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**Childhood Adversity and its Influence on Offspring: Their
Emotional, Psychological and Relational worlds**

Devanshi Desai

**Portfolio Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DPsych)**

**City St George's, University of London
Department of Psychology**

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Declaration

I, Devanshi Desai, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Preface

Childhood is often thought of as a period of innocence, exploration, and discovery – a phase of life where children develop a sense of security in the world. Children enter the world seeking nurturance and connection in the presence of their caregivers, looking to them as the primary source of stability and guidance. Embedded within this dependency, is an unspoken expectation that the family unit and environment will also serve as a place of safety and security – a critical foundation and context for their development and well-being. However, not all children experience this foundational security and safety in the ways they expect or need. The realities of life within families can be complex, shaped by circumstances that disrupt the very environment meant to offer nurturing conditions essential for their well-being and development. When these early environments are disrupted by adversity in childhood, whether through conflict, instability, neglect, abuse, loss – the influence on a child's inner world is profound. This thread – childhood adversity and its influence on children – runs through the three components of this portfolio.

In parts A and B, I approach this theme from a research perspective in two capacities: thesis and journal article respectively, shedding light on the lived experiences of children growing up with interparental conflict. Through an interpretative phenomenological lens, the research components of the portfolio, elucidates how children experience, interpret, respond, and adapt to this adversity experienced in childhood. It uncovers the nuanced ways in which living with this adversity has shaped the inner world of the participants; the implications of living with this adversity for the family dynamics, for the broader childhood experience that was emotionally unfulfilling and how the imprint of this early adversity has shaped their lives in adulthood, both in negative and positive ways.

In part C, I introduce the clinical component of the portfolio. I present a client case study outlining and illustrating my therapeutic work with a man who sought counselling to address

chronic anxiety, depression, and interpersonal difficulties. Working within a schema therapy framework (Young, 1999; Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2006), one aspect of our work together was exploring early life experiences that had shaped his schemas about himself and others and schema modes, reinforcing his patterns of emotional distress and relational difficulties. He described growing up in a home environment that was emotionally inhibited and always tense due to witnessing interparental conflict and violence, growing up with poverty (having to live on a boat) and experiencing severe bullying and abuse at school. Together, we explored how his childhood and adolescence characterized by a spectrum of adverse circumstances led him to experience a deeply engrained sense of fear, insecurity, worthlessness, defectiveness, and mistrust. It emerged that in order to protect himself from these vulnerabilities because of the adverse childhood experiences, he learned to cut off from emotions, suppress them, emotionally withdraw, not assert himself or express his needs, avoid social interactions, behave in a compliant manner, maintaining his difficulties and his view of himself and others. My work with him and his therapeutic journey highlights the profound ways in which childhood adversity, regardless of its specific nature, shapes a child's internal world and continues to influence them well into adulthood.

Therefore, at the heart of this portfolio is a central question: How do childhood experiences of adversity shape an offspring's emotional, psychological, and relational worlds? This question underscores the interconnected nature of the research and clinical components. By exploring this theme, from both an empirical and a therapeutic perspective, albeit slightly differently, this portfolio contributes to a deeper understanding of how childhood adversity reverberates through the lives of individuals, shaping the way they relate with themselves, others, and the world.

Additionally, the work captured in this portfolio is about more than just adversity – it is also about the possibility of transformation and resilience. What transpired in the research component of this portfolio is that the participants came to see their early experience of

adversity, growing up with interparental conflict, as a springboard for personal growth. They learned valuable lessons from their experience – what to do and what not to do – and have strived to differentiate in their own lives. In the clinical component of the portfolio, we can see how through therapy, there is an opportunity to understand, confront the pain of the past and to cultivate new ways of relating to oneself and others.

Ultimately, this portfolio is a contribution to the growing dialogue on the significance of childhood experiences, offering insights into the intricate ways in which it lays the groundwork for an individual's life.

References

Young, J. E. (1999). *Cognitive therapy for personality disorders: A schema-focused approach* (rev. ed.). Sarasota, FL: Professional Resources Press.

PART A

Research study

**The Lived Experience of Adults Reflecting on Growing up with Interparental
Conflict: A Qualitative Study within the Indian Context**

Abstract

Interparental conflict (IPC) is a robust and prevalent family risk factor for numerous problems in different spheres of children's lives (Harold & Sellers, 2018). The influence of IPC on children is well-documented, with substantial quantitative research highlighting its effect. However, qualitative research on children's lived experiences of non-violent forms of IPC remains limited, particularly in contrast to the more established body of work focused solely on domestic violence and more specifically is very limited within an Indian context. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, this study set out to explore the lived experiences of Indian adults reflecting on growing up with IPC. Qualitative data using semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with eight participants were collected. Analysis led to four Group Experiential themes (GETs): "Living in a pressure cooker environment", "Me in between oppositions", "A childhood I didn't have" and "The adult I have become". These GETs and their corresponding sub-themes are discussed in relation to psychological theories, concepts and existing literature. Potential implications for clinical practice have been explored alongside limitations and directions for future research.

Chapter One

1. Introduction

A critical context for a child's development is family (Parke & Buriel, 2006) - archetypal of the initial socialization vehicles in their lives. Interparental relationship serves as a foundation of the family system and the significance of this relationship for a child's emotional, cognitive, psychological and physical development is well recognized (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; Grych & Fincham, 2001). Despite its critical role in shaping the family system and child's development, the interparental relationship is not immune to challenges. One such challenge, is interparental conflict (IPC) - a common, inevitable, yet complex dynamic that significantly influences the family environment and children.

IPC is a robust and prevalent family risk factor for numerous problems in different spheres of children's lives (Harold & Sellars, 2018), constituting to a significant social problem. Family relationships have been identified as the second most common reason for children seeking help (NSPCC, 2018). IPC is found to be a significant contributor to the mental health difficulties of children in nearly half of all cases (Mees, 2017). Furthermore, "child affected by parental relationship distress" (CAPRD) has been introduced in the DSM-5 in the list of "other conditions that may be a focus of clinical attention" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; p. 716), acknowledging the risk and impact this relational issue can have on children. Therefore, it is in the interest of Counselling Psychology to deepen and contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon.

IPC has been operationalized in several ways across the literature by different scholars. Cummings and Davies (2002, p.34) define IPC as "any dispute, disagreement or expression of untoward emotions between the parents". However, since IPC is common and regarded

as a multi-dimensional construct (Harold & Sellars, 2018), it is differentiated from mundane conflict and defined along specific characteristics/dimensions.

Grych & Fincham (1990) defined IPC along different characteristics as: intensity, content, duration, and resolution. Intensity of conflict refers to the degree of negative affect, hostility, or physical aggression expressed. Content refers to the topic of conflict which can differ from those concerning and related to the child to other aspects of the marriage or topics. Duration refers to the length of conflict episodes and lastly, resolution refers to the extent to and manner in which parents resolve the conflict. They argued that conflicts of greater intensity, those that are prolonged, frequent, child-related, and poorly or unresolved are more likely to cause greater distress in children than those that are less intense, short-lived, infrequent, and adequately resolved. Others have defined IPC in terms of destructive or constructive (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Goeke-Morey et al., 2003; McCoy et al., 2009; van El-Dik et al., 2020; Warmouth et al., 2020). Destructive IPC refers to verbal and non-verbal expressions of anger, hostility, physical aggression/violence, avoidance, withdrawal, disengagement, detachment between parents. Constructive IPC refers to characteristics such as co-operation, problem-solving, warmth, physical and verbal affection, support and desire to reach a resolution. Therefore, given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of IPC, the term “IPC”, for the purpose of the literature review is used as an umbrella term and refers to/encompasses one or more of these outlined dimensions of IPC, unless specified.

Although I acknowledge the significance of the multiple conceptualizations and dimensions of IPC in the current body of literature, in the present study, IPC will refer to the overt (characterized by visible and direct manifestations of conflict) and covert (characterized by indirect, subtle manifestations of conflict) (Buehler et al., 1997) conflict between the parents that children experienced but not encompass physical aggression/violence. This is because children’s experiences of physical violence, which represents the extreme end of the continuum of expressed severity (ranging from silence-violence) in IPC has been widely

studied in the domestic violence/ interparental violence literature. However, there is a dearth of qualitative exploration of children's experiences of IPC beyond physical violence, despite the recognition that non-physical, overt or covert forms of conflict also have a bearing on children (Cummings & Davies, 2010; Harold & Sellars, 2018; van Eldik et al., 2020).

The term "child" and "children" throughout this chapter and in the write-up of the present study refers to offspring.

The other terms consistently referred to in the literature review are "internalizing" and "externalizing" problems. Internalizing problems are conceptualized as those that are centrally related to internal psychological environment, particularly emotional difficulties such as anxiety, depression, withdrawal, somatic complaints (Achenbach, 1966; van Eldik et al., 2020). Externalizing problems are conceptualized as those whose central feature is disruptive and disinhibited behaviours that are outwardly and directly observable to others such as aggression, hyperactivity, impulsivity, delinquency (Achenbach, 1966; van Eldik et al., 2020).

1.1 Theoretical Frameworks

1.1.1 Social Learning Theory (SLT)

According to SLT, children learn how to think, behave, and act in the world by means of observing the behaviours and interactions of their parents (Bandura, 1978). Therefore, it is argued that a child's parents' relationship is one of the most influential models observed by children that plays a role in shaping structures and scripts regarding own behaviours and relationships (Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989; Bryant & Conger, 2002).

For example, observing parents' aggressive or hostile behaviour with one another influences children's schemata regarding the acceptability of aggressive strategies, particularly if it is viewed as effective (Bandura, 1978) and may encourage them to adopt similar behaviours of

aggression or hostility in social situations (Margolin, 1998). Indeed, empirical research has indicated children's exposure to interparental aggression relating to their own individual aggressive behaviours with peers (Cantrell et al., 1995; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003). Recent research by Hess (2022) focused on the frequency of IPC and its association with peer problems and prosocial behaviour in children between the ages 7-16. She hypothesized that increased frequency of IPC would be linked with increased peer problems and decreased prosocial behaviour and found support for this. The finding was explained using SLT, such that, upon observing frequent conflicts between parents, children would come to view frequent conflict as an acceptable social behaviour and emulate the commonly observed behaviours in the interparental relationship in the context of school, leading to problems with peers and prosocial behaviour.

SLT also provides an explanation for intergenerational effects of IPC on offspring's marital quality and romantic relationships. Using a longitudinal design, Whitton et al., (2008) tested the SLT based hypothesis that offspring's marital conflict patterns are learned in the family-of-origin. They reported that levels of hostility expressed by parents were found to predict later marital hostility, negatively predict positive engagement, and were linked with poorer marital adjustment in offspring's marital relationship. Cue & Fincham (2010) argued that majority of work relating to intergenerational effects focused on marital quality rather than on pre-marital relationships. Therefore, guided by social learning theory perspective and using a short-term longitudinal design, they focused on examining the effects of IPC on young adult's pre-marital romantic relationship. The findings suggested that IPC positively related to young adults' conflict behaviour towards their partner which in turn was linked to lower relationship quality. Therefore, this study highlighted the role of learned conflict behaviour influencing relationship quality and satisfaction, furthering the evidence for the intergenerational effects of IPC.

Consistent with this, more recent research by Sagkaland & Ozdemir (2019) using a non-western sample of Turkish emerging adults found that frequent, intense, and unresolved IPC was linked to higher levels of similar conflict characteristics in emerging adults' romantic relationship which in turn was related to lower levels of relationship satisfaction. In addition, IPC was also linked with less favourable attitudes towards marriage which in turn was associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction in pre-marital relationships of these young adults. The authors explained the findings as being consistent with the social learning theory perspective that emphasizes on the role of exposure to IPC influential in playing a role in children's conflict behaviour, skills, attitudes that are transferred in their own relationships. Similarly, Shanoora et al., (2020) hypothesized that IPC would have a direct negative relationship with adult's romantic relationship quality. Based on social learning theory, they assumed that exposure to intense IPC, children would have learned conflicted behaviours that they are likely to bring to their own romantic relationships leading to a reduction of the overall quality of their relationship and found support for this in their study.

The above studies focus on the influence of negative interparental interactions on the intergenerational transmission effects in romantic relationships, which fails to address the multidimensional nature of interparental interactions (i.e., overlooking the influence of positive interparental interaction on children). The study by Delevi et al., (2012) addresses this by examining the role of interparental positivity on young adult's conflict management style in their romantic relationships in the context of IPC. Their findings revealed support for intergenerational transmission of conflict management tactics. Exposure to negative IPC was associated with negative conflict management conflict tactics in young adult's own romantic relationships. More importantly, exposure to positive conflict management tactics used by the parents, namely negotiation, was associated with increased use of similar tactics by young adults in their own romantic relationships. However, whilst their study provided evidence for intergenerational transmission of conflict behaviours, including positive interactions, it did not find support for their hypothesis that interparental positivity would have

an additional impact on the conflict management of young adults beyond the impact of IPC. They explained the finding that interparental positivity may have less additional influence on young adults' conflict management than IPC based on the premise that positivity is harder to detect and less salient. They argue that negative events tend to provoke stronger emotional and cognitive impacts, often eliciting more attention and reactions than positive events which may lead to offspring's to be more influenced and affected by negative interparental interactions. This is interesting, as it perhaps points to the limitation of SLT, in that the emphasis on behavioural modelling doesn't fully account for other salient, important, nuanced processes such as children's emotional and cognitive aspects of interparental interactions. In addition, whilst SLT provides a useful explanation of how IPC impacts children in interpersonal and relational domains, it alone is insufficient in explaining the other child outcomes that stem from IPC, such as children's emotional and psychological well-being. Thus, while SLT focuses on behaviour, other theories focusing on children's more salient processes (emotional and cognitive) help provide a more nuanced understanding of how IPC impacts children. I now refer to these in the following two sections.

1.1.2 Cognitive-Contextual Framework

The cognitive-contextual framework (Grych & Fincham, 1990) highlights the processes that occur when children witness IPC, thereby explaining the underlying mechanisms for the association between IPC and its impact on children. The framework focusses on the role of cognition and posits that the children's cognitive processing and contextual factors shape their perception of and response to IPC.

According to Grych & Fincham (1990), IPC spurs "three questions for children: "What is happening?", "Why is it happening?", "What can I do about it?" (p.281), the answers to which are transpired via primary and secondary processing. In primary processing, children attend to the conflict and interpret information regarding its negative aspects, potential threat, and personal significance. Their perception of conflict, thereby, leads to the

evaluation of threat - appraising how threatening or benign the conflict is to them, their parents, their parents' marital status or others. The authors argue that if the conflict is not appraised as threatening or deemed as important, the child's attention may move away from it, without additional processing and the conflict may no longer affect them. However, if the conflict is appraised as threatening, significant or personally relevant, further processing (secondary) is likely to take place. Having said that, primary processing may directly result in immediate affect and behaviour in cases where children are too young and have not yet developed the cognitive abilities essential for secondary processing, thereby only relying on primary processing. This highlights how primary processing may be influenced by developmental level of a child.

Secondary processing encompasses children's subjective evaluation of why the conflict is happening (casual attribution) and who is responsible for it (responsibility attribution). The casual attributions depend on dimensions such as locus (the extent to which the cause is attributed to oneself, other people, or external factors), stability (how likely the cause is to persist in the future) and globality (the extent to which the cause is perceived to impact other domains of one's life) (Grych & Fincham, 1990). The authors argue that if IPC is attributed as being caused by the children themselves rather than attributing the cause of the conflict to one or both parents or to external factors, children may be more likely to be distressed due to the perceived self-relevance in the situation. Furthermore, if children perceive conflict as being caused by a stable, global factor as opposed to an unstable, specific factor, they are more likely to be distressed due to the perceived recurrence in the future, permanence and likelihood of the situation influencing various domains of family life. Once the casual attribution is made, the framework suggests children make responsibility attributions, which involves formulating judgments regarding who is responsible and to be blamed for the conflict. Responsibility and blame attributions are suggested to be grounded on various principles such as intention, motivation, capacity, control etc. Having said that, both casual and responsibility attributions are likely to change with age/development level. Principally in

research practice, primary and secondary processing is operationalized by their respective, related cognitive appraisals - threat and self-blame appraisals.

Another component of the framework is the wider, contextual factors, namely the distal and proximal context that may either buffer or intensify the children's processing/appraisals of and responses to IPC. The distal context refers to the "relatively stable or slowly changing factors" (Grych & Fincham 1990, p.279) and involves aspects such as children's previous experience and memory of IPC, perceived emotional climate of the family, child's temperament, and gender. The proximal context refers to "the thoughts and feelings experienced by the children immediately before their processing of the conflict episode" (Grych & Fincham 1990, p.279) that could rapidly change based on aspects such as the children's expectations for the course of the conflict and their mood.

The empirical literature and evidence guided by the cognitive-contextual framework is explored in section 1.2.2.1

1.1.3 Emotional Security Hypothesis

Another process-oriented theory that explains the underlying mechanisms by which IPC has an impact on children is the emotional security hypothesis (EST) (Davies & Cummings, 1994). It was originally developed to address the question "how and why conflict and hostility between parents is associated with children's trajectories of mental health" (Davies & Martin, 2013; p. 1435).

The framework by Grych & Fincham (1990) mainly focused on the role of cognitions, where affect was more secondary. Thus, EST was developed to rather emphasize on the primacy of emotionality, predominantly the importance of emotional security to children's responses in face of IPC. Both EST and attachment theory assume that the quality of parent-child relationship influences the children's ability to function adaptively either by strengthening or

weakening their sense of security within the parent-child dynamic, implicating that a children's emotional security is derived from their experiences with their parents. However, EST highlights that preserving security is relevant beyond the parent-child subsystem and proposes that children's emotional security also derives from the quality of interparental relationship and the family as a whole. It posits that children foster their own distinct sense of security in the interparental subsystem and the broader family unit. Overall, the central tenet of EST is to preserve protection, safety, and security within the emotionally laden context of IPC, which is a salient and prominent goal for children. With repeated exposure to IPC involving characteristics such as verbal and physical aggression, disengagement amongst parents, conflict related to children, unresolved closings, this goal is at risk.

Within EST, repeated exposure to IPC is proposed to increase children's concerns regarding security in the interparental relationship and family. This, in turn, threatens their ability to achieve and preserve emotional security, which triggers three interrelated broad emotional and behavioural response processes: 1) greater *emotional reactivity*, characterized by intense, prolonged, and dysregulated arousal and distress in face of IPC (e.g., fear, hypervigilance, sadness etc.) 2) *regulation of conflict exposure*, characterized by enhanced over-controlling (mediation, involvement, comforting) or avoidance (escaping, withdrawing, distancing) - attempts in face of IPC that serve to regulate, reduce or terminate the conflict and 3) negative *internal representations* of the significance and consequences of IPC on their own well-being as well as the welfare of the family.

The empirical literature and evidence guided by EST is explored in section 1.2.2.2.

1.1.4 Family systems theory

FST incorporates a range of models that are built around a common set of principles concerning family dynamics (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). According to FST, the family is conceptualized as a social system or entity comprising of multiple subsystems such as the marital, parent-child, sibling (Minuchin, 1974) that are intricately interconnected and interdependent. It emphasizes on how disturbances in one subsystem indirectly influences the other.

