS NAS RELAÇÕES INTERPESSOAIS*

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine academics' conflict resolution skills when problems arise in their interpersonal relationships. The data obtained to achieve this objective included academics' sociodemographic distribution and administrator-staff relations in the university, the atmosphere among the stakeholders, the administrators' relationships with teachers, students, and parents, the distribution of jobs between administrators and staff, and academics' physical reactions of academic to conflict resolution. This qualitative study was conducted as a case study. The population of the study consisted of 20 academics working in a private university in Nicosia, in Northern Cyprus (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) during the 2021-2022 academic year. Purposeful sampling to represent the study population was first determined using the purposeful sampling method; the snowball sampling technique would be used as long as different views were obtained. The majority of the participants consisted of women, most of whom were aged 30-40 years, married, had children, and 16 or more years of professional experience. A semi-structured interview form, which was prepared by the researcher, was used as a data collection tool. The research data were analyzed using the content analysis method. The results showed that the established relationship was positive and authoritarian. The participants expressed their views on the need to create a positive atmosphere among stakeholders and strengthen communication, and highlighted such illnesses as physical stress, heart palpitations, difficulty in breathing, headache, neck pain, shoulder pain, and depressive mood.

**Keywords:** Academic. Psychological state. Conflict. Resolution skills. Interpersonal relationship.

## RESUMO

Este estudo tem como objetivo determinar as habilidades de resolução de conflitos dos acadêmicos quando surgem problemas em seus relacionamentos interpessoais. Os dados obtidos para atingir esse objetivo incluíram a distribuição sociodemográfica dos acadêmicos e as relações entre administradores e funcionários da universidade, o clima entre os stakeholders, as relações dos administradores com professores, alunos e pais, a distribuição de cargos entre administradores e funcionários e os acadêmicos' reações físicas do acadêmico para resolução de conflitos. Este estudo qualitativo foi conduzido como um estudo de caso. A população do estudo consistiu em 20 acadêmicos trabalhando em uma universidade privada em Nicósia, no norte de Chipre (República Turca do Norte de Chipre) durante o ano letivo de 2021-2022. A amostragem intencional para representar a população do estudo foi determinada primeiro usando o método de amostragem intencional; a técnica de amostragem de bola de neve seria usada, desde que diferentes visualizações fossem obtidas. A maioria dos participantes era do sexo feminino, a maioria na faixa etária de 30 a 40 anos, casada, com filhos e com 16 ou mais anos de experiência profissional. Como instrumento de coleta de dados, foi utilizado um formulário de entrevista semiestruturado, elaborado pela pesquisadora. Os dados da pesquisa foram analisados pelo método de análise de conteúdo. Os resultados mostraram que a relação estabelecida foi positiva e autoritária. Os participantes expressaram suas opiniões sobre a necessidade de criar um clima positivo entre as partes interessadas e fortalecer a comunicação, e destacaram doenças como estresse físico, palpitações cardíacas, dificuldade respiratória, dor de cabeça, dor no pescoço, dor no ombro e humor depressivo.

**Palavras-chave:** Acadêmico. Estado psicológico. Conflito. Habilidades de resolução. Relacionamento interpessoal.

## Introduction

Universities play a major role in raising qualified academics and developing innovation. As educational institutions that generate knowledge, universities feature prominently in countries' development projections. Academics are needed to further their careers by conducting scientific research in the process of generating knowledge (Demir, Demir & Özdemir, 2017). Therefore, academics play a key role in universities' education processes as the persons who work as part of this process and generate knowledge (Özer, 2011; Alparslan, 2014).