Triangulation is a family systems concept that refers to the involvement of a third person (a child) in a dyadic conflict (parental conflict) to defuse stress, tension or conflict that exists between them (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). Children could either be involved and drawn into IPC by their parents or freely enter themselves voluntarily (Buchanan & Waizenhofer, 2001). Alternatively, triangulation has also been conceptualized as children feeling caught in the middle or pressured to take sides even if they are not involved in the IPC (Keirg & Swanson, 2010). Research has implicated the association between IPC and triangulation, with increased IPC resulting in increased likelihood of triangulation (Camisasca et al., 2019). In addition, triangulation has been shown to impact child maladjustment outcomes (Beuhler & Welsh, 2009; Fosco et al., 2015). Moreover, empirical evidence has demonstrated that triangulation is a mechanism linking IPC and children's maladjustment (Grych et al., 2004; Franck & Buehler, 2007; Fosco & Grych, 2008, Wang et al., 2023), suggesting that involvement in conflict is a crucial means through which risk from IPC can be conferred to children. Beyond this, triangulation has also been shown to influence emotional reactivity to IPC and psychological adjustment outcomes (Buehler & Welsh, 2009; Davies et al., 2015) as well as undermining closeness between parent-child relationship (Fosco & Grych, 2010; Fosco et al., 2014).

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Search Strategy

The review is based on a comprehensive search, identifying the relevant literature through databases such as, PsychArticles, PubMed and Google Scholar. The preliminary search began by using different combinations of several keywords such as “interparental conflict”, “children”, “adolescents” “adults”, “young adults”. However, the search produced too many relevant items due to the numerous factors being identified/examined in the literature, which was overwhelming for the scope of this review. Due to this complexity, only quantitative literature focusing on children’s responses was selected. The reason for this was because children’s own processes and responses are considered being one of the most proximal factors related to their own functioning and adjustment (Rhoades, 2008). There was some interesting literature on children’s physiological responses which was initially considered but was excluded. This is because it was deemed to be beyond the scope of this review, and it was felt that focusing on the psychological processes and responses was more relevant. Therefore, a more focused search using a combination of key words “interparental conflict”, “emotional security”, and “cognitive appraisals” was conducted. The results of the search are illustrated in Figure 1. Moreover, due to the preliminary search highlighting the sheer volume of quantitative research, an additional search using a combination of keywords including “interparental conflict” “children”, “adolescents”, “adults”, “qualitative” was also carried out. As physical violence in the domestic violence literature shares a conceptual overlap with destructive parental conflict style, these studies were selected for the review of qualitative literature in the topic area. The results of the search are illustrated in Figure 2. To note, literature reviewed was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and those that were published in the English language. The next section will thereby begin by outlining the quantitative literature in the area – namely the role of children’s processes only (emotional security, cognitive appraisals) in the link between IPC and child outcomes.

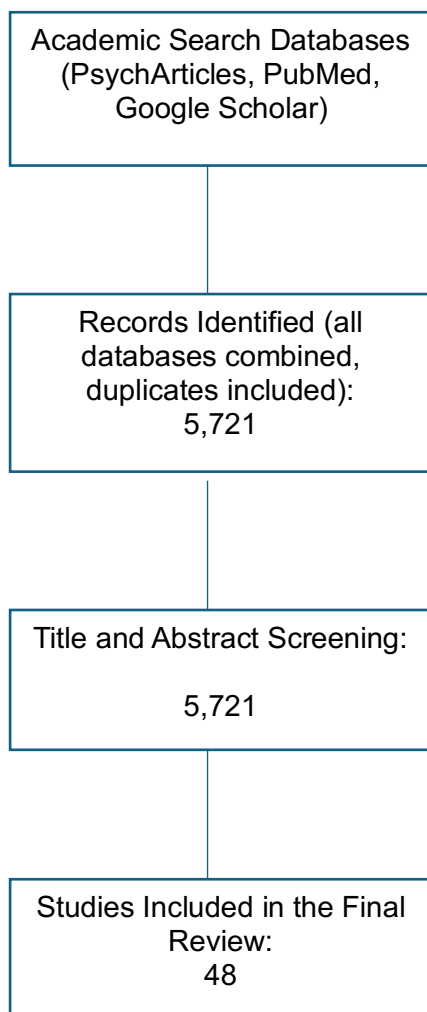


Figure (1) : Flowchart of the online database search for quantitative literature (conducted between 2022-2024)

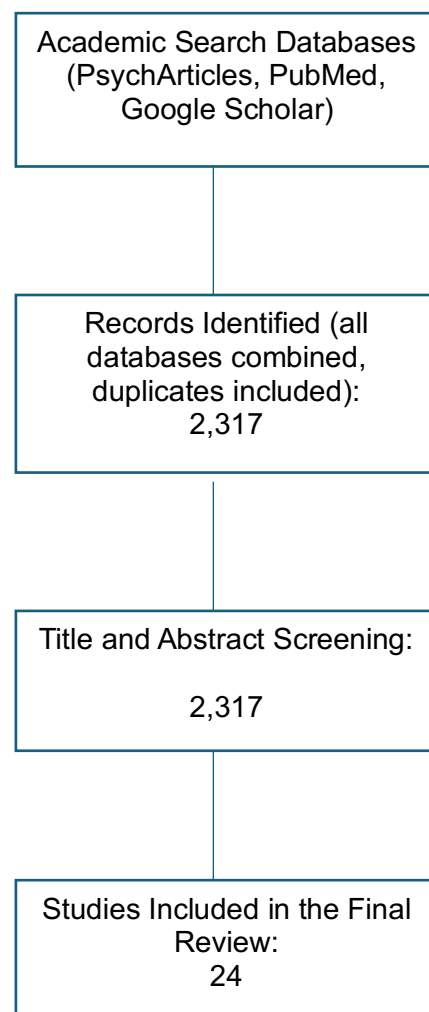


Figure (2) : Flowchart of the online database search for qualitative literature (conducted between 2022-2024)

1.2.2 Quantitative Research

1.2.2.1 The role of children's cognitive appraisals

Children's perceptions about IPC play an important role in their adjustment (Grych & Fincham, 1990) and therefore, the role of cognitive appraisals (i.e., threat and self-blame) has been extensively studied by various researchers, which I consider below.

Using data from two samples (children from community and women's shelter, aged between 10-14), Grych et al., (2000) examined the role of cognitive appraisals in the link between IPC and children's adjustment outcomes. Children reported on the Conflict Properties sub-scale of the Children's Perception of IPC (CPIC) assessing the exposure to IPC as well as the Perceived Threat and Self-blame subscales from the CPIC assessing cognitive appraisals. Particular measures assessing children's internalizing and externalizing problems were completed by children, mothers, and teachers. The authors found that perceived threat and self-blame mediated the link between IPC and internalizing problems for boys in both the samples. Similar results were found for the role of perceived threat for girls; however, the mediational role of self-blame was found only in the shelter sample. In addition, cognitive appraisals did not mediate the link between IPC and externalizing problems in either sample for boys or girls.

Gerard et al., (2005) operationalized IPC and measured the construct on the following dimensions: overt hostility, triangulation and intensity of conflict using child and parents reports and examined cognitive appraisals as a mediating variable linking IPC and children's maladjustment. The authors also considered the influence of contextual factors such as gender and family structure (i.e., children living with married parents or with divorced/separated mother) in the linkage among IPC, appraisals, and children's maladjustment. Similar to Grych et al., (2002), the findings indicated stronger mediational role of perceived threat and self-blame for internalizing problems than externalizing problems. With respect to gender, the association between self-blame and internalizing

problems was stronger for girls than boys. With regards to family structure, the path between IPC and perceived threat was stronger for children living with married parents. Furthermore, similar results concerning greater evidence for the mediational role of perceived threat and self-blame for internalizing problems than externalizing problems in the context of IPC was replicated in the study by McDonald & Grych (2006) in their sample of children aged 7-9 years, indicating that cognitive appraisals function similarly in younger children.

Siffert & Schwarz (2011) focused on assessing a specific conflict dimension: conflict resolution and the mediational role of cognitive appraisals in the link between IPC and children's adjustment. They considered two types of IPC resolution styles (conflict engagement and withdrawal) and found that perceived threat acted as a robust mediator of internalizing problems than externalizing problems in their sample of children aged between 9-12 years. However, self-blame did not mediate the link between negative IPC resolution styles and internalizing, externalizing problems. The authors argued that this could be perhaps due to the low variance of the self-blame subscale found in their study (i.e., most children did not attribute the IPC to themselves). In addition, they examined whether gender differentially influenced the mediational pathway and found no gender differences.

Camisasca et al., (2019) focused on another important conflict dimension; content of conflict and examined the role of children's cognitive appraisals in the association between two types of IPC (child-related conflict versus adult-related conflict) and children's adjustment. Higher levels of both adult-related and child-related conflict was associated with higher levels of perceived threat and self-blame and with greater internalizing and externalizing problems in children. Furthermore, when considering the mediational role of cognitive appraisals, distinct effects were noted of adult-related and child-related conflicts on cognitive appraisals and children's adjustment. Higher levels of adult-related conflict predicted high levels of children's internalizing problems through the mediational role of perceived threat whereas higher levels of child-related conflict predicted high levels of both internalizing and

externalizing problems through the mediational role of perceived threat as well as self-blame. This finding suggests that perhaps child-related conflict has stronger negative impact and poses as a significant risk factor for children's cognitive appraisals and adjustment problems compared to adult-related conflict.

Whilst there is support for the mediational role of cognitive appraisals for younger children and adolescents, very few scholars have considered its role among adults. Keeports & Pittman (2015) explored whether threat appraisals and self-blame explain the link between IPC and internalizing problems using a sample of young adults (18-21). Rather than assessing broader indices of internalizing problems, the authors specifically assessed levels of depression and anxiety, enabling a clearer differentiation between them that could perhaps reveal additional information which might have been missed when internalizing symptoms are grouped into a single category. Like research with young children and adolescents, threat appraisals and self-blame mediated the link between IPC and internalizing symptoms in their sample of young adults. Specifically, threat appraisals were found to be a key mediator between IPC and depression rather than anxiety whilst self-blame was found to be a key mediator between IPC and anxiety rather than depression. This finding, therefore, elucidates how specific appraisals influence the distinct pathways for depression and anxiety problems in children in the context of IPC.

Studies discussed above were all cross-sectional, which only tells us about concurrent relations and lacks offering evidence about the temporal and causal associations of the constructs, warranting the need for longitudinal studies. Indeed, longitudinal studies have also explored the link between IPC, cognitive appraisals and children's internalizing and externalizing problems and found support for the mediational role of threat appraisals and self-blame (Grych et al., 2003; Shelton & Harold, 2008; Ablow et al., 2009; Fosco & Fienberg, 2015, Fosco et al., 2023). Furthermore, most of these studies predominantly only focus on one aspect of children's maladaptive functioning (i.e., internalizing, and

externalizing problems) when considering the role of cognitive appraisals as an intervening mechanism in the context of IPC. Other studies have also provided support for the mediating role of cognitive appraisals in the link between IPC and other outcome difficulties among children such as physical health (El-Sheikh & Harger, 2001), academic attainment (Harold et al., 2007), dating behaviours (Kim et al., 2008), dating violence perpetration and victimization (Tschann et al., 2009), affective well-being (Xin et al., 2009; Fosco & Lydon-Staley, 2019), self-esteem (Siffert et al., 2012), substance use (Fosco & Fienberg, 2018), and peer relationships (Weymouth et al., 2019).

Apart from only considering the role of cognitive appraisals as a mediating variable between IPC and child problems, the cognitive-contextual framework also highlights the wider, distal factors that play a role in shaping children's appraisals of IPC. Thus, other empirical work has focused on IPC and the role of cognitive appraisals in the context of broader family characteristics. Using a sample of adolescents, Grych et al., (2004) found that parent-adolescent closeness was associated with lower threat and self-blame appraisals in the context of IPC. The findings from the study by DeBoard-Lucas et al., (2010) revealed that mothers' coercive/controlling and unsupportive parenting amplified the association between IPC and children's self-blame, whereas emotionally supportive parenting diminished this association. Additionally, those children who were less securely attached with their parents, specifically fathers, were more likely to find IPC as threatening and tended to blame themselves more. Children's secure attachment with fathers was associated with less threat and self-blame. Selcuk et al., (2020) found that higher psychological control and lower child attachment security was associated with higher threat and self-blame appraisals in the context of IPC. These studies indicate how family relationships change the way children appraise IPC.

Other studies have considered the role of wider family processes on children's appraisals in the context of IPC. Fosco & Grych (2007) focused on emotional expression in the family and

how that influences children's appraisals. Children were more likely to self-blame but did not experience an increased sense of threat in families where the emotional climate was expressed as exhibiting high negative affect and low positive affect. Family cohesion, another family level process, which refers to the emotional bonding family members across the system have towards each other (Olson et al., 1982) has been considered by a few researchers. Lindahl & Malik (2011) considered the role of family cohesion in the link between different conflict styles (Harmonious, Disengaged, Conflictual-Expressive and Conflictual Hostile) and children's appraisals. When family cohesiveness was high, there were no differences between the different conflict groups in perceived threat or self-blame. However, at low levels of cohesiveness, children from the Harmonious and Conflictual-Hostile group reported higher levels of threat compared to the Conflictual Expressive group, while children in both Conflictual-Expressive and Conflictual-Hostile reported greater self-blame than the Disengaged group. This study contrasts with Fosco & Grych (2007) who did not find family level positivity influencing the link between IPC and children's threat appraisals. It may be that addressing different aspects of conflict styles aided and captured additional information relevant to children's threat appraisals in the study by Lindahl & Malik (2011). Therefore, this study demonstrated how different conflict styles can differentially influence children's appraisals, depending on the wider family context in which IPC occurs.

A daily-diary study by Fosco et al., (2021) in their sample of adolescents provided support for the role of family cohesion as a buffering factor in the context of IPC. On days where family cohesiveness was high, adolescents were less likely to appraise IPC as threatening or blame themselves. On days where family cohesiveness was low, they experienced more threat and self-blame. Fosco et al., (2023) in their longitudinal study also found support for the role of positive family climate (as operationalized by family cohesion and organization) as a buffering factor in the link between IPC and threat appraisals. Their findings revealed that adolescents who experienced declines in positive family climate and rise in IPC over time exhibited the highest threat appraisals. However, adolescents who experienced either

maintained or increased positive family climate over time had lower threat appraisals, despite increasing IPC.

1.2.2.2 The role of children's emotional security

Another salient child-related response that is regarded as a significant risk factor for children's maladjustment in the context of IPC is their emotional security. Numerous empirical studies have examined its role, which I now present below.

Early landmark cross-sectional research (Davies & Cummings, 1998) and short-term longitudinal studies (Davies et al., 2002; Harold et al., 2004; Cummings et al., 2006) have provided support for emotional security (evidenced by emotional reactivity, regulation of exposure, and internal representations) as an intervening mechanism (i.e. as a mediator) of the link between IPC and children's internalizing and externalizing problems even when other factors such as threat appraisals, self-blame attributions, security about parenting were considered.

Cummings et al., (2012) extended the demonstration of the relationship between IPC, emotional security, and child adjustment using a long-term longitudinal design. The authors examined IPC when children were in kindergarten (T1), children's emotional security in the early school years (T2) and internalizing and externalizing problems in adolescence (T3). IPC was assessed using parents reports on the Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scale (CPS), capturing the dimensions of IPC such as frequency, severity, resolution, efficacy as well as conflict behaviours. In addition, a problem-solving interaction task was employed as an observational assessment of IPC that the parents engaged in, and the interactions were recorded for coding. Emotional security was assessed by a parent report of children's emotional security using Security in the Marital Subsystem- Parent Report Inventory (Davies et al., 2002). Child adjustment (i.e., internalizing and externalizing symptoms) was assessed by Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL), completed by parents along with adolescents

completing the Center for Epidemiological Studies- Depression Scale (CES-D) and the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale. The findings revealed that IPC predicted children's emotional insecurity at T2, even when controlling for emotional insecurity at T1, which in turn was associated to both internalizing and externalizing problems in adolescence, even when controlling for adjustment indicators at T2. Therefore, this study furthered the evidence for emotional security as an explanatory mechanism for the effects of IPC on children's internalizing and externalizing problems, by implicating that this relationship holds across developmental periods and for long periods of time. It highlighted the significance of early experiential history of IPC on children's subsequent functioning. Despite the strength of this study in elucidating a developmental support for EST, emotional security as a construct was assessed via parental reports. Relying on parental data seems limiting as parents may lack full awareness of their children's experiences and thus, children's experiences could perhaps differ from the parent's perception.

Relying on children reports of emotional security, Davies et al., (2016) examined the role of emotional security as a mediator between specific parameters of IPC (hostility and dysphoria) and children's adjustment across five measurement waves spanning childhood through adolescence, with the first beginning from when children were in kindergarten. Across the five waves, parents participated in an IPC interaction task which was recorded for coding. Interparental hostility and dysphoria was assessed by trained coders rating the interparental interactions in the observational assessment using the dimensional scales from the System for Coding Interactions in Dyads (SCID). Emotional security in the interparental relationship was assessed at Wave 1 and 2 using a modified, younger child version of the Security in the Interparental Subsystem (SIS- YC; Davies et al., 2002) due to the relatively young age of children in this phase. MacArthur Story Stem Battery- Revised (MSSB-R) was used for assessing the insecure representations of the interparental relationship as SIS-YC does not contain this measure. Emotional security for adolescents was assessed using the original SIS questionnaire at waves 3, 4 & 5. Psychological adjustment was assessed using

the CBCL, completed by parents. The findings demonstrated that interparental hostility and dysphoria each predicted subsequent increases in emotional insecurity, which in turn predicted greater increases in psychological problems, particularly during adolescence. In addition, interparental dysphoria was found to be a more consistent predictor of the mediational pathway than interparental hostility. The authors also tested child gender as a moderator by splitting the data into subsamples of girls and boys and found no significant difference for the mediational path in the context of both interparental hostility and interparental dysphoria.

In a different paper by Davies et al., (2016), the authors examined the mediational pathway involving three distinct forms of IPC (i.e. hostility, disengagement and uncooperative), emotional security and externalizing problems, using a longitudinal (three measurement occasions annually), multi-method and multi-informant measurement approach across two studies. In study 1, the sample involved pre-school children and their parents and in study 2, the sample involved young adolescents and their parents. The results of study 1 indicated that interparental hostility significantly predicted greater emotional insecurity in children at wave 2 (i.e., over a one-year period), which in turn predicted greater externalizing problems at wave 3, whereas the mediational pathway involving disengagement and uncooperative forms of conflict, emotional security and externalizing problems were not significant. The results of study 2 indicated that high levels of interparental hostility and disengagement predicted greater adolescent emotional insecurity, which in turn predicted greater externalizing problems. Across both studies, interparental hostility predicted insecurity more strongly than disengagement and uncooperative IPC. Furthermore, in study 2, disengagement predicted the mediational pathway involving adolescent emotional insecurity and externalizing problems more strongly than uncooperative IPC. This study therefore highlights the relative strength of different forms of negative conflict and its role in the mediational pathway involving emotional security and child outcomes.

de Silva et al., (2021) using an Italian sample of adolescents explored three types of adolescent emotional security (interparental, parent-child, family) and their role in the association between destructive IPC and adolescents' adjustment (assessing difficulties relating to internalizing and externalizing difficulties using the Strengths and Difficulties Scale (SDS). The results indicated that adolescent's emotional insecurity in the interparental relationship and parent-child relationship played a role in the association between IPC and adolescents adjustment problems, with emotional insecurity within the interparental relationship rather than emotional insecurity in the family as the strongest predictor. However, the effects of adolescent's insecurity in the interparental relationship and about the parent-child relationship were negligible.

O'Hara et al., (2024) also examined the different forms of emotional security as de Silva et al., (2021) but examined whether its role was differentially associated with mental health problems for adolescents in varying family structures (i.e. married or divorced/separated families) in the context of IPC. Their findings revealed that IPC predicted all forms of emotional insecurity. In addition, all forms of emotional insecurity also predicted greater mental health problems. These relationships followed similar patterns across family structures (i.e. for adolescents from married or separated/divorced families), with just a couple of exceptions when considering specific domains of child outcomes or specific forms of emotional insecurity.

Xiang et al., (2022) examined emotional security as a mediator between IPC (particularly interparental violence (IPV)) and children's adjustment outcomes (internalizing, externalizing problems, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS)) in the Chinese context in their sample of young adolescents. In addition, they also examined the role of one parent-child factor, parental warmth as a potentiating factor of the mediational pathway, given the importance of broader familial context highlighted in EST. IPV was assessed using the Chinese version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, emotional security was assessed

using a validated, Chinese version of SIS, parental warmth was assessed using a validated, Chinese version of Ghent Parental Behaviour Scale. The Chinese version of PTSD Checklist-Civilian and CBCL was used to measure adolescent adjustment outcomes. All measures were completed solely by adolescents. The findings indicated that emotional insecurity partially mediated the relationship between IPV and all three adjustment outcomes, with stronger effects on internalizing problems and PTSS than externalizing problems. In addition, findings revealed that parental warmth did not diminish the impact of IPV on emotional insecurity, however, it did act as a potentiating factor between the emotional security and child adjustment link, particularly for internalizing and externalizing problems. That is, for adolescents who exhibited greater emotional insecurity, high parental warmth was less likely to predict internalizing and externalizing problems than those with low parental warmth. Another study conducted within a Chinese context, using a multi-informant measurement approach (data from adolescents, parents, and teachers) found that destructive IPC positively predicted greater emotional insecurity, which in turn, predicted greater emotional and behavioural problems amongst adolescents from primary and junior high school (Yang et al., 2022).

The studies presented above have mainly focused on negative IPC behaviours/styles, providing a unidimensional picture which seems limiting. McCoy et al., (2009) in their longitudinal study considered both constructive conflict (positive conflict style) and destructive IPC to explore the differential impact on children's prosocial behaviour, with emotional security as a mediating variable. The findings revealed that emotional security was an intervening process linking both forms of IPC and prosocial behaviour, albeit differently. Constructive IPC enhanced emotional security at time 2, which in turn predicted increased prosocial behaviour at time 3. Conversely, destructive IPC predicted decreased emotional security at time 2, which in turn predicted decreased prosocial behaviour at time 3. This study thereby highlighted that IPC could have both positive and negative effects, depending on how the conflict is managed and advanced the literature that has

predominantly focused on understanding emotional security and children's functioning only in the context of negative conflict behaviours/styles. Similarly, Lee et al., (2019) considered the role of differential IPC (constructive and destructive), emotional security and development outcomes of young children in the context of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings indicated that destructive conflict was associated with high levels of child problems assessed using Behaviour Problems Index for internalizing and externalizing problems, via increased levels of emotional insecurity in children. Conversely, constructive conflict was associated with lower levels of child problems, via reduced emotional insecurity in children. However, none of the measures in both these studies involved child reports. In addition, constructive and destructive IPC as predictors were analysed separately and not considered together in these studies. Given that both these types/styles of conflict can co-occur together, when only considering and analysing their effects separately, it's hard to tell if both play an equally important role influencing emotional security and child outcomes or one type is more significant than the other.

Davies, Martin & Cicchetti (2012) using children's reports on emotional security in study 1 of their paper involving a sample of adolescents, examined the joint role of constructive and destructive IPC in predicting emotional security and adjustment outcomes (internalizing and externalizing problems). The findings revealed that destructive IPC significantly predicted adolescents' increases in emotional insecurity which, in turn was associated with greater internalizing and externalizing symptoms, with the inclusion of constructive IPC as a predictor. Conversely, constructive IPC failed to predict emotional security and subsequently psychological symptoms in the mediational pathway with the inclusion of destructive IPC. Thus, emotional security was identified as a unique mediator underlying destructive conflict and children's internalizing and externalizing problems when considering both the forms of conflict together. The authors interpreted this finding considering children's heightened exposure to destructive IPC assuming primacy in predicting and organizing children's distress and emotional security compared to constructive interparental interactions.

I would like to note that most studies in the literature have combined the elements of emotional security: emotional reactivity, behavioural/emotional regulation, internal representations and considered it is a latent homogenous construct while examining its role. However, there are a few that have assessed/considered some of these elements independently, which I would like to briefly present. Davies, Cichetti, Martin (2012) examined the specific forms of emotional reactivity (i.e., fearful, sad, angry) to IPC and its role as an explanatory mechanism in pathways between IPC (i.e. aggression) and child psychological problems (i.e., internalizing, and externalizing problems using multi-method and multi-informant measurement approaches). The findings demonstrated the strongest support for children's fearful reactivity to conflict than sad and angry reactivity as an intervening mechanism in the link between IPC and children's psychological problems which remained stable across different informants and following consideration of other variables such as child sex and socio-economic status.

Warmuth et al., (2018) examined children's behavioural dysregulation specifically in the context of destructive conflict and children internalizing and externalizing behaviours and found support for its mediating role. Sturge-Apple et al., (2008) reported on the mediating role of children's insecure internal representations of interparental and parent-child relationships linking IPC and emotional and classroom engagement difficulties. Coe et al., (2018) considered the role of family instability as a potentiating factor in its relation to the pathway involving destructive IPC, children's internal representations of insecurity in the family system and school maladjustment, given the role of broader family climate serving as a distal factor influencing emotional security. The findings suggested that the mediational pathway varied significantly depending on the level of family stability. That is, IPC predicted greater insecure internal family representations which, in turn predicted greater problems in school in the context of those with heightened family instability.

Literature discussed in this section largely presents evidence for emotional security as an intervening mechanism between IPC and a specific domain of child outcomes, particularly focused on internalizing and externalizing problems. However, other studies have also provided evidence for the mediating role of emotional security in the link between IPC and other child outcomes such as instability in friendships (Schwarz et al., 2012), sleep problems (Kelly & El-Sheikh, 2013), construction of negative self-representations (Silva et al., 2016), decline in social competence (Davies et al., 2018), internet addiction (Zhou et al., 2017), poor parent-adolescent communication (Mills et al., 2021). This implicates the role of emotional security more widely.

1.2.3 Qualitative Research

While qualitative research around IPC is scarce relative to the quantitative literature, the literature search identified qualitative studies examining children's experiences and perspectives of living with parental domestic violence (DV) / interparental violence (IPV) which will now be considered below.

Buckley, Holt & Whelan (2007) conducted a qualitative study that explored the impact of IPV on 22 children and young people in Ireland. The data was gathered through focus groups and five themes emerged from the data analysis. Under the first theme, "anxiety, fear and dread", children referred to their own and others' (i.e., mothers, siblings) sense of safety and security being impacted and that the experience of DV instilled fear and dread in them. They reported general tension and uneasy atmosphere at home and the constant state of apprehension as they learned to anticipate signs or triggers of violence. The second theme, "loss of confidence and self-esteem, stigma and secrecy", indicated children's feelings of being different that impacted their confidence and self-esteem, their tendency to conceal what was going on at home with peers out of fear of being bullied. Findings also indicated their reluctance to trust and share their situation, in case this was leaked, thereby, keeping it a secret.

The third theme, “relationships with parents and peers”, indicated that children felt torn and caught in the middle between their parents, assumed responsibility to stop the violence, intervene or mediate. In addition, children reported ambivalent relationships with their fathers. Their ability to make and retain friendships at school were impacted as they were cautious of becoming close to their peers out of shame, fear of rejection owing to the home circumstances. “Educational experiences” as a fourth theme revealed how most children recalled school not being positive or successful experience, with one exception who saw school as a “safe place”. Children reported difficulties in concentrating, producing homework in the context of a chaotic household that also resulted in conflict with teachers. The last theme spoke more to what would be helpful for children experiencing DV (what children and young people want from services), giving them a voice to express their needs, desires, and opinions about how they can be supported. Whilst the study’s findings are helpful in highlighting the impacts of DV elicited by children themselves, Buckley et al., (2007) recruited the participants solely through refuges. Studying the children’s experiences of DV solely with participants from refuges is limiting as it only represents a subsection of those experiencing DV.

Using a community-based sample of 19 children, aged between 10-19, the study by Stanley, Miller & Foster (2012) explored their perspectives on DV using focus groups along with interviews by 11 survivors as well as 10 perpetrators. Of most relevance to the present study, the second theme, “impact of domestic violence on children and young people” indicated young children’s experience of anger, powerlessness, learned aggressive behaviours, and feeling enforced to embrace adult roles and responsibilities. In addition, similar to the findings by Buckley et al., (2007), the young children highlighted the ways in which DV impacted educational attainment such as poor concentration and lowered attendance. The other themes identified in the study, “disclosing and acknowledging domestic violence” and “expectations and experiences of practitioners” mainly captured the voices of either the survivors and perpetrators, with very little focus on the children’s voices

and provide an account of those aspects that they distinguish as restricting or facilitating their engagement with others. Thus, these findings do not specifically augment our understanding of the experiential account of children's experiences. Moreover, both the studies discussed so far, have used focus groups to elicit material from children which can be critiqued for its risk of social desirability, fostering consensus, or silencing of some children due to the presence of dominant voices amongst other group dynamic processes.

Swanston, Bowyer & Vetere (2014) explored children's experiences of parental DV using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to interpret the data gathered from one-to-one semi-structured interviews. From the children's perspective, two themes emerged, "domestic violence through the eyes of children" and "learning from children's experiences". Under the first theme, similar to Buckley et al., (2007), the findings showed that children experienced a pervasive sense of fear and threat concerning themselves or their mothers and siblings and found themselves constantly alert, anticipating and predicting what might happen. In addition, the findings revealed a sense of loss or deprivation of a normal childhood experienced by the children as well as neglect, missed opportunities to be cared for and nurtured, which they realized only after leaving the environment. Under the second theme, children indicated diminished confidence and trust in the capacity of adults to support or protect them and feeling let down by them whilst both living with DV and post leaving the environment. Findings also revealed how talking about their experiences after leaving DV helped them heal. In addition, children indicated that there were times services were unhelpful in keeping them safe, made them feel powerless and not listened to and revealed their thoughts on how they could be more supportive to others experiencing DV in the future. However, to note, the study's focus was on dual perspective of the phenomenon. Thereby, with respect to the rest of the findings of the study, the themes that emerged spoke to the mother's perspectives and reflections on the children's experiences of DV. Although an intriguing aspect of the research, the focus on children as well as mothers limits the in-depth

exploration and enriched understanding of only the children's phenomenological, lived experience.

Chester & Joscelyne (2018) using IPA, interviewed five adolescents, aged between 14-18 years regarding their experience of DV and how they made sense of their experience. Findings indicate that the adolescents experienced DV as ever-present, unpredictable, breaking boundaries, controlling and uncontrollable, and as hidden. Trying to prevent the violence or intervening were identified as two main ways in which adolescents coped at the time of violence but found these attempts futile. Other coping strategies involved distraction, hiding, escape and blocking. In addition, findings indicated certain protective factors such as school, alternative role models, relationships outside of immediate family were helpful to them and enabled in establishing a different understanding of their experience and responses. Adolescents accounts also revealed the psychological impact of experiencing DV. They reported feeling angry, upset, frightened, confused, anxious as well as symptoms of trauma such as nightmares, flashbacks, numbing. When the violence ceased, some adolescents indicated positive changes in their lives with the optimism that things could be different for them, reflecting growth from the trauma. Lastly, adolescents attempted to make sense of DV forming different beliefs and explanations such as believing violence was normal, acceptable, rationalizing parental behaviour, finding a cause-effect relationship for DV, or blaming themselves. Whilst this study highlights the phenomenological lived experience of only children, the participants represented in this study come from a clinical sample and were all White British. It would be interesting to build on the research with non-clinical samples and other cultures or ethnic groups to further our understanding and explore whether these experiences are similar or different to the sample in this study.

Other qualitative literature on children's experiences of parental DV has been explored with a particular focus. Few authors have focused on the children's perceptions of / relationships with parents in the context of DV (Staf & Almqvist, 2013; Cater & Forssell, 2014; Lapierre et

al., 2017; Pernebo & Almqvist, 2017; Lamb et al., 2018; Katz, 2019; Carmel, 2019) whilst others have focused on children's responses/actions and coping (Aymer, 2008; Overlien & Hyden, 2009; Chanmugam, 2015; Overlien, 2016; Miranda et al., 2020; Miranda et al., 2023).

Across the papers on coping, the pattern of findings indicate that children use strategies such as a) intervening to prevent/stop violence, b) adopting a mediating role, c) adopting a protective/ caring role towards particular members in the family, d) seeking social support from significant individuals (family members, other adults, friends) they trust with the view of finding emotional support, empathy, and assistance, e) avoidance (such as watching television, movies, listening to music, engaging in creative activities, consuming food) to block out, distract and inhibit the distress associated with DV, f) escaping (fleeing into safe space outside or inside the house, hiding in their rooms, engaging in recreational activities such as sports/gym outside the house, using substances) and lastly cognitive strategies such as thinking about other ideas, focusing on fantasy, transforming their experience into something positive or denial as a way of distancing. These findings are helpful to understand the varied number of ways in which children cope with the DV they are experiencing and to consider the promotion of different resources to deal with this adversity. However, the narrow focus on just their actions/coping does not help paint a full picture of their lived experience. In addition, across these papers, the sample studied was limited to adolescents only. Interestingly, research conducted with adult samples reporting on childhood experiences of DV have considered some of the coping findings highlighted above along with identification of others such as physically distancing from their parents, having a spiritual connection, accessing therapeutic support as resilient and protective factors (Suzuki et al., 2008; Anderson, Danis & Havig, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2012; Obrien et al., 2012). Whilst this body of literature furthers our understanding in the context of experiences of adults, its narrow focus on resilient/protective factors is yet limiting.

Dumont & Lessard (2019) explored the meanings that young adults, aged between 18-25 assigned to their experiences of childhood exposure to IPV, using semi-structured interviews and Life Course Theory to analyse the data. Findings indicated that participants recounted the experience of IPV as a persistent and escalating cycle. They provided diverse explanations and causes such as the fathers difficulties in emotional regulation, experiences of childhood trauma, alcohol, and mental health issues. Additionally, some attributed the persistence of interparental violence to the mother's decision to remain in the relationship. Participants described consequences for both victims and them. For themselves, participants reported experiencing anger, difficulty concentrating at school, challenges in forming friendships in hindsight and now as an adult: issues with trust, sensitivity to violent triggers, low self-esteem, and mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression. The meanings participants assigned to IPV were shaped by their personal experiences depicted above that were closely related to the family trajectory. Findings reveal how the meanings were also constructed differently depending on their awareness of IPV and experiences they had during their life course overtime through comparisons with healthier family dynamics, reactions of others, education, professional help, and maturation which helped them better understand, refine, and articulate their experiences. However, findings indicated that secrecy, shame, and the fear of burdening others often delayed this process for the participants. The authors explained how the construction of the meanings seemed to rely on three processes: an awareness process, a process leading to greater trust in others, being involved in healthy, balanced relationships and an empowerment process fostered by the transition into adulthood that enabled them to be exposed to new prospects in the life course trajectories and construct their individual meanings.

Band-Winterstein (2013) focused on the lived experience of adult offspring's, aged between 30-55 years that had been and continue to be impacted by ongoing IPV. Using a phenomenological perspective, analysis yielded four themes: "What type of family do I have: Normal or abnormal" which revealed the ways in which participants perceived their family as

being affected by double standard arising from two family realities: internal and external and trying to construct a bridge over the years between normative existence and reality of violence. The second theme, "Once violent, always violent", revealed the destructive nature of violence and chaos that defined their childhood and continues to for some, the trauma of living with violence over the years (ingrained fear, anxiety, hyper-vigilance) and the active roles participants continue to adopt and remain involved in family dynamics in face of violence despite geographical distance. The third theme, "Once my parents, always my parents: to care or not to care?", revealed participants complex and ambivalent feelings regarding caregiving, obligations, and responsibility within the family. Lastly, "What do I take along with me? Reflections over time" brought about insights regarding their existence in the present and future, with participants either perceiving themselves as suffering, creating a distance from the experience for their own life and families, or trying to balance between the two.

Perhaps, most pertinent to the present study, Fozard & Gubi (2017) explored the experiences of four adult offspring aged above 20 who had grown up in families where self-defined continuing destructive IPC was prevalent, using IPA. Analysis suggested "feelings of loss", whereby participants reported a profound sense of insecurity, feeling powerless and seeking security outside of their homes and a loss of identity or change in personality. The second theme, "impact to family structure" suggested parent-child role reversal whereby participants took on roles to support their parents and some noted that this role caused distress and greater sense of responsibility. In addition, participants noted distant and strained relationships with their fathers at some point in their lives as well as a fractured family unit as a whole. Participants data suggested "trauma associated with conflict", experiencing internal conflict due to the tension at home, painful memories of conflict lasting through adulthood and resistance in discussing their trauma, often processing these experiences in therapy. Lastly, participants spoke of the "impacts to personal and professional development", with the experience of IPC influencing directly or indirectly their

career paths as counsellors, difficulties dealing with anger, aggressive personalities, conflict, trusting others, alongside issues with self-esteem as a child, and the experience bearing a knock-on effect on their relationships with current or future partners. Some participants reported not wanting to get married, emulating parents' behaviours for lack of a better model whilst others reported a positive impact in that they have learned from their parents' relationship.

Among all the studies identified in the literature search, the study conducted by Fozard & Gubi (2017) seems to be the only one to my knowledge that provides an in-depth exploration of children's experiences of destructive IPC without the primary focus on DV and therefore, there remains plenty space for qualitative research to explore children's subjective, lived experience of this phenomenon beyond the context of DV. In addition, the sample studied in Fozard & Gubi (2017) were all trainee counselling psychologists, and therefore, exploring this phenomenon with a varied sample could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

1.3 Situating IPC research within a wider context

Majority of the studies in the literature are carried out in the Western context, with a few studies conducted in the East Asian context. Thus, research to date has reflected a Western bias, predominantly situated within individualistic cultures/societies as opposed to collectivist societies such as India. The literature search identified only three Indian quantitative studies in the topic under study (Sood & Misra, 1995; Gulati & Dutta, 2008; Tiwari & Verma, 2015) and no qualitative research to the best of my knowledge.

Unlike the Western society, the Indian society is largely characterized as collectivist, placing emphasis on group harmony, belongingness, interdependence, relationships with others, versus personal autonomy, space, and privacy (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). While scholars have critiqued oversimplified dichotomies between individualism and collectivism (Al-Hassan et al., 2021) and India today demonstrates emerging individualistic tendencies alongside

traditional values, familism and collectivist orientations are still strong in the Indian cultural context (Narayan & Sriram, 2023) and therefore, within the scope of this research, the prevailing assumption is that India largely operates as a collectivist society. In such contexts, family bonds and cohesion are deemed important. Values such as upholding family unity, harmony and honour are encouraged (Narayan & Sriram, 2023). Lifelong connectedness, interdependence and emphasis on filial piety has a bearing in Indian families (Narayan & Sriram, 2023).

From this foundation, several cultural nuances emerge that shape interparental relationships. The joint family system, for instance, has historically been central to Indian society, where multiple generations co-reside, share resources, responsibilities and decision-making power (Kapadia, 1966) which is bound by hierarchical relationships (Sinha, 2023). Within such structures, authority and decision-making are rarely confined to the marital dyad, but instead diffused across elders. Sharma & Deb (2024) note that joint families often function as both sources of support and sites of intergenerational tension. This structural arrangement also has implications for IPC. On one hand, the presence of extended kin may buffer IPC by offering emotional or practical support (Jothikaran et al., 2022). On the other hand, where conflict between the couple often unfolds in presence of extended kin, it can create dynamics where disputes are either mediated or exacerbated by their involvement. Even with the rise of nuclear households (Vision IAS, 2023), the ethos of interdependence and kinship obligations continue to shape family life (Chadda & Deb, 2013). For children growing up with IPC within joint families, such a family context may amplify the complexity of their experience as conflict may be experienced as not only between the parents but embedded in wider intergenerational dynamics, complicating loyalties and coping strategies. Such a family arrangement, for children, could either expand the network of caregivers or exacerbate stress.