Universities must have qualified academics in faculty. In general, qualified academics have one of three academic titles, namely, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor. The holders of these academic titles have three main jobs: Research (doing research, scientific publication or creative activities), teaching (lecturing, observing, and consultancy), and benefit (providing services to the society and providing professional services), thus improving the quality of the services produced by the university (Kelecioğlu, Bilge & Akman, 2006). "Quality is

fitness for purpose.” (Watty, 2003). In education, this fitness is a branch of service. Of course, the psychological state of the instructors and the satisfaction they get from their jobs also affect the quality of education. Achieving this satisfaction, academics are required to earn degrees in their related fields to be entitled to material income, autonomy, academic self-confidence, and job guarantee.

In addition to having all these gains, academics should be healthy both physically and psychologically (Yılmaz, & Memişoğlu, 2019). However, if this occurs unhealthily, it can upset the balance between the relationships of family and friends and lead to conflicts (Erdil, Keskin, İmamoğlu & Serhat, 2011).

Conflict is an inseparable part of human nature. According to Öğülmüş (2006), conflict, as an interpersonal problem, is the difference between the existing and the ideal interaction, and the hindrance of enterprise by the tension felt due to these differences. According to Karip (2003), it is any dispute, disagreement, or verbal confrontation. Öner (2004) states that conflict arises when there is discrepancy between at least two people on an issue and it can occur when people’s impulses, needs, and desires do not align. Based on these definitions, one should maximize the positive results and minimize the negative ones when resolving conflicts between people in their social relations to improve the quality of education. Thus, when problems arise, the objective is to obtain better results and reduce emotional distress (D’Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Oliveras, 2004).

Johnson and Johnson (2004) introduced five different strategies to resolve interpersonal conflicts. The solution strategies available for academics to select to manage relations well are: Withdrawal (to avoid conflict), Use of force (gaining the upper hand, forcing, and giving orders), Yielding (giving up objectives to bolster the relationship), Reconciliation (abandoning some objectives so that the relationship does not get damaged), and negotiation to solve the problem (achieving the objectives and maintaining the relationship).

When conflicts in interpersonal social relations are resolved as rigid, destructive, and dominant, they lead to violence, hostility, anger, separation, and sadness in the individual. To be constructive in the process of resolving conflicts and

to strengthen the relationship, emotions such as happiness, success, and relief are triggered in the individual (Türnüklü & Şahin, 2004).

In light of previous research, Akyol et al. (2018) focused on the problems faced by higher education in Turkey according to the views of academics. The study by Akar (2019) titled “Academic & Managerial Talent in Universities: Examining the Applicability of Talent Management” concluded that talent management in higher education is necessary and useful but that its implementation requires various regulations, adding that “positive working conditions” are important for attracting and retaining talent, and that the situation is different in provincial and central universities. In their study titled “The Opinions of Academics about the Impact of the Academic Incentive Fund on Scientific Activities,” Ültay, E. and Ültay, N. (2018) touched on both the positive and negative aspects. The positive aspects were an increase in the number of publications and a corresponding increase in citations. There was also an increase even in participation in projects among academics who had not been engaged in scientific activities for years, letting them make some publications. Their negative views on the application were that their colleagues preferred paid journals that provide a quicker return due to the long time it takes to publish journals, as well as the presence of academics who would cite one another and the uncontrolled increase in participation in international symposiums/congresses with more than one paper. In their study titled “Academics’ Perceptions of Intimidation in Universities,” Çayvarlı and Şahin (2015) focused on the situation in Dokuz Eylül University.

Many studies have been conducted in recent years on academics’ conflict resolution skills in the problems that arise in their interpersonal relationships. In this sense, this study aims to reveal academics’ conflict resolution skills when problems arise in their interpersonal relationships. To this end, answers were sought to the following sub-problems:

1. What do academics think about administrator-staff relations in university settings?
2. What are academics' views on establishing a positive climate relationship among stakeholders?
3. How are the jobs distributed between administrators and staff?
4. What are the educational administrators' relationships with and views on teachers, students, and parents in the work environment?
5. What are the physical reactions that academics show in response to the conflict resolution they experience?

## Methodology

This section provides information about the research design, study group, data collection tools, and data analysis.

### *Research Design*

Document review, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in this study because it examined the academics' views on conflict resolution skills in the problems experienced in interpersonal relationships. Qualitative research sets out to reveal how people interpret and explain natural experiences and to show various viewpoints about life (Merriam, 2013). From this perspective, it becomes a transformative point of view that determines the types of questions asked, conveys information about the collection and analysis of data, and presupposes a necessity for change or action (Demir, 2013). With this in mind, the study used a qualitative research design, which has the quality of field research in terms of the environment in which it is applied. Document review is a scientific research method that can be described as the collection, review, questioning, analysis, and interpretation of different documents as the primary source of research data. The document review method used as part of this research method is a scientific method that requires strict adherence to the research protocol (Özkan, 2019). It is a data collection

technique in its own right. The study is a case study. In case studies, detailed research is what should be conducted the deepest (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2013).

### *Study Group*

Population of the study consisted of 1,200 academics working in different departments of a private university in the Nicosia Region of Northern Cyprus (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus - TRNC). The sample group consisted of 20 volunteer academics from the population of the study. The study group to comprise the sample of the study was first determined using the purposeful sampling method and the snowball sampling technique would be used as long as different views were obtained. According to Balcı (2006), in purposeful sampling, the researcher uses his/her own judgment as to whom to select and selects the ones that best suit his or her purpose. The participants in the present study were selected through criteria sampling (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In choosing the snowball sample, the researcher began with the first small group of participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005) and asked the them to identify potential participants with different characteristics (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2015). The following criteria were sought when creating the study group: being an academic, administrator, stakeholder, and experiencing difficulties with respect to conflict resolution skills in interpersonal relations. The study was conducted with academics at a private university in the city center of Nicosia in TRNC in the 2021-2022 academic year. The criteria for the study group were determined by the researcher based on the research problem.

Table 1 – Distribution of academics by demographic characteristics

	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	13	65
Male	7	35
<b>Age</b>		
29 years and below	1	5
30-40 years	14	70
41 years and above	5	25
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	16	80
Single	4	20
<b>Having a child</b>		
Yes	15	75
No	5	25
<b>Professional experience</b>		
5 years and under	4	20
6-10 years	5	25
11-15 years	5	25
16 years and more	6	30
<b>Duty</b>		
Assistant	1	5
Coordinator	1	5
Lecturer	3	15
Faculty member	12	60
Deputy dean	2	10
Dean	1	5

Table 1 shows the distribution of academics based on their socio-demographic characteristics. Of the academics who took part in the study 65% were female and 35% were male; 70% were aged 30-40 years, 25% were aged 41 years and above, and 5% were aged 29 years and below; 80% were married and 20% were single; 75% had children and 25% did not; 30% had 16 years or more of experience, 25% had 11-15 years of experience, and 25% had 6-10 years of experience. From a job perspective, the majority of the academics were faculty members (55%), 15% were lecturers, 10% were deputy deans, and 5% were assistants and coordinators.

### *Data Collection Tools and Collecting the Data*

The study used a survey form consisting of five open-ended questions as a data collection tool and the questions on the form were developed by the researchers. Instead of the interview technique, the semi-structured interview questions were handed to the academics on paper and they were asked to provide written answers within two weeks. At the end of this period, academics who did not return the form were reminded again and given an extra week. Those who had still not responded by this deadline were excluded from the study.

### *Data Analysis*

The data obtained from the survey form were analyzed based on the nature of the questions. The records obtained from the interviews based on the survey form's five questions were transcribed and transformed into written documents. The researcher who conducted the interviews did the transcription data loss was prevented. The content analysis technique was used to interpret the data. The data obtained were organized under the determined themes, verbatim quotes were taken from the views of the participants, and the findings were supported and interpreted. The verbatim quotes were presented with codes to protect the anonymity of the participants and were included to increase the reliability of the research. Furthermore, the data obtained were coded by a second researcher with experience in qualitative research. The codings made by both researchers included the formula (Reliability = Consensus / Consensus + Disagreement) by Miles and Huberman (1994). Consistency between the encoders was calculated as 82%. A reliability score of 70% and above is deemed sufficient. The research process was defined in detail to increase the external validity of the study.