Another defining feature of Indian families is the institution of arranged marriages. Rooted in familial choice and social compatibility, these unions often privilege family expectations and kinship alliances over individual preferences (Uberoi, 2006). Chadda & Deb (2013) point out that such marriages may limit spousal autonomy, embedding couples in wider familial obligations. When conflict emerges in arranged marriages, it is rarely confined to the couple; extended families frequently play an active role in both the conflict and its resolution, thereby complicating marital dynamics, through concerns about honour, duty, and social reputation (Singh & Pandey, 2023). For children, this may mean not just observing disagreements between parents but also the silences and compromises imposed by cultural values. Such experiences may also influence how children develop coping strategies or interpret IPC – for instance, adopting silence as a form of adaptation or internalising the weight of familial reputation. Moreover, marriage in India is seen as a lifelong commitment and divorce often stigmatized (although this is diminishing, Vincent & D'Mello, 2018), compelling parents to endure conflictual unions rather than risk family dishonour and fragmentation. This may prolong conflict behind closed doors, creating sustained exposure for children.

Gender roles and expectations also play a crucial role within the Indian socio-cultural context, which also intersects with both joint family structures and arranged marriages. The sacred nature of marriage in Indian culture, reinforces traditional expectations surrounding gender roles. As Kakar (1990) notes, Indian traditions often demand that a wife obey her husband and fuse her individuality with that of her husband, revering him as *pati parameshwara* (lord and master of the husband). Such cultural outlooks on interparental relationships position women within a framework of submission and sacrifice.

Moreover, Indian families have traditionally been characterised by patriarchal norms that often position men as primary earners and authority figures, while women are expected to prioritise caregiving, domestic responsibilities and family maintenance (Pew Research Centre, 2022; Vision IAS, 2023). Grounded on patriarchal norms, male authority and female

submission can exacerbate power imbalances, shaping not only the content of IPC (finances, child rearing, or participation in workforce) but also constraining the women's agency and strategies of negotiating marital disputes (Kapadia, 1966; Chadda & Deb, 2013). Children exposed to such dynamics may internalise gendered scripts of authority, submission, silence, or deference, influencing both their interpretations of IPC or their own relational styles. While urbanization and women's greater education and workforce participation are shifting these traditional roles (Dubey & Sharma, 2024), the persistence of these expectations continue to influence and shape marital relationships in ways that complicate conflict and emotional expression (Chatterjee, 2022).

Taken together, collectivism, joint family structures, arranged marriages, and gendered expectations provide the cultural context that could influence IPC. These nuances may not only influence or prolong conflict but also shape strategies or roles children may adopt to navigate it – whether through silence, avoidance, embodying endurance, stepping into mediating roles, heightened feelings of responsibility or seeking support from extended kin.

Therefore, given that families and family dynamics do not exist in isolation and are best understood in their socio-cultural context (Chadda & Deb, 2013), it becomes imperative to explore the phenomenon in diverse cultural contexts.

1.4 Rationale for the present study

The review above has offered a critical dialogue of the existing literature on IPC and its influence on children. However, there are several gaps in the literature which the present study addresses.

As reviewed above, the quantitative literature has explored the topic using specific variables and/or specific topic areas, often taking a snapshot approach which feels restraining. In addition, they rely on self-report questionnaires, which are prone to response biases and

neglect individual differences. It also limits the scope of nuanced exploration due to the focus on pre-determined set of categories leading to results being item-dependent, perhaps failing to capture the complexities and holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative design, an in-depth exploration engaging with several aspects of participants' experience of IPC from their own perspective, without imposing any topical or pre-determined ideas.

Importantly, there is a stark imbalance between the quantitative and qualitative research in this area, a gap I wish to address. To the best of my understanding, the current qualitative literature, except for Fozard & Gubi (2017) has focused on children's experiences of parental DV, which perhaps shares a conceptual overlap with only one of the aspects of the destructive style of IPC (i.e. physical aggression/violence). It was felt that IPC beyond the context of DV has not captured a comparable attention from scholars in the qualitative research domain, despite the recognition that non-physical overt or covert forms of conflict also impact children (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Harold & Sellars, 2018; van Eldik et al., 2020). Thus, the present study makes a unique contribution to the literature by exploring children's experiences of IPC that does not involve physical violence. I would also like to note that whilst some of the qualitative literature explored the children's experiences of DV more broadly, many explored a narrow part of the experience, i.e. relationship with parents, coping, resilient/protective factors. This pre-determined focus within qualitative literature feels unauthentic and limits the wider lived experience of the children. The present study, therefore, as such aims to refrain from adopting a particular narrow focus, aiding in an in-depth exploration of what the participants deem relevant and important to discuss regarding their lived experience of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, literature has focused on examining IPC within a defined period., i.e. infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, with majority of the studies recruiting younger children and adolescent samples. The present study aims to explore the experience of IPC

retrospectively using an adult sample. Literature examining the topic using adult samples in the quantitative field has predominantly focused on one specific variable/topic area., i.e. marital/romantic relationships. On the other hand, literature in the qualitative field using adult samples has tended to predominantly focus on resilience/protective factors. This yet again comes across as limiting and dismissive; a gap in the literature I hope to address by providing them a space in which participants can freely explore their lived experience.

Lastly, as discussed previously, there appears to be a distinct gap in literature reflecting a Western bias when exploring the phenomenon of IPC, prompting a need for research in diverse cultural contexts. Moreover, there is a dearth of knowledge within the Indian context—a gap I wish to address.

My research question is:

What is the lived experience of Indian children growing up with interparental conflict?

Chapter Two

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

This chapter focusses on identifying and explaining the methodology used to address the research question: “what is the lived experience of children growing up with interparental conflict”. This study adopted a qualitative approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

I begin by explaining why I chose a qualitative design for this study. Next, I present my ontological and epistemological position that underpins this project, a crucial part of the development of research and methodological selection process. I then move onto outlining the theoretical underpinnings of IPA and my rationale for the choice of IPA. Next, I consider how the study was conducted, detailing the procedural aspects and analytic strategy. I then pay close attention to reflexivity. Whilst I have dedicated a section for personal reflexivity in this chapter, reflections pertaining to different stages of the research process is weaved in throughout. I close the chapter with ethical considerations and quality in qualitative research.

2.2. Rationale for the selection of a qualitative design

Primarily, the reason for adopting a qualitative approach was determined by the gap identified in the literature as delineated in the introductory chapter.

According to Patton (2002), when selecting a research design, reflecting on the purpose of the inquiry and type of answers researchers wish to seek is important. The present study aims to explore and understand the lived experience of children growing up with IPC. The subjective nature of participants’ experience, “what the [lived] experience of [a phenomenon] is like for them, what these experiences mean to them, how they talk about them, and how they make sense of them” (Willig, 2012; p.1) is explored through qualitative approaches.

Quantitative designs focus on the objective measurement and analysis of casual or correlational relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, since the answers I wish to obtain is concerned with the subjective experience and “quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of cause-effect relationships” (Willig, 2022, p.9), I felt that a qualitative design was deemed to be a good fit in line with the purpose of the study.

Quantitative designs seek to quantify experiences through deductive reasoning and pre-determined categories (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2013) that forecloses the possibility of participant’s own ways of making sense of the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2022). Thus, I felt that adopting a quantitative design would reduce and dismiss the multi-faceted nature of human experience and phenomenon I endeavoured to explore and instead a qualitative design concerned with rich descriptions of individual experience, captured from their perspective (Willig, 2013) was necessary. Besides, the philosophical stance that quantitative methodology assumes is that of a fixed reality which doesn’t align with my positioning (explored in detail in the following section).

Finally, qualitative research aligns with the ethos of counselling psychology (CP). Both share and emphasize the importance of subjective experience and the exploration of it over universal claims of truth. As a trainee counselling psychologist, I value the humanistic tradition of CP; conceptualizing, and striving to engage with my clients’ experiences, “as agentic human subjectivities who cannot be reduced to, or treated as, objects of natural scientific inquiry” (Cooper, 2009; p.120-121). Thus, I felt a qualitative design would honour this.

2.3 Situating the Project: Ontological and Epistemological Stance

A crucial starting point of any research project is dependent on the research paradigms (Crotty, 1996). It signifies the philosophical stance of ontology and epistemology that underlines the researcher's belief system and worldviews, which eventually influences the development of the study (Ponterotto, 2005). Below, I explore my ontological and epistemological position.

Ontology refers to the postulations about the form and nature of being and reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is driven by the question "what is there, with what exists in the world" (Willig, 2022; p.8) and as such underpins epistemology. Epistemology refers to a set of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and is driven by the question "how, and what, can we know?" (Willig, 2022; p.4).

Ontological positions can be classified on a spectrum with the extreme positions as realist and relativist (Willig, 2022). Realists believe in a single external reality that can be objectively accessed and discernible and in theory of truths (Madill et al., 2000). Quantitative research often has its basis on this view. On the contrary, relativists reject such a view of the world and believe that there are diverse, equally valid interpretations of reality and the world is not as definitive (Willig, 2022). Willig (2012) argues that a "naïve" realist treats data at face value and takes them as a description of what "actually" took place in reality whereas a relativist upholds that the data generated doesn't enlighten the researcher with what is actually going in the world but says something about how the participants are constructing meanings in their life.

As I began to explore how I position myself along the realist-relativist continuum (Willig, 2013), I paid close attention to my research question. I came to realise that my emphasis is not on whether what is being said is factually correct or not but is on *understanding* how growing up with IPC is *subjectively* experienced by children. Having said that, I do not lie on

the naïve realist end. Alternatively, neither am I positioned as an extreme relativist in which I assume that there isn't something out there that exists beyond ourselves and our constructions of meanings. Thus, I sit in the middle of this spectrum, taking on the stance of a critical realist (Bhaskar, 1978), believing that there is an external reality (recognising that we can never have direct access to it) while at the same time acknowledging that there are cultural, social, historical factors that are experienced individually, constructing an individual's perception of reality. Indeed, my research question shows the realist aspiration in a way that it points to a phenomenon (IPC) that has an ontological standing, i.e., it exists in an experiential, mental, emotional, psychological sense and would exist even if no account of this was taken through research participants. In this regard, I assume that the experience of IPC exists and therefore, is real. However, I am not assuming that it is self-evident or is a direct reflection of what is going on in the world. I am mindful that my participants' can only access their own perceptions and equally, I am limited to my own sense-making and understanding. Additionally, I also do not claim that I would take the data of my participants' accounts at face value but instead interpret it to further my understanding of the underlying structures that generates the phenomenon (Willig, 2022). Thus, aligning with the critical realist position. My aim in this position is to uncover the subjective, experiential and multiple realities of children's experience of IPC.

Phenomenology, a philosophical discipline and one of the epistemological bases for qualitative research (Willig, 2012) concerns itself with the experiential worlds, "stepping into the shoes" of the individuals (Willig, 2022) without making claims regarding its accuracy or seeing reality as distinct from an individual. Such an approach also aspires to understand the experience instead of what is going on or what causes events to take place (Willig, 2019). It adopts a standpoint that there is "more than one world to be studied" (Willig, 2012; p.12) and believes that each participant has their own unique experience, thereby forming their own individual meanings. Thus, from a phenomenological standpoint, what seems to be the same event (e.g., IPC) can be experienced differently, resulting in possibly as many

different perspectives as there are individuals (Willig, 2022), a position I resonate with as a researcher. Thereby, knowledge could be obtained by exploring and understanding the meanings of an individual experience. This position is advantageous for this study as it seeks to explore the subjective experience of children growing up with IPC. Here, an interpretative variety of phenomenology will be held because I resonate with the belief that it is impossible to ““produce a pure description of experience and that description always involves a certain amount of interpretation” (Willig, 2012; p.15).

2.4 Methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

I chose to adopt IPA as a methodology for this study. IPA is an approach that concerns itself with detailed exploration of ones' personal and social world and commitment to how individuals make sense of them in their own terms (Smith et al., 2022). It is concerned with the individual's subjective, lived experience of something which is of particular significance to them, however, accepts that it is not possible to gain direct access to a lifeworld of an individual (Willig, 2022). This methodology was benefitting to the present study as it seeks to explore the lived experience of children growing up with IPC. IPA is grounded on three key theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography that Jonathan Smith drew from to develop the approach. The following three sections dive into introducing these paradigms that came together to shape the methodology and analytic approach.

2.4.1 Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1927, as cited in Smith et al., 2022) was the key founder of the philosophical movement of phenomenology. He defined phenomenology as the study of the essence of conscious experience and his aim was to “bring out the full richness of our subjectivity as ways of discovering the world” (Finlay, 2011; p.45).

According to Husserl, consciousness or experience is always consciousness *of* something. He emphasises on an orientation towards the “object” – the willingness and ability to

understand a perspective upon it as a key characteristic of a phenomenology. As such, IPA is concerned with subjective experience of 'something' and the quality of orientation in IPA is characterised with respect to the meaning which something has for someone (Smith et al., 2022).

Moreover, for Husserl, phenomenology involved the inquiry of human experience in the way that it appears. In his famous quote we should "go back to the thing themselves", the thing he is referring to is the experiential content of consciousness (Smith et al., 2022) and urges us to focus on it in its own right instead of fitting things into pre-existing systems, giving voice to an individual's experiences. He believed that in our natural everyday life, we are immersed in various assumptions, activities and take for granted the experience of the world which can get in the way and distance us from the richness of what appears (Langdrige, 2007; Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Thus, his phenomenology involved stepping outside of the "natural attitude" and adopting a "phenomenological attitude" which warrants a reflexive move to attend to human experience as it appears. In order to achieve this specific attitude, Husserl proposed a phenomenological method and a series of reductions that would lead to the essence of the experience itself (Smith et al., 2022). One major component of his methodology is epoche which involves phenomenologists to 'bracket', abstain and suspend prior understanding, knowledge, presumptions and secure a level of detachment (Finlay, 2011). However, this purely descriptive attitude in the Husserlian sense is contested in IPA and rather relies upon later understandings of phenomenology that were further developed by others. Having said that, Husserl's work has influenced IPA in the sense that it encourages researchers to pay close attention to the process of reflection. Bracketing through reflexive practices is seen by IPA as a central part of the research process and analysis (Smith et al., 2022).

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, diverged from Husserl's ideas and introduced the existential or hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy that addressed the nature of human

existence (Finlay, 2011). In his key work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) refers to *Dasein* (being there /being in the world) to convey his view on the quality of being human. According to Heidegger, *Dasein* is “‘always already’ *thrown* into this pre-existing world of people and objects, language and culture, and cannot be meaningfully detached from it” (Smith et al., 2022; p.12). As such, the self/our being is never separated or isolated rather is always involved and embedded with the world around it and this relation is always both interpersonal and interpretive (Wrathall, 2006). Therefore, Heidegger’s position moves away from the idea that we can occasionally and effectively step outside and transcend our engagement with the world through epoche as discussed by Husserl. Thereby, he challenged the possibility of any knowledge outside of an interpretative stance although substantiating this stance in the lived world – the world of people, things, language, relationships (Smith et al., 2022). As such, Heidegger’s philosophy made the case for a phenomenology through a hermeneutic lens – which will now be explored below.

2.4.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study and theory of interpretation. Heidegger (1962) links phenomenology with hermeneutics as he viewed phenomenology as dually perceptual and analytical. He argued that things have certain visible qualities as they appear and show itself to us but at the same time present themselves in a concealed and hidden manner.

Therefore, the aim of phenomenology is to examine the thing itself as it visibly appears to us but also in part to examine the latent and disguised, a process which necessitates interpretation.

Heidegger (1962) also maintains that the interpretive aspect of phenomenology will never be pre-suppositionless rather will be inexorably founded upon one’s fore-conceptions and assumptions, rejecting the idea that it is possible to entirely bracket our fore-conceptions. With that being said, priority is given to the object or phenomenon in question or the “new object” rather than holding to preconceptions (Finlay, 2011). In addition, he believes that

whilst presuppositions may precede or inform our understanding of the new things encountered, the new things may also shed light upon the nature of the presuppositions, during the process of engagement (Smith et al., 2022). This is also echoed by Gadamer (1990).

Heidegger explains that a 'hermeneutic circle' is involved when working out the fore-structures, moving "between question and answer, between implicit understanding and explicit understanding, between the reciprocal relationship between the interpreted and interpreter, between understanding parts and the whole" (Finlay, 2011; p.53), highlighting the cyclical and dynamic process of interpretation and sense-making. This concept is implicated in doing the analysis in IPA, which is iterative (Smith et al., 2022). With respect to IPA, Heidegger's view of phenomenology as interpretive is central – as after all IPA is an interpretative phenomenological approach. Importantly, the process of interpretation in IPA is described in terms of a 'double hermeneutic' – whereby the participants make sense of their world, and the researchers pursue to make sense of the participant's meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2015), recognising that the researcher cannot entirely have direct access to the participants' inner experiences. In this light, IPA is a dynamic process where meanings are co-constructed owing to the relationship between the researcher and participants and the relationship between the researcher and the data (Willig, 2022).

Moreover, there is an additional way in which IPA applies and realises the double hermeneutic. IPA involves two types of interpretative stances proposed by Ricoeur (1970) – hermeneutic of empathy and hermeneutic of suspicion. The former refers to accepting and reconstructing the experience in its own terms, in other words, at face value as it appears. The latter refers to a more questioning, critical stance, exploring hidden and latent meanings upon utilising theory or psychological knowledge (Smith et al., 2022). IPA is seen as taking a middle position, combining these two hermeneutic stances.

2.4.3 Idiography

Lastly, the third influence on IPA is idiography. In contrary to nomothetic approaches that is concerned with establishing universal and casual laws, population or group level claims, idiography is concerned with the particular (Eatough & Smith, 2008). IPA's commitment to the particular is realised in two ways: First through the detailed, close analysis of individual accounts, case-by-case, to achieve depth in the understanding of a phenomenon. It then cautiously moves to cross-case analysis, highlighting similarities and differences in experience and making more general statements (Smith et al., 2022). Secondly, IPA strives to understand a particular phenomenon from the subjective viewpoint of particular individuals within their particular and unique contexts (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

2.5 Rationale for the choice of IPA

Willig (2008) points out that it is essential to select a methodology that will answer the research question. IPA is not the only methodology that seeks to explore and make sense of individuals' experiences which the present study aimed to do. Therefore, I felt that it was necessary to position IPA in relation to other methodologies in order to rationalise the choice. I now present the three qualitative methodologies evaluated and why they were regarded not suitable for the present study.

Grounded theory (GT) is considered to be the closest methodology to IPA. Both aim to seek a rich and detailed perspective of an individual's world and offer a systematic analytic procedure that seeks to discover themes, emphasising on uncovering the essence of a phenomenon (Willig, 2008). However, the main focus of GT is to develop a theory and explanatory framework grounded in the data that helps understand the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued this approach would be suitable if I was seeking to construct a theory around the children's' experience of IPC which I do not aim to do in the present study. Urcia (2021) also emphasises that GT is more effective for exploring a phenomenon with limited existing knowledge or prior information. As outlined in the

introduction chapter, a number of theories pertaining to the mechanisms involved in the experience of IPC and child outcomes has been already explored. Thus, I felt that in order to contribute meaningfully, enhance or question the existing theories, it was essential to focus on a close analysis of individual experiences, which an IPA would allow. Moreover, GT was rooted in sociology and centres on the study of social processes, whereas IPA originated to draw out participants' lived experiences with an emphasis on psychological paradigm (Willig, 2013). Although the societal context and influence is deemed to be significant, it is not central to this study instead the psychological processes are more central to the present study. With all of the above in mind, IPA was considered to be a better fit than GT.

Thematic analysis (TA) was also considered. Similar to IPA, TA enables rich descriptions of data and fits well with the phenomenological position of this research as it places importance on the experiences, perceptions, feelings of individuals at the heart (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, the differences lie in the analytic framework in that the TA's analysis process generates themes across the group rather than initially looking at individual cases as in IPA. Given the purpose of the research is individual lived experience without the aim of generalizing but rather a focus on the subjective and idiosyncratic nature of the participants experience, IPA was chosen to be more suitable in answering the research question.

Lastly, Narrative Analysis (NA) was also evaluated but decided against. NA involves looking at the stories people tell about their lives and focus on meaning-making with an attention to language and the social and psychological consequences of the stories they tell (Willig, 2022). In this regard, this approach is largely interested in the *manner* in which people make sense of their experience, treating language as an object for investigation itself, rather than understanding the experience per se. For this reason, the subjective focus of the present study did not fit well with this approach and IPA was felt to be a better fit. I would like to clarify that language sits at the core of IPA and acknowledges its impact on sense-making, however, the role that language plays differ. In IPA, it is believed that language characterises

only an aspect of what the participants are doing when they are talking about their experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008) and does not regard it as the “sole or primary constructor of reality” (Smith & Eatough, 2012; p.443).

There were other facets related to the choice of IPA which I now highlight. IPA has been argued to be valuable when studying topics that are complex and emotionally laden (Smith & Osborn, 2015), which I felt the phenomenon of interest in the present study (IPC) is. Owing to the cultural context in which I wished to study the phenomenon, where disclosing matters of the family to those outside due to the value placed on maintaining family honour, I anticipated barriers in recruitment. This was also a driving force for the selection of IPA, where a relatively smaller sample size is needed due to its idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2022). In addition, IPA is argued to be theoretically rooted in critical realism (Fade, 2004) and phenomenology, which aligns well with my ontological and epistemological position discussed in section 2.3.

2.6 Method: Design and Process

2.6.1 Sampling

A sample of eight individuals who have experienced and grown up with IPC were recruited in this study. Five participants were not living with the family of origin during the time of the interview. The sample size was determined due to the idiographic commitment of IPA, viability in terms of allocated time and recruitment constraints and the view that typically interviews between six to ten is reasonable for a professional doctorate study (Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore, a purposive homogenous sample was recruited in line with the IPA framework (Smith & Nizza, 2022), however participation was self-selected. Demographic details of participants purposively recruited are presented below in Table 1.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Occupation
Rishi	34	Male	IT Professional
Prachi	27	Female	Nutritionist
Aditi	32	Female	IT Professional
Divya	30	Female	Professional
Samaira	25	Female	Psychologist
Zoya	26	Female	Psychologist
Saanya	29	Female	Psychologist
Vedika	21	Female	Student

Table 1. Summary of Participant Demographics

2.6.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

18 years old and over

The rationale for this is that previous literature in IPC has primarily obtained data from children and adolescents, whilst research on an adult sample is scarce. Furthermore, the role of self-understanding is argued to become salient in adulthood (Arnett, 2006). Adults are also believed better positioned to reflect and think as opposed to young children and adolescents that undergo substantial cognitive and emotional changes (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011). Thus, I felt that the adult sample would be better able to make sense of their childhood experience and their families. In addition, recruiting individuals below the age of 18 would mean that I would require parental consent, and I felt that it would limit the scope of recruitment as the focus of the research is IPC, which I believed itself would be conflicting. There was no maximum age limit set for this study as I did not have clear rationale for doing so.

All identifying as Indians, residing in India

This supported my aim of filling the gap in the literature by recruiting a non-Western population, particularly individuals belonging to a collectivist society. The rationale for these individuals residing in India was to maintain homogeneity with respect to contextual consistency. In addition, I felt that this would limit the scope of influence associated with acculturation – a process where individuals from one culture encounter and incorporate values, norms, customs of another dominant culture (Berry, 1997) that would perhaps add a different layer to the phenomenon. This seemed significant as culture plays a significant role in family relationships and dynamics across different societies (Kagitcibasi, 2017).

English speaking

Given the vastness and richness of India's diverse population, there exists linguistic diversity. There are 22 officially recognized regional languages with several other minor languages and dialects. Thus, I felt it is important to define the language criterion as English speaking as the study would be conducted in English. This would enable both the participants and I to have an adequate level of mutual understanding for a rich interview and subsequent analysis.

Have access to internet and Zoom/Skype on a device

This was for pragmatic reasons to be able to facilitate online interviews.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who have experienced domestic/interparental violence as a form of IPC

Children are impacted by features of IPC across a continuum of silence-violence (Harolds & Sellers, 2018). It has been recognised that children are affected by IPC where conflict does not include physical violence (Harold, Leve, Sellers, 2017), however, past qualitative literature has largely focused on the extreme form/feature of IPC (domestic violence) at the expense of other dimensions of IPC as discussed in the introduction chapter. Thus, in line

with the interests of this study, to explore the experiences of children beyond the context of domestic/interparental violence, this criterion was important. I felt that this would allow me to gain access to this 'particular' group of individuals that may have been overlooked.

Individuals whose parents are separated/divorced

By selecting only individuals whose parents are married/living together, ensures that the individuals share a similar context which I felt would maintain the homogeneity in the sample. Experiences of children from divorced families are not influenced by conflict only but by other aspects such as the separation itself, reorganisation of family dynamics/structures, adjustments to new living arrangements to name a few (Amato, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003), shaping their emotional experiences and lifeworld. Thus, I felt that the phenomenon of divorce would add a different layer. By narrowing the sample and excluding the individuals based on the stated criterion, it was felt that I would be able to facilitate a more focused examination of the phenomenon of IPC, aligning with IPA's emphasis on depth over breadth (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Individuals who only report ongoing IPC and cannot identify themselves as having lived with IPC in their childhood/ adolescent years.

I was interested in focusing on the early experience to capture the experience in a way that explores what it was like for the participants in my study to grow up with IPC. My interest in researching the early experience is perhaps also a reflection of my clinical interests and ways of practicing. Additionally, I felt that exploring the phenomenon in a retrospective way with a focus on early experience would also capture the dynamic experience of IPC which could be valuable for the topic area.

Those who are currently experiencing or anticipated high levels of emotional distress

This was with the view that recalling childhood experiences could be potentially distressing. Thus, exclusion was with the aim to minimise the risk of potential harm due to participation in

the study. The way I approached this was in the pre-interview screening call which I discuss later.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are delineated in Table 2.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• 18 years old and over. • All identifying as Indians, residing in India. • English speaking. • Have access to internet and Zoom/Skype on a device.	• Individuals who have experienced domestic/interparental violence as a form of IPC. • Individuals whose parents are separated/divorced. • Individuals who only report ongoing IPC and cannot identify themselves as having lived with IPC in their childhood/ adolescent years. • Those who are currently experiencing or anticipated high levels of emotional distress.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

2.6.3 Recruitment Process

I shared a recruitment poster (Appendix A) on a social media platform - Instagram. Some of my personal contacts online also shared the poster. This allowed me to reach a wider audience. I felt that sharing the poster online was feasible for me as I was in the UK and the sample, I wanted to recruit was Indians, residing in India. However, I also reflected on the limitations this form of recruitment would perhaps entail – reaching a rather ‘young adult’ sample owing to my online contacts and those that did share my post were fairly similar to

my age. To address this to the best I could, I shared the poster with my family and family friends (older adults) and encouraged them to share this further within their networks if they wished to. I felt that this would widen the scope of reaching a diverse range of individuals to participate as I aimed to recruit a homogenous sample.

Individuals interested to participate were asked to contact me via the email address provided in the poster. I responded to the emails, thanking them for their interest in taking part and sent them a participant information sheet (Appendix B). I encouraged them to carefully read it and noted that it was solely their decision whether they wished to participate upon reading the information sheet. Participants were asked to revert to the email if they were willing to proceed upon consideration. I then sent them a pre-interview screening call consent form (Appendix C) and upon receiving their consent, a date and time was set for this call.

During the pre-interview screening call, I assessed whether or not they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Appendix D). During the call, I also checked their anticipated levels of distress in talking about their experience and whether they were currently emotionally-well enough to participate. Upon discussing with my supervisor, I had decided if the participants rated their anticipated level of distress 7 or above 7 on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being most certainly) or reported that they were currently experiencing high levels of emotional distress, they would have been informed that taking part in the study was not recommended. I would have sensitively explained the reasons and offered emotional support resources (Appendix E). Fortunately, no imminent concerns were raised during this stage. However, two potential participants did note they experience depression and therefore occasional self-harm/suicidal thoughts. I checked whether they were experiencing active thoughts at the time, and they denied. I also asked whether they could foresee any obstacles to participation and no concerns were raised. Furthermore, I asked whether they have access to either a mental health service/professional or individuals they can identify that could support them, if participation was experienced as distressing. They assured me that they have access to support and stated that they would like to continue to proceed. My focus

was on ensuring safety whilst at the same time allowing autonomy. Since no concerns were raised, neither did I experience this to be the case and they both felt assured, I decided to proceed with them to the next stage. All participants, except one were considered to be eligible for the study. They were verbally confirmed as a research participant during the call. I then, sent them an interview consent form (Appendix F) and a preferred date and time for the interview was negotiated. The participant deemed not suitable for the study was based on the exclusion criteria - *Individuals whose parents are separated/divorced*. I sensitively explained the reasoning for the exclusion and thanked her for expressing her interest. Monetary incentive was offered to those that participated in the research interview. I consider this further in the ethical considerations section.

The initial process of recruitment was enlightening. I received preliminary interest from about 13 individuals following the advertisement of the research poster. Considering the large number of individuals who expressed their interest, I was unsure how to proceed. Upon discussing this with my supervisor, I decided that I would consider the order of response, prioritising those that reached out to me first and let the others know that they are on the waiting list, explaining the reasoning for the same. I said 'waiting list' specifically because it would provide me with an opportunity to recruit these individuals if any participant was deemed unsuitable during the screening call or there were any other challenges.

I had decided that I would allow maximum one weeks' time for individuals to consider their participation following the information sheet sent to them. Whilst a few got back within this timeframe, others did not. I then discussed this with my supervisor and those that didn't get back to me within the timeframe, were sent a follow-up email allowing for another weeks' time. I also stated that if I hadn't heard back from them then, I would assume that they no longer would like to participate. Again, a few got back and others didn't. At this point, I then reached out to the ones in the waiting list but also faced similar issues, which made the recruitment process challenging. Furthermore, even as I progressed with the recruitment process, I faced obstacles such as delayed communication, no response post the screening call, no shows that required further scheduling to name a few. This then made the recruitment process lengthier than I had anticipated. In addition, to the reflections on the recruitment process above, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the point that all of the interest I received was from individuals I did not know, except one. I initially felt uncertain about whether proceeding with this participant was appropriate. I was worried that having a prior connection would impact the process of the interview and the participant's willingness to be open about the experience and reflected on this deeply. However, I came to settle on proceeding with this participant because I was in the midst of recruitment difficulties and most importantly I did not have an active and close relationship with this individual and a significant amount of time had gone by since we connected. Nonetheless, I addressed our previous connection and asked whether or not she felt comfortable in talking about her experience in this way. She felt confident and thus, we proceeded amicably.

2.6.4 Data Collection

2.6.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In thinking about a data collection method, IPA is argued to be best fitting with a method that would invite participants to “offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” and provide them with an opportunity to “speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their and express their concerns at some length” (Smith et al., 2022; p.53). One-to-one, semi-structured interviews tends to be the preferred method of collecting such data that grants a gateway to elicit in-depth, reflective and insightful first-person-accounts of the phenomenon (Smith & Nizza, 2022). As such, this study adopted a one-to-one, semi-structured interview as means of collecting data, allowing participants the space to be heard, think, and reflect, facilitating a personal discussion.

2.6.4.2 Interview schedule

Smith et al., (2022; p.54) note interview as “a conversation with a purpose” and more specifically an IPA interview “an attempt to come at the research question sideways”. With that in mind, I designed an interview schedule (Appendix G) to facilitate a conversation around relevant topics that provided a loose agenda and a “virtual map” (Smith et al., 2022; p.56). The aim of the schedule was to use it flexibly so that the interviews are participant-led and at the same time relevant data pertaining to the research question is collected. In the final schedule employed, I made sure to use open-ended and non-directive questions (Willig, 2013). I formulated the questions and prompts in a way that were neutral and unassuming. I discussed this schedule with my supervisor to address its suitability and a couple of peers to ascertain if it is clear.

2.6.4.3 Conducting the interview.

The interviews were conducted online (seven interviews were conducted on Zoom and one on Microsoft teams) and audio recorded. The choice to conduct them online was informed by the geographical distance between myself in the UK and the sample residing in India. This

also ensured compliance with City, St George's guidance by adhering to the relevant regulatory requirements such as UK GDPR standards, and by enabling participants to take part without any procedural barriers associated with overseas research.

At the onset of the interview, I reiterated to the participants that I am interested in learning about their personal experience and that there are no right or wrong answers. Furthermore, given the online nature of interviews, I assured them that it was being conducted privately and prepared them for course of action if at all there were any technical difficulties.

Fortunately, none of the interviews faced any technical difficulties. In addition, I ensured that I always kept my camera on to build sufficient rapport and support empathic engagement with all my participants. All participants, except one also had their cameras on.

I conducted the interviews using the interview schedule flexibly and not in a standardized questionnaire manner akin to post-positivizing research (Ponterotto, 2005). Some participants' responses naturally led them to exploring or expanding on a different question outlined in the interview schedule. In such instances, I was led by them rather than strictly following the script and order of my interview schedule. However, there were others that tended to move away from the phenomenon and expanded greatly on other issues, in that case, turning to the guide often was helpful. I briefly touched upon all the questions in the interview schedule with each participant. However, how long I spent on each of the different aspects was dependent on the participant and therefore varied.

Furthermore, prompts and probes were often used throughout the interviews to encourage them to expand on what they were saying. These were used more for some than others because there were some participants that were more conversational and open whilst some were reticent and less expressive. During each interview, I also ensured that I clarify anything that I didn't understand or realized could have different meanings for different individuals. I did not make any notes during the interview as I wanted to be attentively present and felt that doing so would be disrupting in some way. However, I made notes after

each interview, penning down my thoughts, feelings, and reflections on the experience with each participant.

My aim of the duration of the interview was 60-90 minutes. The interviews ranged between 45-90 minutes, depending on the participant. Post the interview, participants were debriefed (Appendix H).

The interview process was relatively smooth. As I progressed with the interviews, I began to find my footing with the flow and nature of research interviews. However, I now wonder whether conducting a couple of pilot interviews would have benefitted me. In addition, in three interviews, participants often digressed and moved away from the phenomenon itself. Keeping in mind, participants “should be given much leeway in taking the interview to ‘the thing itself’” (Smith et al, 2022; p.55) and embracing unexpected turns, I feel the time spent on relevant experiences pertaining to the phenomenon itself was compromised. However, I made attempts to ground them back to the phenomenon turning to the interview schedule and naming the phenomenon repeatedly when asking questions, yet some participant responses were met with the issue stated. At these times, I decided to go with the natural flow, keeping in mind to focus on participants’ priorities and concerns (Smith et al., 2022), but chose not to follow this up as I didn’t think it related to the phenomenon as such. Additionally, my personal feeling throughout the interview at these times was that it was important to hold the safe space for these participants to talk about their difficult emotional experiences they were referring to as they were so forth coming about it, and I felt uncomfortable not allowing this to happen. In hindsight, I wonder whether explicitly mentioning to the participants at the onset of the interview that “there may be times I may interrupt you and guide you to the focus of the interview if I notice that we are moving away” would have been useful. Despite this, participants brought interesting material to the forefront. Moreover, most participants expressed how pleased they were that I was researching this topic. Most participants also indicated the experience of having the space to talk about their experience has been beneficial to them in some way. Finlay (2015, p.172) notes that “engaging in an in-depth process may actually be affirming and transformational”. Thus, these aspects of the interview were enlightening to me and reassuring.

2.6.5 Transcription

“Transcription is a form of interpretative activity” (Smith et al., 2022; p.69) and therefore it is important to consider the requirements of transcriptions. IPA aims to interpret the meaning of

the content and therefore requires the semantic record of the interview (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Therefore, all audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to preserve confidentiality. All other identifying information were also abstracted, including details of other individuals that were mentioned. Non-verbal communication in the transcripts such as pauses, laughter etc. were also recorded. I outline how they are recorded further in the overview section of the analysis chapter. Additionally, to work from material that was akin to the original dialogue of the interview, I have also included superfluous words such as “umm”, “err”, “you know”.

I formatted the transcripts in landscape with a wide margin on the right column of the transcript and a smaller margin on the left column of the transcript to prepare for analysis. The text was formatted with double-spacing, lines and pages were numbered.

2.7 Analytic Strategy

IPA employs a set of inductive processes that are applied flexibly and iteratively in the analytic process. It is a “fluid...process of engagement with the transcript” (Smith et al., 2022; p.77). The analytic process involves moving through the hermeneutic circle, from the individual to shared, from describing to interpreting, from concrete to abstract. As I was encountering IPA for the first time, I was guided by the step-by-step framework for analysis presented by Smith et al., (2022) to work through the process. It helped me manage my feelings of overwhelm and confusion as a novice IPA researcher. I now outline the series of steps below that I used adaptably.

2.7.1 Reading and re-reading

I began the analysis by immersing myself with the data, where in each of the verbatim transcripts was read line by line multiple times. The first time I engaged with each transcript, I simultaneously listened to the audio-recording of the interview which then aided the

subsequent readings as I could hear the participants' voices in my mind. This allowed me to move into a stage of active involvement and interaction with the data.

2.7.2 Exploratory noting

Subsequently, I paid attention to the semantic content and language use on an exploratory level with the aim of producing a thorough and detailed set of commentaries on the data.

Exploratory noting conducted was reflective of the different layers of interpretation that I worked through. These notes were recorded on the right margin of the transcript and were colour coded. Notes that were descriptive focused on the explicit content, the subject of the talk, or summarized what the participant had said and were made in black. Notes that were considered more linguistic, focusing on the specific use of language and its features were made in green. Lastly, notes that were conceptual and interrogative were made in pink. The conceptual notes helped me think about making sense of the deeper meaning in the participants' accounts. For an example of a transcript with exploratory noting, refer to Appendix (I). I worked through all of my transcripts by hand.

As I worked through the first couple of transcripts, I found myself more comfortable with the descriptive noting and 'hermeneutic of empathy' rather than interpretative noting and 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. I was worried that I would pull away from the original text and my participants' accounts. However, I found it useful to turn to Smith et al., (2022) remark of engaging in an analytic dialogue with the data and asking questions about the data, which then helped me to push myself a little more. As I progressed, I began to pull out the linguistic features of the text which added more depth. Furthermore, with the more abstract thinking I was able to engage in, my notes became more conceptual where possible and necessary, depending on the participants.

2.7.3 Constructing experiential statements

Next, I created concise summaries of what was important in the notes attached to segments of transcripts, in the form of experiential statements. The intention was to reorganize and condense the notes to focus on the experiential, defining elements of the participants' accounts. These statements were constructed such that it captures both the participants'

particularity and my interpretation as a researcher. It also involved working through the hermeneutic cycle here: focusing on a particular segment of the transcript (the part) and how this local point of text would also inexorably be informed by the other aspects and overarching elements of the participants' accounts that I had learned about through commenting on the entire transcript (the whole). The experiential statements were recorded in pencil by hand on the left margin of the transcript and can be seen in Appendix (I) as well.