NVIVO 12 Plus qualitative data analysis program was used to group the data obtained in categories and code them. NVIVO 12 Plus allows a wide range of contents to be easily encoded and complex information to be organized simply, thus ensuring a full grasp of all the data. NVIVO 12 Plus lets researchers make rapid recalls when coding and conduct analysis later. This software makes it very easy to



find common statements among the responses given to the same question. The data obtained were digitized and interpreted. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were digitized. The processes involved were observation, interview and document review, and digitization. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013), data can be reduced to numbers at a certain level in qualitative research just as in quantitative research. Simple percentage calculations and frequency analysis are used in digitizing data; this method increases the reliability of qualitative data, reduces bias, and lets data be compared (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The qualitative data in the present study were digitized by making statistical calculations with the NVIVO 12 Plus qualitative data analysis software.

## Findings

Figure 1 – The relationships between university administrators and staff

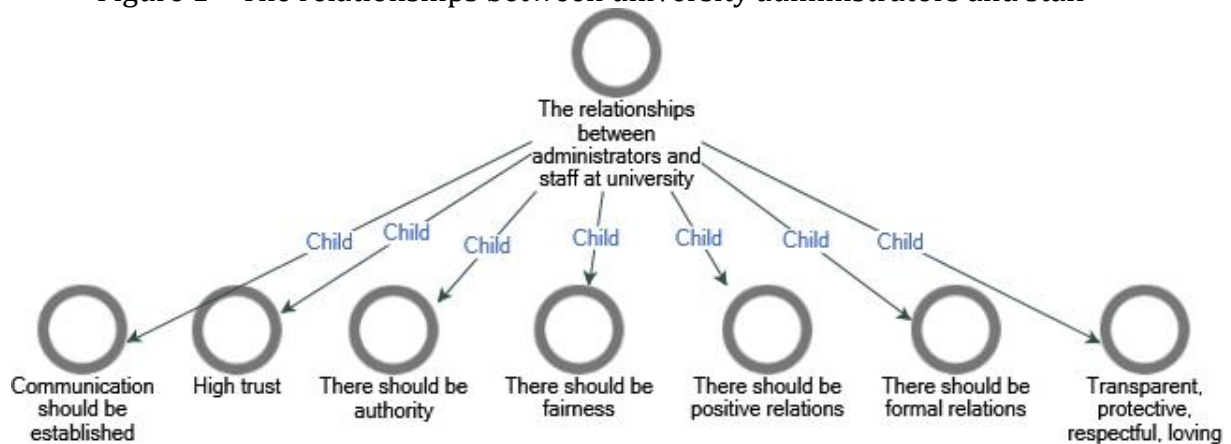


Figure 1 shows the themed form of the relationship between administrators and staff. The relationships between administrators and staff are created in the following sub-themes: “fair”; “communication”; “positive relations”; “authoritarian”; “formal relations”; “transparent”; “protective”; “respectful”; “loving” and “high trust.”

Table 2 – The relationships between administrators and staff at university

Themes	F	%
Authoritarian	6	30
Positive	5	25
High trust	4	20
Transparent, protective, respectful and loving	2	10
Fair	2	10
Communication	1	5

Table 2 shows the expressions used by academics to describe the relationships among academics working at the university. Of the relationships established between administrators and academics in the university, 30% were reported as being authoritarian and positive, 20% as high trust, 10% as fair and transparent, protective, respectful and loving, and 5% as communication.