Overall, this process required focusing in and broadening out. However, here, the range of possibilities arising from the notes attached to a particular segment seemed challenging to me at first due to the different aspects in a particular segment. I had to limit the number of statements to make the data manageable for the next steps. Thus, I prioritized what appeared to be the most clear and crucial. I also came to realize that focusing on small parts of the transcripts would both make the participants' accounts lost and pulled out of context and yield greater number of experiential statements. Thus, I decided to focus on relatively bigger segments. I came to approach it in this way after working through smaller parts of transcripts in my first two transcripts. I later then went back to those transcripts and made changes to reflect my new style of working. It is at this point, that I began to get the feel of the iterative process. Additionally, I did not regard these statements as fixed in anyway as I was mindful that new ideas might emerge as I move along the process (cross-case as well as write-up).

2.7.4 Searching for connections across experiential statements.

This analytic step was concerned with drawing together the experiential statements and searching for links and connections between them that would provide a meaningful structure, constituting to a Personal Experiential Theme (PET). To achieve this, I typed up all the experiential statements on a Word Document in the order they came up within the transcript. I then printed this document and cut out the experiential statements to individual pieces and mixed them up. Next, I spread them across a table and began to shift them around into initial clusters upon identifying experiential statements that grouped well together (conveying a similar object of concern, process, etc.), (refer to Appendix J). I then closely examined these initial clusters one at a time to evaluate their interconnections again and checked whether they need to be re-organized or divided into sub-themes. During this process, I continually

checked with the original transcript extracts associated with the experiential statements to ensure that I remain firmly grounded to the participants' accounts. At this stage, I also consulted my supervisor to check whether the construction of my statements was effective, aligned with the extracts and thereafter the clusters were appropriate.

Initially, I found the process of clustering to be challenging. This was because of my tendency to capture almost all the experiential statements in the transcript in some way. I found myself finding it hard to let go of the experiential statements and feared that I would lose out on something crucial. This also led to the difficulty of naming PETs in an effective way as I was attending to many aspects of the participants' overall account by retaining almost all the experiential statements. I was then reminded by my tutor's remark that it is not possible to include everything pertaining to a participants' account. I also turned to Smith et al., (2022; p.90) who stated that "not all experiential statements must be incorporated into this stage of the analysis". This then gave me the push to consider the experiential statements and the groupings in a new light: to reflect only the most important and interesting aspects of the participants' account. I also aligned with the idea that less is more in IPA. Thus, I began to let go off my previous reluctance and progressed to more focused analytic work. Therefore, at this point, quite a few experiential statements were discarded and put aside. I made this decision based on those that did not strongly align with the clusters formed, those that were attached to complex extracts or those that were grounded in relatively plain data. I also felt comfort in knowing that I can always come back to them considering the work done later and revisit the importance of experiential statements discarded.

2.7.5 Naming Personal Experiential Themes (PETS)

The clusters of experiential statements that were organized in the earlier step (as PETs and sub-themes) were assigned a label that captured its key qualities. I translated this onto an Excel sheet for the individual case summary. Each experiential statement was then linked with its quote from the transcript, identified with page and line number. I felt that this supplementary information enabled easy trailing as I progressed. Refer to Appendix (K), for an example of a PET table.

2.7.6 Continuing the individual analysis of other cases

Following the previous step of creating an individual PET table, I repeated the steps 1-5 for all the other interview transcripts. Due to IPA's commitment to idiography, it was important for me to consider each next case in its own terms, with its own particularity. I had to remain careful about merely replicating ideas from the previous cases. However, it was also inevitable that I would be influenced by what I have already consolidated and learnt about previously. Therefore, I dedicated sometime to reflect on my previous understanding from analysing the preceding case in my reflective journal and made sure to thoroughly immerse myself with the new set of data by repeating step 1 multiple times. I also made sure to take enough break before beginning a new case.

2.7.7 Forming Group Experiential Themes (GETS)

This step involved carrying out a cross-case analysis, once respective PET tables were developed for each individual participant. This was initiated in a similar fashion to the individual case-level analysis. I printed out the eight PET and sub-theme titles and these were color-coded to make identification of the different participants easier for me (Appendix L). I first began searching for PET titles that appeared to be similar and brought them together in a cluster. At this point, looking for patterns at this higher-level of organization, a couple of group themes emerged. I then did the same for the sub-themes nested within the PETS, whereby other group themes emerged. During this process, I also referred to the components nested within these titles such as the experiential statements and extracts nested within them to check the analytic entities were reflective of the participants' experiences and grounded in the data. This also allowed me to pay attention to both convergences and divergences. Thus, analytical actions were made to address how the experiences were lived similarly as a group whilst also attending to the individually lived, unique standpoints of each participant.

Furthermore, I also turned back to the experiential statements I had discarded earlier that didn't seem fitting to a PET at individual case-level analysis to see if at this stage, it is relevant or speaks to a new feature across the group. I'd like to point that in making decisions about what counts as a theme/GET, guidance by Smith et al., (2022; p.105) who notes: "as a rule of thumb, one can decide in order to make a GET plausible it must be inhabited by at least half of the participants in the study" was followed. Thus, once I was happy with the clusters formed, I assigned labels to these clusters that formed the GET and the group-level sub-themes. These were then represented as before, on Excel with participant reference, quote along with the page and line number.

Overall, this process illuminated another 'part' and 'whole' dynamic. What was consolidated and learnt about at an individual level (part) was now being reviewed to the shared experiences across different participants (the whole). That being said, it is important to note that this cross-case analysis is in no way attempting to present a 'group norm'.

2.8 Reflexivity

Personal reflexivity implicates the researcher's ability to reflect on the ways in which the researchers' personal interests, values, experiences have influenced the topic choice or shaped the research (Willig, 2013). My interest in researching this topic was prompted by own personal experience of growing up with IPC during adolescence. In addition, I often felt unable to share my experience with others as I felt that it was important for me to conceal my family concerns out of respect and integrity of my family. Since pursuing my career as a psychologist, I became aware of the importance of early experiences and its links to how one feels, thinks, behaves, and relates with oneself and others. Consequently, I turned to the literature and was surprised at the lack of knowledge regarding children's experiences of IPC beyond the context of domestic violence and western context, which motivated me to pursue this line of research - to give voice to a particular group of individuals that are perhaps overlooked in research.

Given my personal experience, it can be inferred that I am an “insider” or studying the “familiar”. Being in this position aids the establishment of rapport, trust, and openness. It also facilitates understanding implied content, picking up the unspoken or probing participants more resourcefully (Berger, 2015) which I felt I was armed with. That being said, I was aware of the risk of slipping into or imposing my own assumptions, biases and beliefs based on my personal experience or knowledge that could have inhibited me from truly listening to my participants’ unique voices and experiences. Therefore, I remained self-reflexive throughout the research process and utilized a reflective journal. For example, I came to only realize the strength of my one of my assumptions as I noticed feeling astonished in moments in the interview where participants were talking about what they’ve learnt from the experience, that landed towards a positive slant. I had expected and assumed that participants would mostly talk about the negative experiences/influence. This might have been because majority of past literature has examined the negative impacts of the experience (an understanding which I had to bracket off). In addition, it was perhaps reflective of how I have mainly focused on the negative influence of my experience growing up with IPC myself, without acknowledging the strengths because of the experience as well (reflecting my own bias which I had to bracket off). Therefore, as I became aware of this during the process of the interviews, I was able to remain open and probed further regarding this aspect, maintaining my curiosity.

Reflexivity is also considered as the “process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as an active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015; p. 220). Thereby, I now turn to some of the specific reflections I noted during the research process.

Given that an interview is a collaboration between a participant and a researcher, I considered my influence with regards to the interview process/data collected. One thing that

I reflected on was the possible influence of my personal characteristics. I am an Indian woman, with a distinct Indian accent and the sample consisted of Indian participants. Thus, I reflected on the shared identity and wondered whether I had not been Indian, participants would have yet felt open and comfortable in sharing their experiences that involved disclosing their family matters (however, it is hard to really say or speculate). Furthermore, even though I made sure I led by the participants and played a relatively passive role in the interviews, I acknowledge that my influence could have been manifested through my probing and prompts that I pursued (or didn't) during the interview process, thereby also influencing the data collected.

In addition, three of the participants in the sample had a psychology background which meant that I had something in common with these three than the others and I felt that this would have perhaps influenced the quality and speed of rapport established with those participants. I also wondered whether their background in psychology meant that they had a different level of self-awareness, thereby also influencing the data collected in some way. Furthermore, throughout my interactions with the participants, I also monitored the possible influences and effects they had on me. For example, in moments when participants talked about experiences that were similar to mine, I was reminded of my reactions and thoughts in relation to those aspects. I acknowledged those in the moment but ensured that I did not impose or manifest the parallels I sought in their accounts via my questioning and rather maintained a sense of wonder and curiosity.

With regards to the analytic process, particularly the nature of IPA that casted me, the researcher as a co-constructor, reflexivity was again deemed important as it required careful responsibility on my part. I had to ensure my sense-making of participants' data and interpretations stayed closely aligned with what they expressed about their experiences in their own words whilst honing into my own understanding of the topic, assumptions, and biases that would be inevitable. To achieve this, I engaged in the "hermeneutic circle" (Smith

et al., 2022) as mentioned earlier in this chapter and strived to “dance...between bracketing pre-understandings and exploiting them as a source of insight” (Finlay, 2008; p.1). This way I could foster an open space for attentive engagement with my participants’ experiences and data. However, despite the continual careful reflexive practice, I acknowledge that understanding and interpreting my participants’ experiences requires me (the researcher) to absorb and comprehend the original material which may inevitably transform some of the material or extend beyond the participants’ understanding/perception. Moreover, given my professional background, I acknowledge that some of the interpretations may be guided by psychological perspectives inevitably, although rooted in participants’ data.

The shared construction of meaning raises ethical challenges that are inherent with this type of an analysis. Is it appropriate to present participants with interpretations of themselves and their words that they did not request? As a researcher, although I want to delve deeper into interpreting my participants’ accounts for a thorough exploration of their experiences, I also want to honour the integrity of their accounts. In order to address this, I have not adopted the “hermeneutic of suspicion” approach to interpretation tremendously. In addition, I acknowledge that there may be a considerable distance between the data and the interpretations where I decipher some of the layered meanings of their accounts and experiences. In the write-up, I have offered my interpretations tentatively and clearly stated what comes from my own understanding. I do not claim that I fully know what my participants are really saying. I acknowledge that another researcher may have produced distinct data from the interviews, interpreted differently, resulting in differing findings. Therefore, the findings from this study reflects just one and not the “only” analysis or interpretation of the data collected.

Lastly, I’d like to address my contemplations regarding the three interviews I mentioned about in 2.6.4.3. I was initially worried that these participants moving away from the phenomenon itself would compromise the quality and richness of data collected for this

study. This made me wonder about their inclusion or not. My supervisor suggested to give myself time and consider how I feel about the material during analysis. Upon beginning to analyse their transcripts, I felt that even though these participants often presented material related to a different phenomenon or childhood experience, it was not that the entirety of the transcript was such. There was still some interesting material they presented concerning their experience of IPC and the prompts I used in the interview to guide them to focus on this. Thus, I didn't have a substantial rationale for excluding them and decided to include these participants in the analysis. I also felt it would be ethically inappropriate to not include them as significant time had passed since I interviewed them, and they had provided consent to receive the findings. The decision was made upon deep reflection and considering options with my supervisor.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

This research project received official ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee at City, University of London on 4th May 2022. This research complied with the guidelines by BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). Thus, it was conducted in accordance with the principles such as 1) respecting the autonomy, privacy, and dignity of participants 2) scientific integrity 3) social responsibility and 4) maximizing benefit and minimizing harm.

Informed Consent

"Consent is not valid unless it is given from an informed perspective" (BPS, 2021). Thus, participants were provided with detailed and necessary information regarding the research, providing an adequate basis for them to consider their participation. It was only after this that individual, signed, written consent was obtained prior to participation to ensure participants' autonomy. Participants were clearly made aware of their right to withdraw without giving a reason or penalization, up to two weeks post interview along with their rights to refuse answering any question that they didn't want to address. Consent was sought throughout owing to the nature of conducting in-depth interview (Thompson & Chambers, 2011). The

way I approached this was by asking “would you be willing to talk about this a little more?” and being in tune with my participants’ emotions. For example, in instances where I felt my participants were recalling emotionally laden experiences, I checked with them if they felt comfortable to continue.

Confidentiality

Participants were informed and assured that all personal and identifying information would be confidential and anonymized. They were also informed of the use of anonymized direct quotes or excerpts in the write-up of the findings and anonymous data may be made open access. They provided consent for the same. A pseudonym was used throughout the research process such as in the transcripts, storing of the files and the write-up of the study. Furthermore, since the participants in my study were reflecting on their subjective experience related to IPC, there were few instances where some participants disclosed some information regarding the parents. Thus, this data was also handled with respect, integrity and anonymized. In addition, the document that noted the participants’ correspondence to the pseudonym used was kept securely (password protected) separate from the interview data.

Minimizing risks

Although all participants were recruited from the general population, minimizing the potential for severe psychological distress, there remained a possibility that participants experienced mild-moderate mental health difficulties. In order to mitigate risk associated with this, the pre-interview screening call ensured suitability and safety. Although I didn’t specifically ask for any diagnosis, I ensured the potential participants were currently psychologically well-enough to take part. This was in line with research conduct necessitating the consideration of participants’ well-being (BPS, 2021). I also checked whether they were likely to become overly distressed upon participating and if they had access to a mental health service/professional or individuals they could identify as supportive.

Furthermore, recounting experiences during the interview was deemed to be potentially distressing. Throughout the process, I used my therapeutic skills to create a safe environment and contain their emotions. I had decided to take a break from the interview and use my therapeutic skills to contain the participant and offer emotional support if any participant became overly distressed. I would have also reminded them of their right to withdraw at that point and signposted them to resources to seek further support. There were instances that were moving or emotionally poignant for the participants, but none of the participants became overly distressed that required a break or further emotional support during or post the interview.

Data handling

All data was handled in accordance with Data Protection Act (2018). All participant information and data were stored securely. The audio-recordings were stored in a password-protected laptop and password protected folders. Each interview was then transcribed in Microsoft Word and these individual files were also password protected. The hard copies of the transcript used for analysis were stored securely in a locked drawer. In accordance with City University's guidelines, the interview recordings will be held until the end of the study and then safely deleted. The anonymized data such as the transcripts will be retained for 10 years and then deleted safely. The hard copies of the transcripts will be destroyed upon the end of the study.

Other considerations

Monetary incentive

My supervisor and I decided to include a monetary incentive as a way of recognizing participants' valuable contributions and to thank them for their time, effort and openness involved in sharing their experiences. However, I recognized the shortcoming of this that could potentially raise ethical concerns. I felt that the monetary incentive would perhaps

encourage certain individuals to take part at the cost of genuine willingness to talk and make sense of their experience. To address this in some way, during the pre-interview screening call I asked my participants what drives their interest in taking part in the study and spent some time reflecting on this with them to gauge their genuine motivations.

2.10 Evaluation of research

Evaluative criteria such as reliability, validity and generalizability that is considered in quantitative research to ensure quality in research does not align with qualitative approaches. This is due to the fact that the wide variety of qualitative methodologies are associated with different epistemologies and methods (Yardley, 2000). Thereby, evaluative criteria and guidelines for qualitative research have been set out by various scholars. Yardley (2000) suggested four principles by which qualitative research can be evaluated and it is in line with his evaluative criteria that I hope to demonstrate quality of the present study which I now outline below.

2.10.1 Sensitivity to context

Firstly, qualitative researchers are required to exhibit that the study is sensitive to the context of existing theory and research (Yardley, 2000). I have thoroughly engaged with the existing literature in the topic area of IPC and identified gaps in the literature that has led to the formulation of the research question. The literature review in chapter one demonstrates this clearly, outlining the rationale for the present study. I have also paid attention to the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the IPA methodology as outlined in this chapter. Yardley (2000; p. 220) states that “it is obviously integral to the rationale of empirical research the analysis is manifestly sensitive to the data itself”. I have demonstrated sensitivity to the data itself by a) remaining open and curious about unexpected turns during the interviews b) throughout the write-up of the analysis, I have used tentative language when interpreting and clearly stating those interpretations that were borne from my understanding.

In addition, another facet of sensitivity to context involves focusing on participants perspectives, socio-cultural and linguistic context. Throughout the interviews, I have used the interview schedule flexibly and used open-ended questions to encourage the participants to speak freely and remained curious and open to what they had to say. In a couple of interviews, where participants asked if they could express something in Hindi, I encouraged it as opposed to disallowing it, further demonstrating sensitivity to socio-cultural and linguistic context. I have also paid attention to the same socio-cultural background of myself (as a researcher), and my participants as discussed in the reflexivity section of this chapter. Lastly, to demonstrate sensitivity to power influences in the investigation (Yardley, 2000), I made sure to explain the participants' rights prior to their participation clearly. During the interviews, I remained reflexively aware of the inherent power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship. I had decided that if my participants asked whether I have experienced IPC, I would be happy to discuss my personal experience briefly, to address imbalance of power inherent in the study.

2.10.2 Commitment and Rigour

Commitment "encompasses the prolonged engagement with the topic" and "the development of competence and skill in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data" (Yardley, 2000; p. 221). This has been demonstrated through not only the academic engagement over the course of four years as a doctoral student, but also in the capacity of experiencing some difficult personal circumstances and remaining committed to the research. I have made use of the teaching and supervision to develop my skills and competence with research and the IPA methodology used. I have also engaged with a range of books, research papers as well as external workshops in IPA analysis to further develop and refine my expertise in the methodology. Rigour refers to the completeness of data collection and analysis. I have chosen a purposive, homogenous sample for this study and provided sufficient detail regarding this, demonstrating rigour. I have also aimed to show my

rigorous approach during the stage of data analysis, explaining the detailed analytic process, paying close attention to participants words, the idiographic engagement and interpretation of data, illustrating depth and insight into the phenomenon in this study. I have also paid attention to representing the diversity amongst participants' perspectives, placing value on the 'completeness' aspect of data analysis.

2.10.3 Transparency and Coherence

Transparency and coherence relate to the clarity and cogency (Yardley, 2000). I have clearly outlined and defined my ontological and epistemological position which I hope serves to ensure there is a good fit between the philosophical position adopted and the research question. I have endeavoured to clearly present and provide a detailed descriptions and reflections on all the different aspects of my research in the process of writing-up, disclosing all relevant aspects of the research process. I have also presented the raw data, excerpts in which the reader can discern and follow the patterns, comments and interpretations made clearly. As mentioned previously, I have made it clear where interpretations were borne from my own understanding. Additionally, I have a paper trail, whereby each analytic step can be traced. Lastly, transparency is enriched by reflexivity that is demonstrated throughout the report, to facilitate the consideration of the researcher's role, process, and impact on the study.

2.10.4 Impact and Importance

Lastly, research must be useful in some way. It must be applied theoretically, practically, or socio-culturally. My hope with this research study was to give a voice to an overlooked/under-researched group of individuals and mainly broadening the understanding of children's experience of IPC within an Indian context, without holding any pre-determined categories in mind, exploring it in its own terms. I hoped that the knowledge generated would

be useful in a practical sense, highlighting their needs and concerns that could inform therapeutic interventions for psychologists and practitioners. I also hoped that conducting this research would contribute in some way to the efforts reducing IPC.

Chapter Three

3. Findings

3.1 Overview

This chapter provides an in-depth account of the analysis of the research interviews. The analysis of the participants' interview transcripts produced data that encompassed a wide spectrum of the participant's experiences of growing up with IPC. Owing to the broad extent yet varied nature of the data yielded, it was vital to present the data that sought to directly address the research question, and which was relevant and representative across the cases, whilst also capturing the unique, individual participants' voices. Therefore, this section aims to highlight and offer insight into some of the relevant, rich, and interesting material that is organized under four (GETS), each then divided into sub-themes, emerging from eight semi-structured interviews. Figure (3) presents a thumbnail of the four GETS and their subthemes. A complete GET table with the supporting extracts from individual participant interviews can be found in Appendix (M).

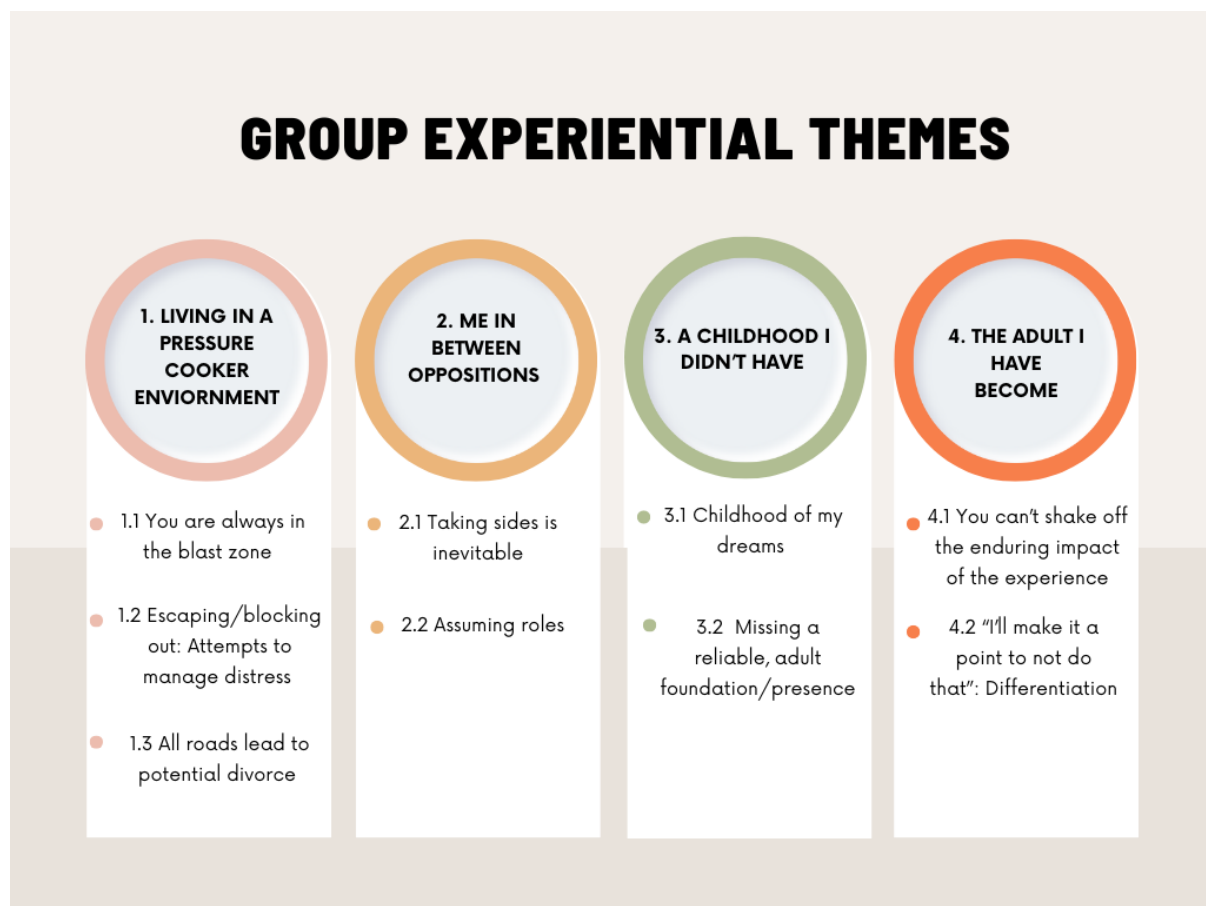


Figure (3). Visual Representation of the GETs and their sub-themes.

To present the participants' stories and IPA findings, each theme intends to move between a general description, quote from a participant and an interpretative commentary (Smith et al., 2022). I attempt to stay grounded and as close to the participant's accounts as possible. At times, where I am adopting a more suspicious and interpretative stance to elicit deeper meanings of the participant's accounts and provide more depth to the data, I use tentative language and make it clear what my understanding and interpretation is and what is the participants.

I am using direct quotes from the interviews and have indicated the participants' name and in brackets the page and line number from where the quote is drawn from the transcript besides each quote. I have indicated pauses or silences using ..., words/phrases that were emphasized by participants in bold, words that the participants raised their voices/elongated

in capital letters and bold, clarifying details using (), and lastly any text I have omitted within a quotation by [...].

In this chapter, what is presented is solely the findings with the interpretative analysis, without any incorporation of relevant literature or theoretical discussion. These elements will be found in the following, separate chapter. I have chosen this approach to present the material as I felt that this would allow for a better and focused representation of the participants' voices in an evolving manner, uncluttered by the shifting focus that would come with integrating relevant literature and discussion of psychological theory. This type of a representation also aligned with the analytic process of steering away from use of theories or psychological concepts when coding and interpreting the transcripts.

3.2 Group Experiential Theme 1: Living in a pressure cooker environment.

This theme presents an account of what it is like for the children to be captive to IPC, likening it to being in a pressure cooker environment. On first gaze, the themes presented here might appear distinct and separate and one might not notice the interconnections between them or how they together relate to the GET label, however, as I stepped back and delved into the double hermeneutic and wondered upon how I have made sense of their sense-making, I gained an understanding of their lived experience using a metaphor that speaks to the pervasive, unrelenting tension dominating their lives (*you are always in the blast zone*) akin to the constant heat and pressure of a pressure cooker. In response to the unrelenting conflict, what emerges is the children's attempts to escape the inescapable as best as they can, encapsulated in *sub-theme two*, much like briefly releasing the steam through the valve on a pressure cooker. However, their attempts do not alleviate the reality of the persistent and pervasive conflict they experience and (*all roads lead to divorce*), the potential for an explosive end to the built-up pressure.

3.2.1 Sub-theme 1.1: You are always in the blast zone.

This first sub-theme captures the children's accounts of the unceasing nature of IPC that permeated and dominated their home and family life and how they were always within the radius of it. Some participants recount explicitly how the conflict was ever-present, a continuous backdrop to their lives, and some participants subtly indicate the relentless and inescapability of conflict, making remarks to their home environment which was fragile and tense.

Divya provides a vivid description of the constant conflict experienced in her home:

*“interparental conflict for me is like, never having any mutual, consensual life at all, on anything, any decision **anything, like anything**, like life has always been on conflict and clash for the parents” Divya (1, 11-12; 2, 1-2)*

The phrase “never having any mutual, consensual life at all” in describing her parental relationship highlights the absence of unity and harmony in her family life, with the use of words “never” and “at all” underscoring this chronic and constant feature of the parental relationship experienced. To me, this conveys a sense that conflict is the baseline state of existence. The repetitive emphasis on “anything” serves to perhaps accentuate the inescapable and exhaustive nature of the conflict, establishing it as a key feature of her lived experience. Overall, the use of the absolute terms in the statement “never”, “at all”, “anything”, “always” vividly conveys the enduring nature of the conflict which has perhaps become an integral part of her family life. She further elaborates on this idea in an interesting light when she says:

*“what that looks like for me at home is, like, always stressful. I don't know exactly what a happy family actually looks like. For me, all I get to see happy family definition is in movies, TV, or friends. And then I look at my family and then I'm like, like, what happened? Like, why is it so difficult to, for two people to **REALLY** come on some middle way, some middle path for anything for something as basic as breakfast? I mean, anything I can't even think of, which could be the tiniest thing because even the tiniest of the things in my house have had blast issues” Divya (3, 6-12; 4, 1-4)*

Here, Divya contrasting her lived experience with idealised images of family life observed via external sources adds a different layer to my understanding of her relentless conflict-ridden reality, making the inescapability of her situation more poignant. Her reference to “I don't know exactly what a happy family actually looks like” implies a reality overshadowed by continual discord. To me, her inability to identify with happy families reflects a deeply rooted

sense of inescapable presence of conflict in her reality, where a harmonious and joyous environment feels out of reach and foreign.

Additionally, there is a sense of sorrow and disillusionment conveyed in the rhetorical question *“and then I look at my family and then I’m like, I’m like, what happened?”* which can perhaps be interpreted as being rooted in the relentless conflict that defines her life, making it difficult for her to comprehend the unattainable aspects she observes elsewhere externally. The reference to parents’ difficulty in agreeing to *“something as basic as breakfast”* suggests that even the simplest and most mundane aspects of daily life are fraught with conflict. Lastly, the use of the hyperbolic expression *“blast issues”* evokes an imagery of a sudden explosion, which conveys how even the smallest matters can rapidly escalate into significant and intense disputes, perhaps reinforcing the unrelenting force.

Like Divya, Aditi also comments on experiencing conflict as ever-present:

*“So, yeah, you’ll have all sorts of conflicts, even, not only in the, you know, big things, but **every, every day**, like a small thing, small issues”* Aditi (3, 5-9)

“So yeah, there had been always like conflict, like when we were born, okay. I mean, like when I was like, one or two year I don’t remember for that but yeah, like the last, the oldest memory which we could remember like we three siblings used to discuss. So there had been always conflict and we could remember huge fights, even some huge fights between them. And I guess, they were never in harmony” Aditi (6, 7-14).

In the first excerpt, Aditi implies that conflict is not confined rather permeates through many facets, all levels of significance which to me, amplifies the persistent extent of the conflict experienced. The mention of *“big things”* and *“small issues”*, highlights the omnipresence of the conflicts. The use of *“every, every day”* on a surface level, indicates the frequency and

regularity of the conflicts but to me, it also implies the pervasiveness and relentlessness experienced. Her reference to conflict arising from “*small thing, small issues*”, further solidifies this and conveys that no issue is immune from conflict, illustrating the felt inescapable nature of the conflict, like Divya.

In the second excerpt, Aditi further illustrates the omnipresence of conflict by referring to temporal markers such as her earliest days. Together, the repetition of “*there had been always conflict*” in the statement and the phrase “*they were never in harmony*” reinforces the idea that conflict is experienced as a deeply embedded feature in her life, making it an ever-present reality. Interestingly, there is also an element of collective processing as she mentions “*we*”, “*we three siblings used to discuss*”, highlighting a sense of shared experience, elucidating that it was not an isolated reality.

Zoya emphasised on the constant exposure to emotionally charged conflict experienced and the emotional impact it has had on her:

*“I would say that ever since I know of being existent, I've seen my parents not just fight, you know a fight, you say that, oh, somebody's having a disagreement. It was not a disagreement, because it was really intense, strong, negative emotions, shown towards two people who claim to love each other, who claim to have built this family for themselves, and umm yet choose **to almost every day** uhh hurt each other in front of their children. It's a very, very depressing experience overall”* Zoya (5, 9-12, 6, 1-6)

Similar to Aditi, Zoya here suggests that conflict has been a constant, life-long presence in her life, tracing back to her earliest memories. My understanding of the use of “*ever since I know of being existent*”, evocatively put, adds an existential dimension to underscore the felt relentlessness as it suggests that her very sense of being alive and conscious is associated with the presence of conflict. The mention of “*almost every day*” indicates the regularity and

yet again similar to the other participant voices suggests that it feels persistent. To me, the phrase *“in front of their children”* is also key in demonstrating the inescapability due to its regular visibility, perhaps making the experience deeply personal as reflected in the powerful concluding phrase *“it was a very, very depressing experience overall”*. It highlights the lingering, profound influence that the relentless and inescapable sense of conflict has had on her emotional well-being. The repetition of *“very”* emphasises the depth of the experience, conveying a sense of overwhelming sadness and despair attached to it.

Furthermore, present in the above comment by Zoya is also a sense of disillusionment through her experience of felt relentlessness and inescapable conflict between the parents, a sense of disillusionment that is slightly different to Divya's. Here, to me, Zoya reflects her sense of disillusionment by pointing out the contradiction she experiences between her parents' professed love and the reality of their actions (daily hurt and negativity) and persistent conflict, perhaps indicating shattered expectations and idealised concepts of love and family.

In a different light to the others, Rishi and Samaira, subtly capture the sense that the conflict feels inescapable, but much like in a way that is more intangible owing to the constant underlying tension and instability experienced in the home environment. Rishi depicted this by describing a cycle of conflict in the context of unresolved discord which leads to a relentless atmosphere of lingering tension:

“you kind of have a fight one day and then things quieten down, nobody's kind of you know, solved the issue on which the fight happened or nobody's spoken about, it is, just that everybody's tired so you go to sleep or just kind of go separate ways. But the undercurrents, the tension is still there. So, whatever the environment is still very rife with tension. And you know that anything can lead towards the spark again. You're always on your toes, you're what do you call - walking on eggshells” Rishi (14, 9-16, 15, 1).

Here, Rishi points that whilst the visible sign of active discord subsides, owing to the temporary and superficial means of cessation rather than any meaningful closure or resolution - the underlying issues remain. The lack of closure or resolution indicates that the issues are left to fester, which creates an enduring atmosphere of tension.

The word “*undercurrents*” metaphorically evokes an image of a water body where calm surfaces hide the turbulent currents beneath - forces that are hidden yet insidious, perhaps mirroring his experience. Therefore, I am struck by the contrast he mentions between “*things quieten down*” and “*the undercurrents, the tension is still there*”. It juxtaposes the visible calm with the invisible tension, suggesting that the outward appearance doesn’t match the internal reality of felt tension being all-encompassing. This to me, implies and contributes to the feeling that conflict is yet inescapable. Interestingly, he likens this experience to “*walking on eggshells*”, an evocative metaphor that accentuates the fragility of the situation in a home where tension persists, where he perhaps perceives his environment as delicate and easily disrupted akin to eggshells that can be easily shattered with pressure. It also conveys a constant state of vigilance and hyper-awareness/caution suggesting that he is perhaps constantly anticipating and bracing for the next eruption in face of the relentless tension.

Samaira echoes the cyclical nature of conflict experienced and says:

“you know one day things are fine, everything is going fine but then suddenly there is a trigger, and then there is a fight and then things are okay again but then there is a fight, so it's like you don't know... there's no sense of like umm certainty, with how things are going to go because anything can be a trigger and then it can be a fight” Samaira (4, 4-9).

My understanding is that the description of sudden triggers and recurring nature of conflict suggests an environment characterised by persistent underlying tension. There is also a

sense of abruptness in “*suddenly*”, capturing the feeling that conflict feels like a relentless force, always looming, waiting for something to set it off as conveyed with the mention of “*trigger*”. This constant potential for conflict makes it feel pervasive and as an omnipresent threat. The phrase “*there is no sense of like umm certainty, with how things are going to go*” underscores her experience of unpredictability and instability. This lack of certainty may mean that she is perhaps always on edge and vigilant, unsure of her environment and the next eruption. Later in the interview she adds: “*feeling very umm...like, hypervigilant, feeling very cautious that this happened, that happened*” Samaira (10, 1-3).

3.2.2 Subtheme 1.2: Escaping/Blocking out

This sub-theme builds on the first in a way that in response to experiencing conflict and tension as relentless, inescapable and pervasive, children’s accounts noted on the various forms and attempts to escape and block out either the IPC itself or the emotional aftermath as a result of that such as physical withdrawal, seeking refuge elsewhere, and immersing in alternative activities.

Vedika’s comment sets the stage for her need to escape and block out the conflict:

“you end up crying like you don’t want to hear it, you tend to like close your ears. Like you know, no, no, no, no, no, no, like, you know, stop it” Vedika (7, 3-6)

Whilst the above excerpt captures the raw, visceral instinctual and immediate response to the emotional overwhelm experienced by Vedika, the act of closing her ears perhaps serves as both a literal and metaphorical withdrawal. Literally, it represents the physical action to block out and escape the noise of the conflict whereas metaphorically it signifies her attempt to create a mental barrier against what she is experiencing. It symbolises the desperate need to retreat inward, withdrawing from the conflict and chaos, representing a mental and

emotional shutdown. My understanding of the repetition of “no” signifies a strong sense of pushing away the painful reality and attempting to mentally distance herself. Note the use of the word “you” throughout the statement. It perhaps creates a degree of separation and distance between herself and her feelings which perhaps mirrors the distancing and withdrawal she is referring to in relation to the conflict and her internal experience.

Building on the need to escape, Vedika also reveals a different form of escape – a more deliberate and controlled attempt:

“I used to go in my room, put on my headphones and put music very loudly so that I don’t have to even if I’m away from them, and their arguments are not coming to my ears. So, I used to just like put the headphone on and listen to loud music” Vedika (17, 2-6).

The act of going into her room represents a physical retreat from the conflict where the room perhaps serves as a safe space where she can have more control over her immediate environment. The physical separation serves as a distance and escape from the distressing situation. Additionally, the use of the “headphones” and “loud music” represents sensory and psychological escape to replace and drown out the negativity in a more controlled fashion.

Echoing the physical form of escape, Divya comments:

“I would just straight stand up and go in some corner of the room. Just take one corner and just sit and do nothing” Divya (17, 2-4)

Divya highlights the instinctive drive to escape the immediate proximity of conflict and physically distancing herself, similar to Vedika. The “corner” of the room, though seems significant to Divya as she repeatedly mentions this specific nature of her physical retreat as opposed to plainly saying “go to my room”. My understanding here is that it suggests

maximum possible seclusion and confinement to escape. Additionally, corners are often associated with isolation and a place where one may go when feeling vulnerable or needing to hide. Thus, the repeated mention of it could also imply that she is retreating into a space that represents maximum form of emotional withdrawal. It's almost as though she is being cornered by the conflict, both in a literal and figurative sense, having no option but to retreat to this confined space to escape the chaos. However, unlike Vedika who uses a tool of sensory escape, Divya mentions "*just sit and do nothing*". To me, this can be seen as a form of passivity and perhaps the state of inaction reflects numbing, attempting to shut down and disengage.

Zoya's accounts points to a broader, external form of physical escape from the home environment altogether. A form of physical escape in a different context – the school:

*"All my childhood, I would just, I remember **hating** to go home from school. Yeah, this was one experience that really, really, I felt a lot of times, everybody thought I loved going to school [...] I always loved going to school, because it felt like an escape almost like it felt like, oh, my parents are not going to be I'm not going to be seeing them fighting or not going to be having to deal with my mother yelling at me, hitting me or doing anything negative"*
Zoya (60, 5-12; 61, 1-4).

There appears to be a stark contrast between "*loved going to school*" and "*hating to go home*". It seems as though school becomes a haven for Zoya, away from the dread associated with home. The expression "*everybody thought I loved going to school*" in some way indicates a discrepancy between the outer persona and her true inner feelings regarding this aspect of her life. It represents that her apparent enthusiasm for school perceived by others is actually masked and deeply rooted by an underlying reason: the need to escape the negative home environment as explained by her. My understanding is that the school perhaps served as a space where she sought temporary relief found in the structure,

predictable routine, activities and intellectual stimulation that this context often provides which stands in sharp opposition to the unpredictability, constant conflict and chaos linked with home. By immersing herself in this environment, it perhaps allows her to experience a sense of normalcy and safety, offering the necessary escape that she needs.

Zoya also recalls some other drastic/extreme measures and attempts to escape:

“Most often wanted to kill myself (laughs), run away, hurt myself. I’ve I’ve run away from my house, once childishly, like I knew I was just, you know, pretending, once I actually did”.