The responses to the question regarding the relationship established between administrators and academics working at the university are given below:

*“An administrator should be authoritarian enough, ensure equality, be sympathetic, friendly, objective, and loving.” (G1)*

Transparent, protective, respectful and loving. (G11)

Should be fair. (G20)

Both sides should have high trust, be respectful, have tolerance and equal distribution of jobs. Team spirit should be integrated. There should be no bullying. The job description should be well understood well and solidarity open to sharing should be taken as a basis. (G14)

Figure 2 – Findings regarding positive environment among stakeholders

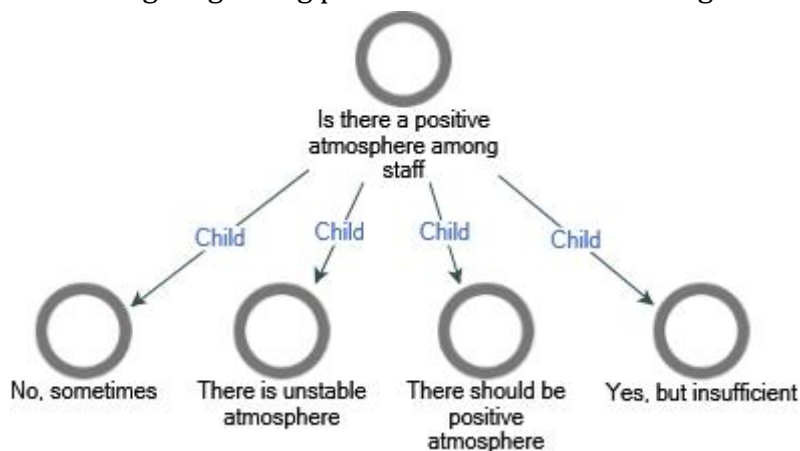


Figure 2: Distribution of positive atmosphere among staff.

Figure 2 shows the themed form of a positive atmosphere among staff. Accordingly, the positive atmosphere created among staff was grouped under the following sub-themes: “unstable”; “insufficient”; “experienced on occasion” and “positive.”

Table 3 – Positive atmosphere among staff

Themes	N	%
Unstable	7	35
Insufficient	6	30
On occasion	6	30
There should be positive atmosphere	1	5

As shown in Table 3, the participants provided their views about a positive environment among staff. Of the academics, 35% stated that the positive atmosphere among workers was unstable, 30% said such an atmosphere did exist on occasion but not enough, and 5% stated that a positive atmosphere needed to be created.

Views of the academics and coordinators are provided below.

There should be a positive atmosphere. (G2)

No, the atmosphere is not positive enough. This is a case of inefficiency in working life due to the negative behaviors of the people around us. Secondary relationships manifest themselves openly. (G3)  
 No. Occasionally, at moderate level. (G9)  
 The atmosphere may change depending on the relationship among the staff. We cannot say it is always there or always absent. (G13)

Figure 3: Job distribution between administrators and staff

Figure 3 – Findings on job distribution in the relationships between administrators and staff

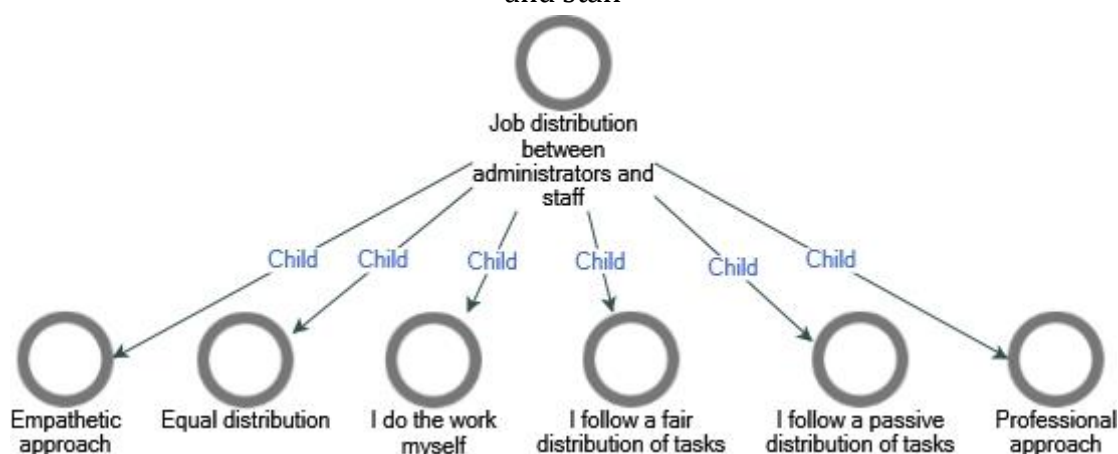


Figure 3 provides the thematic form of the job distribution in the relationships between administrators and staff. Accordingly, the relationships between administrators and staff were categorized as follows: “fair”; “passive”; “empathetic”; “equal distribution”; “doing the work themselves” and “professional distribution of jobs.”

Table 4 – The relationships between administrators and staff regarding job distribution

Theme	N	%
Fairness	9	45
Passive	1	5
Empathetic	1	5
Equal distribution	6	30
I’ll do the work myself	1	5
Professional	2	10

As shown in Table 4, the participants expressed their opinions about the relationships between administrators and staff regarding job distribution. Of the academics, 45% Fairness, 30% said Equal distribution, 5% said passive, empathetic, and I'll do the work myself.

The details of the academics' views are given below.

*There should be an empathetic approach within the bounds of respect and love. (G6)*

*There should be equal distribution. (G7)*

*I have to do other people's work. (G10)*

*There should be equality and fairness. (G14)*

Figure 4 – The findings for the educational administrators' relationships with and views on teachers, students, and parents in the work environment

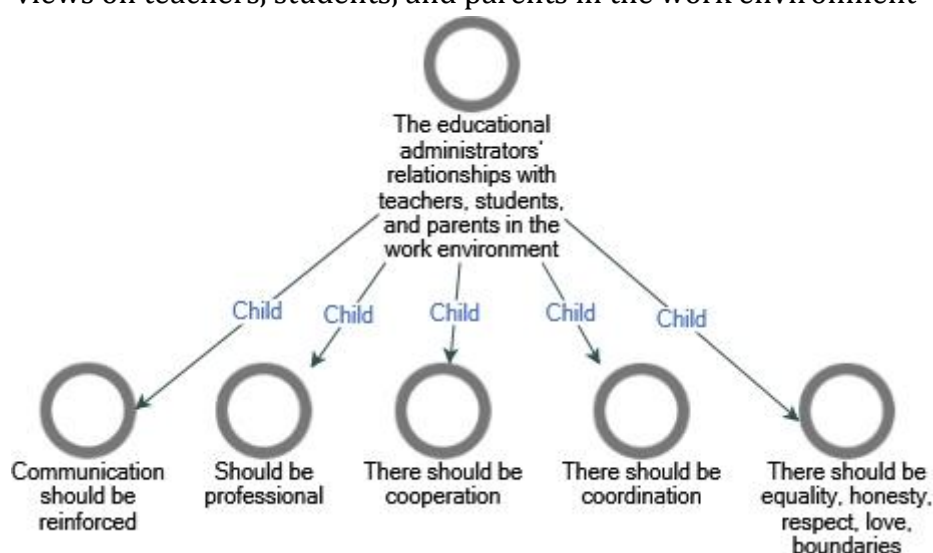


Figure 4: The educational administrators' relationships with teachers, students, and parents in the work environment

As shown in Figure 4, the relationships between teachers, students and parents in the work environment of education directors were categorized in the following sub-themes: equality, honesty, respect, love, boundaries, professional, know-how, reinforcing communication, and coordinated environment.

Table 5 – The educational administrators’ relationships with teachers, students, and parents in the work environment

Theme	N	%
Reinforcing communication	10	50
Know-how	6	30
Equality, honesty, respect, love, boundaries	2	10
Professional	1	5
Coordinated	1	5

As shown in Table 5, the participants expressed their opinions about the educational administrators’ relationships with teachers, students, and parents in the work environment. Of the academics, 50% mentioned reinforcing communication, 10% said equality, honesty, respect, love, boundaries, and 5% said professional and coordinated regarding the educational administrators’ relationships with teachers, students, and parents in the work environment.

The details of the academics’ views are given below.

*Their relationships with teachers, students, and parents should be cooperative and coordinated. (G6)*

*The relationship between administrators and teachers should be very strong. There should be good communication between students and administrators. It is necessary to understand the students, allow them to express themselves, and approach them with empathy. As this is the age of technology, we can easily get in touch with families. (G20)*

*There should be strong communication and accessibility. People should be positive and respect each other. (G4)*

*People should love and respect each other. (G5)*

*Should be well adjusted and coordinated. (G9)*

*Should be professional. (G10)*

Figure 5 – Findings on the physical complaints experienced during sharing (conflict) in interpersonal relationships in their professional life

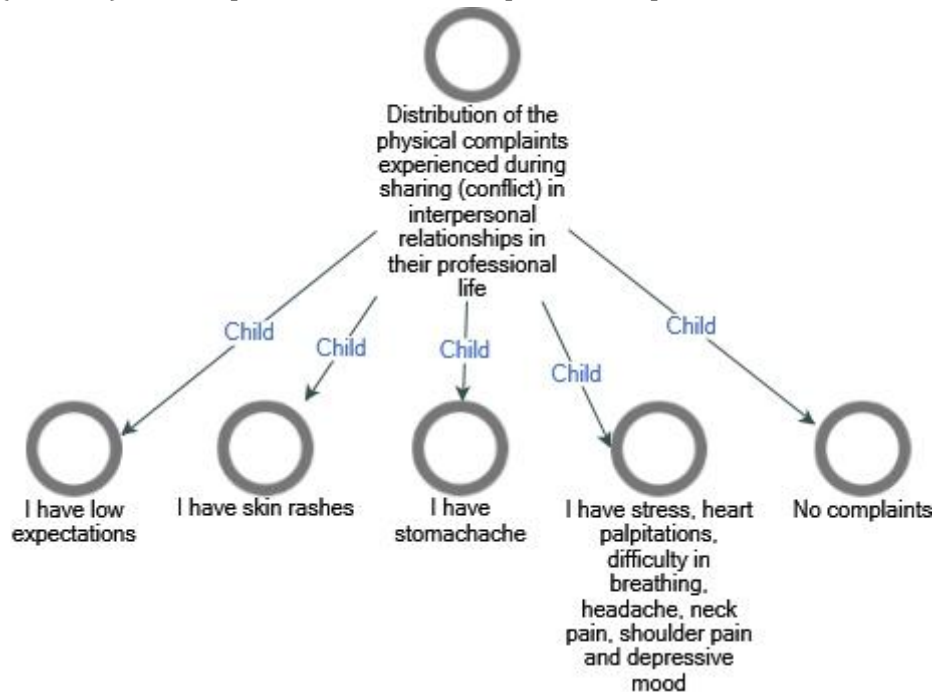


Figure 5: Distribution of the physical complaints experienced during sharing (conflict) in interpersonal relationships in their professional life.

Figure 5 shows the themed form of the physical complaints experienced during sharing (conflict) in interpersonal relationships in their professional life. The following complaints are expressed: “I have low expectations”; “skin rashes”; “no, no complaints”; “stomachache”; “stressful”; “heart palpitations”; “difficulty in breathing”; “headache”; “neck pain”; “shoulder pain” and “depressive mood.”

Table 6 – The physical complaints experienced during sharing (conflict) in interpersonal relationships during professional life

Theme	N	%
I have low expectations	2	10
Skin rash	2	10
No complaints	2	10
Stomachache	4	20
Stressful, heart palpitations, difficulty in breathing, headache, neck pain, shoulder pain and depressive mood	10	50

As shown in Table 6, the participants expressed their views regarding the form of the physical complaints they experienced during sharing (conflict) in interpersonal relationships in their professional life. Of the academics, 50% mentioned stress, heart palpitations, difficulty in breathing, headache, neck pain, shoulder pain, and depressive mood, 20% stomachache, 10% said I have low expectations, I get a skin rash, and no, no complaints.

The details of the academics' views are given below.

*Yes. I get headache, stomachache, and shoulder pain. (G16)*

*No, no complaints. (G2)*

*Stomachache, headache, heart palpitations, difficulty in breathing, fatigue, and skin rash. (G3)*



## Discussion and Conclusion

The relationships between administrators and staff were expressed as fair, communication, positive relations, authoritarian, formal relations, transparent, protective, respect, love, and high trust. Similarly, the research conducted by Öznacar, Kan and Şensoy (2018) clearly shows that the majority of teachers and administrators think that the educational process can progress better by fostering a sense of responsibility and through respectful communication. Teachers here think that administrators can improve their trust in them by giving them responsibilities. The teachers said that the administrators should not make action plans and act with their own ideas only; rather, they should benefit from the experience of other teachers working within the institution or the system. Considering what the participating administrators said when analyzing these views, we can see that they also view the establishment of respectful communication and exchange of ideas between the administrator and the teacher with optimism. In addition to these thoughts, both sides stated that they consider it important to establish a discreet relationship and to cooperate. They pointed out that all these conditions are always necessary for the relationship between administrators and teachers.

The academics expressed their opinions in the form of sub-themes, namely, the positive atmosphere between administrators and staff was unstable, insufficient, and happened on occasion. Similar to our study, Öznacar, Kan, and Şensoy (2018) stated in their study that a positive atmosphere exists between administrators and teachers. These themes indicate that there is a positive atmosphere in schools in general according to both teachers and administrators. A small number in both groups stated that there was no positive atmosphere. Korkmaz (2005) stated that school health is significantly correlated with student achievement; however, although institutional integrity is part of school health, it is not part of the school atmosphere that increases student achievement.

The academics' views on the relationships established by administrators with teachers, students, and families in the working environments were categorized

under the following sub-themes: equality, honesty, respect, love, boundaries, professional, know-how, reinforcing communication, and a coordinated environment. Similar to our study, Aslanargun (2007) has shown that some factors prevent parents from participating in school. The problems that exist between schools and families need to be eliminated to ensure academic achievement.

Regarding the relationships between administrators and staff, the academics cited the following behaviors: fair, passive, empathetic, equal distribution of jobs, doing the work themselves, and professional distribution of jobs. Similarly, the research conducted by Zincirkıran, Yalçınsoy, and Işık (2018) found a significant relationship between perceived supervisor support and job satisfaction; furthermore, perceived supervisor support and job satisfaction increased with workers' age. The physical complaints experienced by the academics during sharing (conflict) in interpersonal relationships in their professional life were as follows: I have low expectations, skin rashes, no, no complaints, stomachache, stress, heart palpitations, difficulty in breathing, headache, neck pain, shoulder pain, and depressive mood. Similarly, in their study titled "The interaction of stress with performance and efficiency in organizations" Gümüştekin and Öztemiz (2005) focused on the concept of stress and its symptoms seen in people. They examined the factors that determine efficiency and performance in enterprises, and discussed the concept of organizational stress and the effects of stress on organizations.

## Recommendations

- The research can be extended with a larger sample by using quantitative methods.
- A mixed method can be used.
- The study group of academics can be extended.
- Opinions of students and parents can be included.
- Opinions of academics in both the Republic of Turkey and TRNC can be taken.

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