Zoya (25, 1-4)

The mention of suicidal thoughts and self-harm reflects the need for ultimate forms of escape – seeing them as desperate and only ways to end/cover up the suffering and emotional pain. It also conveys the depths of the despair perhaps experienced. To me, the laughter when revealing such serious thoughts might signify an attempt to deflect or minimise the intensity of the feelings, however, it does also underscore the depth of the desperation to escape the home environment. She distinguishes between a “childishly” attempt to run away and a more serious one, reflecting a naïve attempt, a fantasy escape on one hand and on the other hand, a more determined effort where the need to escape becomes more critical and tangible.

Unlike the others, Prachi explores mental escapism through fantasy literature:

“I started reading fantasy at that time, my mother had just gotten us a library membership, so Harry Potter was one of our first novels that I like, fantasy novel that I remember reading. I kind of got obsessed with it and I would love, I would wait till the next book to come out and that’s obviously a lot of Potter fans are like that, like we love the series. But for me, it was also an escapism, because that used to live in my head ki, there’s a magic school that exists

and things are fine. The books obviously aren't perfect either but it was just a fantasy land in my head so that was a very nice way to escape for me" Prachi (26, 1-10)

Prachi's engagement with "*fantasy*" literature is particularly interesting as she describes this specific genre rather than simply books or other genres. Fantasy as a genre is associated with imagination unrestricted by reality, formation of idealised, alternative worlds, qualities of magic. It seems as though immersing herself in this literary genre, allowed her to be transported into a mental space, an alternate world away from her immediate and harsh reality of experiencing conflict, offering the mental and emotional detachment she perhaps needed.

Harry Potter novels represent fantasised versions of the real world where magical creatures, magic wands, spells etc exist. Hogwarts, the "*magic school*" is a structured environment and a space of relative safety (stark contrast to her home environment associated with constant conflict) and I wondered whether Prachi in some way envisions this as her home in her mind where "*things are fine*", that perhaps not only offers her an escape but something she lacks in her reality and finds in the fantasy.

Interestingly, she acknowledges and situates her obsession within a broader context, a community - "*a lot of Potter fans are like that, like we love the series*" which elicits a sense of belonging, however, her obsession seems to exceed the typical, suggesting to me a deep-rooted sense of needing to escape via involvement in this alternate world. Additionally, my interpretation of her recognition of the limitation of the novel symbolically signifies to me the limitations of her escapism of her reality.

3.2.3 Subtheme 1.3: All roads lead to potential divorce

This sub-theme captures the participants accounts' of their feelings and thoughts in respect to the potential of divorce. Some participants describe how terrifying and threatening this aspect appeared to them as children and some participants, viewing it from a more matured, adult lens have come to see it is as necessary, desirable end point to the relentless conflict.

Speaking to the former, Prachi recalls the threat she felt to her sense of security with respect to the mention of divorce as “kids”:

“like even threatening insecurity, like using the word divorce in front of kids was, it doesn't seem very big, but it was a big deal to us, because our parents were our heroes are our heroes as kids, so seeing that kind of break apart is heart-breaking” Prachi (54, 5-9).

The word “*threatening*” amplifies the emotional weight, emphasising the hard-hitting nature of the insecurity experienced. “*Threatening*” evokes a sense of danger/harm, suggesting that she perhaps experienced a real danger to her sense of stability by the potential dissolution of the family unit. I found particularly the use of “*the word divorce*” interesting. The reference to divorce as “*the word divorce*” seems as though she is externalising this idea. To me, it means two things. Firstly, as if the word itself holds some kind of energy - a powerful and threatening force charged with emotion and fear which perhaps intensifies her vulnerability or a kind of a taboo, which in the context of collectivist societies like India is associated with divorce. Secondly, by externalising it, it maybe that she is distancing herself from the felt emotions associated with recalling this in the here and now. There also seems to appear something particular about the aspect of it being addressed in “*front of kids*”, implying a sense of exposure, which perhaps she wished to be protected from or deems inappropriate/insensitive.

By referring to her parents as “*heroes*”, Prachi reveals a sense of idealisation that seemed central to her. I wondered whether more than the potential divorce itself, it is perhaps the collapse, shattering of this perception and idealisation which is “*heart-breaking*”, encapsulating the pain and sense of loss associated with it. Furthermore, there appears to be a constant shift between the tenses in the above excerpt (past and present), which paints a complex picture, reflecting how there may be a difficulty in integrating these feelings for her.

Both Vedika and Rishi also reflect on their sense of vulnerability in relation to the looming threat of potential separation:

*“Most scary thing is like, you know, it's mostly scared because you're not realizing that maybe your parents will get divorced. Or like, you know, that you know, you don't want that, and you don't want to be...it was **VERY** scary” Vedika (12, 11-15)*

“umm fear of losing because there were times when mom would just decide or mom, dad would decide okay, this is it, this is it, you know we are going to go separate ways and I would start thinking how life would be” Rishi (21, 6-10)

Vedika depicts the potential of divorce as “*scary*”, whilst Rishi’s account reveals a sense of anxiety. Both convey a sense of threat, disrupting their sense of security and stability. Vedika framing it as “**VERY** scary” captures the intense fear she experienced, reflecting how deeply this threat affected her. The hesitations, unfinished thoughts and the use of second person may reflect her inner turmoil and difficulty in articulating the personal emotional weight and gravity of the situation she felt.

On the other hand, Aditi and Zoya come to see the idea of divorce/separation as welcoming and advocate for this in their family:

“So later on, when I started getting understanding of it slowly slowly, then we only used to suggest them if you can’t manage with each other then why don’t you both take divorce and you know, just separate. We only used to say to them that you know why you’re spoiling you know our, just, you can, both can live your life the way you want right? why you are just you know just trying to be with each other, but I don’t know what is that commitment” Aditi (25, 12-17; 26, 1-3)

“But right now, since I’m an adult, I tell them like, if you guys want to separate, I’ll support y’all, just do it because you guys are not just hurting yourself, you’re hurting everybody else that’s around you [...] So I tell them you want to get married to other people also, just just do it. I really like I’d like, be in on it, I will celebrate with you guys. I’ve literally told this to my parents, you know, do it do it. Just go your own ways. But their mindset is different with things right that like they’re old, they say, they say that they’re old now to be thinking about and their family is also very conservative right, they also have their own take on all these things” Zoya (93, 11-12; 94, 1-12)

Both Aditi and Zoya reflect a nuanced and mature perspective whilst reflecting on their advocacy for divorce. Zoya’s explicit expression *“but right now, since I’m an adult”* and Aditi’s expression *“so later on when I started getting understanding of it”*, reflecting the gradual insight perhaps linked with getting older and being more mature. For both, it appears as though this advocacy and viewing divorce as desirable and necessary stems from viewing their parents’ unhappy relationship characterised by relentless conflict as detrimental to them. Aditi points to this in some way when she says, *“why you’re spoiling you know our”*, the word *“spoiling”* implying damage/ruin - perhaps the relentless conflict is needlessly ruining and damaging her life. Similarly, Zoya says *“you’re hurting everybody else that’s around you”*, pointing to the pain inflicted towards her, being captive to their unhappy relationship and relentless conflict. Therefore, welcoming the prospect of divorce perhaps

reflects their deep-seated personal desire to cease the prolonged exposure altogether, setting themselves free from the strife and achieving collective peace.

The use of *“just do it”* in both the excerpts conveys a sense of urgency and desperation experienced by Aditi and Zoya, however, perhaps minimises the complexity involved which is echoed and explained later in the context of broader societal context. Related to this, I have come to an interpretation that is two-fold. On one hand, both their accounts reveal an implicit value they perhaps place on personal happiness and fulfilment personally as individuals, a shift away from traditional expectations of marriage where the pressure and focus on sustaining a marriage despite the harsh harmful realities and difficulties outweighs individual happiness and well-being. Doing so, they can both be seen as individuals who serve to challenge the societal norms. However, they point to the tension they experience within their realities and embed themselves within the very traditional context that doesn't allow for this prospect to unfold. The use of *“but I don't know what is that commitment”* in Aditi's account and *“their mindset is different [...] their family is also very conservative right, they also have their own take on all these things”*, point to the limitations they experience, perhaps due to the societal expectation of preserving the status quo of the marriage over the quality of relationship and individual well-being.

3.3 Group Experiential Theme 2: Me in between oppositions.

This second GET speaks to how the participants are attempting to understand and make sense of their positioning and role in the family amidst the relentless conflict experienced that puts the parents at odds with one another. These experiences are explored below in the sub-themes, illuminating what it was like for them as they engaged in and navigated the fragmented family environment.

3.3.1 Subtheme 2.1: Taking sides is inevitable.

The first subtheme delves into the overall sense of finding themselves in one of the parents' camps and needing to take sides in order to have a standing. This is manifested in several ways for the participants. Some participants assign and categorise their parents into roles of "good" and "bad", some participants explicitly convey their allegiance with one parent or pressure to take sides.

Divya and Rishi's accounts capture the assigning and categorising of parents into roles of "good" and "bad" that paints a picture for us in understanding their standing and act of taking sides:

"So, because there was more sharing from mom, so we would feel that okay, dad is the only villain in the house. So that's how we, till the longest time, we would always know that okay, he is the worst of the person, he is the monster, or he is the like, the most bad thinking person ever existed, kind" Divya (32, 10-12; 33, 1-3)

"so, I think I was close to my dad at that time and mom wasn't, because, mom felt outnumbered, she wasn't that matured, I would say. Uh dad kind of kept talking to me so I had his side of the story. So, in my head for some time, I had mom as the villain. I had mom as you know someone who is, she could fix it, but she's not fixing it" Rishi (23, 13-16; 24, 1)

Divya's excerpt conveys the polarised view of the parents, where the father is exaggeratedly seen and constructed as "bad". She uses some very interesting and strong language to reveal her negative perception about her father such as "villain", "monster", "the worst", "most bad", positioning him as the "only" source contributing to the conflict or distress. Such descriptors indicate the depth and extent of the negative perception and opposition against her father.

A “*villain*” is often portrayed as an evil character in movies/stories who is in opposition to the hero and embodies qualities of harm. Divya labelling her father as such casts him in this role of an antagonist, making him as someone to be opposed to and suggests that she perhaps perceived him or his actions as harmful. The use of “*monster*” dehumanises him in some way, furthering the divide and opposition she perhaps felt towards him. Overall, the emotional weight that the language carries in describing her father are instrumental in the process of taking sides and indicates the alignment against him. Whilst she doesn’t explicitly portray her mother in a positive light, the lack of negative descriptors in relation to her mother in contrast to the father, to me, indicates her alignment with her mother and perhaps implicitly viewing her as more desirable and as a “good”.

Interestingly, Divya conveys this idea of taking sides through the lens of her mother’s influence in some way indicated by the presence of her mother’s communication. It appears as though perhaps this “*sharing from mom*”, might have meant that she was exposed to her mother’s narratives and feelings that may have contributed to seeing her mother in a more favourable and sympathetic light. Perhaps the sharing inadvertently resulted in her mother casting herself as a victim thereby making the alignment with her stronger and viewing the father as the antagonist.

Similarly, Rishi echoes the sentiments expressed by Divya. He explains how his emotional connection and communication from his father, knowing “*his side of the story*” influenced his alignment with him. Perhaps relating with the father’s perspective together with emotional proximity, he comes to view his mother as an antagonist, expressed by the term “*villain*” like Divya, leading him to take his father’s side. It also demonstrates the father in his story as “good” and mother as “bad”. I found the use of “*she wasn’t that matured*” interesting as it indicates that maybe he viewed his mother as also someone who is childlike in opposition to his father that perhaps influenced needing to take his father’s side. My understanding is that

the alignment with father is perhaps strengthened when he attributes sole responsibility to “*fix it*” towards the mother and blaming her in some way for not doing so.

In both their accounts, we can see how the assignment of roles and categorising parents conveys the process of taking sides and how they positioned themselves within the family by doing so – Divya aligning with her mother and Rishi aligning with his father. However, upon a closer look at both the quotes, there seems to be an indication of it not being a complete story, representing a historical element/shift in this exaggerated perception. In Divya’s quote, the use of past tense “*we would feel that*” and in Rishi’s quote the temporal markers - “*so at the time*”, “*in my head for some time*” implies that these negative roles and positioning belonged to the past, revealing that there perhaps has been a re-assessment or change in understanding or alignment. Therefore, a further dimension of this experience appears to be a reflection on the perception of the roles and taking sides with one parent unequivocally, possibly as an adult. Pointing to this, Rishi says:

“When I grew up after like a couple of years, and when things quietened down. They both also matured, they both mellowed down. I could see that it was both. I could see the other side also” Rishi (24, 2-4)

Here, Rishi indicates as “*things*” evolved, pointing to his maturity (“*when I grew up*”) as well as evolving family dynamics and parents’ individual trajectories, the “*other side*” became more apparent to him. His reflection points to a more balanced perspective with time as he suggests “*I could see that it was both*”, revealing a shift from a polarised and binary view to a more nuanced perspective, realising both parents’ roles and contribution. I wondered whether this realisation translated and shifted the need to solely pick one parent’s side. Note the use of “*other side*”, implicitly suggesting the mother’s side. I wondered whether this indirect phrasing instead of explicitly acknowledging the mother, serves to soften the feelings

of possible regret or shame associated with previously held strong, negative views regarding the mother.

Referring to the present, Divya also contemplates on her past perceptions but unlike Rishi, with a degree of ambiguity and complexity:

“Infact mom is also very much like that, in so many things. So now, at this point we still get confused that was it, it, was it dad only the worst person there for us or the other person was also doing things to trigger, or you know, causing that clash umm we don't know” Divya (38, 5-9)

Despite the unknown nature regarding what *“that”* encapsulates and the vagueness reflected in *“in so many things”*, Divya acknowledges that her mother also plays some role, as opposed to the exaggerated role attributed negatively to the father previously. She considers the possibility that her mother also contributed to the situation, handing over some level of blame and responsibility to her, when she questions her belief *“was it dad only the worst person...”* However, it appears as though she *“still”* remains uncertain about the true nature, reflecting an ongoing process of making sense and unresolved nature of her understanding.

Staying with feeling caught between oppositions and taking sides as *“kids”*, Prachi comments:

“my sister and I we would get involved and not taking sides but we would obviously as kids, we would try to gravitate towards one parent” Prachi (4, 9-11)

Prachi talks about herself in relation to the sibling unit (*“we versus them”* perhaps) and points to getting attracted to one parent. The use of *“my sister and I”* elicits a sense of shared experience and my understanding is that this may reflect a sense of difficulty in taking full

ownership of her allegiance with one parent. “*Gravitate*” is an interesting term which evokes a sense of natural, inevitable movement/attraction/pull towards something. In this context, therefore, it seems as though this attraction and pull towards one parent is an instinctual, natural response rather than a conscious decision. The use of “*obviously*” further implies the naturalness or understood aspect of this pull. To me, this pull towards one parent, even when intending for neutrality, indicates an emotional pull, a response driven by behaviour of that parent or emotional needs. It appears as though; she was drawn to one parent based on what she was perhaps emotionally experiencing in relation to that parent. Indeed, Prachi later makes this apparent when she says:

“I mean, I would I wouldn’t try to take sides but then somehow or the other reason I would always take my mother’s side I don’t know why that happens umm but whenever I used to see her crying like I used to always take her side and then even when she wouldn’t talk to dad, I would not talk to dad. I don’t know maybe that was... nobody really told me that we’re not supposed to talk to him or anything but that always happened” Prachi (10, 9-11; 11, 1-5)

Here, she addresses the emotional pull I interpreted above that outweighs her rational intention to remain neutral and not “*take sides*”. The visible feelings of her mother’s distress, pulls her towards her mother and there seems to be an unwavering and inevitable allegiance with her, reflected in the repetition of “*always take her side*”. It appears as though the pull and alignment with the mother is so strong that it almost becomes a guiding principle as she follows her mothers’ actions and behaviours towards her father instinctively. I say instinctively because the participant notes “*nobody really told me [...] but that always happened*”. To me, this implies a response that felt more automatic perhaps illustrating its instinctual basis. I wondered whether the strong alignment with her mother was also comforting in a way to manage her own reactions and feelings she felt towards her father. Perhaps, it was easier for her to group with her mother and mirror her behaviour than to feel isolated in confronting her own feelings towards her father. Additionally, present in her

account, is an element of ambivalence regarding her act of taking sides in the repeated expressions of uncertainty, *‘I don’t know why that happens’*, *‘I don’t know maybe that was...’*, *‘nobody really told me’*. It perhaps suggests she is experiencing an internal conflict as she grapples with her rational desire to remain neutral and her automatic, more instinctive reality of taking her mother’s side.

Saanya reflects on the ambivalence/internal conflict she experiences in the context of a divided family and expresses the inevitability of taking sides in her account:

“I think again, confusing battle of having to make choices. And having to be in one team, you know, having to decide which team you want to be in, nobody is asking for it. But that’s just something that, you know, if I’m here, if I understand this person more than the other person would be like, I am not close to them” Saanya (41, 2-7)

The use of *“teams”* highlights a strong sense of division and sides – members aligned against each other, in opposition. Thus, the parents are positioned as opposing sides, and this division creates a *“battle”* as she feels caught between them. The term *“battle”* evokes a sense of struggle, representing her internal struggle and conflict where she is feeling torn in the presence of clear divisions, unsure of her place within the family. However, the repeated use of *“having to”* suggests a sense of obligation, feeling compelled to take a side or an implicit pressure to. Additionally, my understanding of *“nobody is asking for it”* underscores both the inevitability of taking sides and perhaps the deeper forces to align with one parent that are perhaps internally driven. Saanya also highlights the experience of taking sides influencing relational dynamics with her parents. For her, aligning with one parent over the other reflects a closer bond with that parent and inherently positions her at a distance from the other. This to me, represents her loyalty conflict in some way associated with feeling the need to take a side.

3.3.2 Subtheme 2.2: Assuming a responsible role

This subtheme attempts to capture how children make sense of what their individual role is in the situation or family, living with conflict. It considers how being in the crossfire, caught between oppositions owing to the relentless conflict led them to assume a responsible role of an intermediary, mediator, emotional caregiver, and anchor in the family in the context of IPC.

Samaira reflects on taking on a role of a “mediator”:

“A lot of times, I remember, like (laughs), I was like, there in the umm, I was there, and I was like...I had to resolve it. So, I feel like that also has happened at times. I feel like I maybe grew up like earlier than what I was like supposed to, because of that role that I was playing of like this mediator” Samaira (6,9-11; 7, 1-3)

Here, the phrases “*I had to resolve it*” and “*role that I was playing of like this mediator*” are perhaps critical in illustrating how Samaira took on an adult role. My understanding is that the act of resolving conflicts and mediation typically requires certain processes such as listening to both parties, facilitating communication, negotiating, finding common ground and solutions. These processes and skills indicate adult-like activities, thereby indicating to me, that perhaps Samaira engaged in stepping into a role typically reserved for adults. It also implies that she engaged in significant emotional labour in managing the dynamics of her parents, which again is not a typical expectation of a child, and a role/responsibility reserved for parents who are the adults in the family context.

Samaria’s acknowledgment of “*I maybe grew up like earlier than what I was like supposed to*”, suggests how taking on this adult role meant that she had to mature prematurely. To me, it also points to a disrupted childhood, one where she was perhaps unable to be care-free

and childlike, indicating possibly the inappropriateness of taking on this role. The use of “*had to*” elicits a sense of duty or obligation that Samaira experienced in taking on this role, suggesting that she felt compelled in some way.

Saanya echoes this sentiment of feeling compelled to take on responsibility to manage the situation, “*I have to sort the argument out, I have to make things okay*” Saanya (89, 6-7) and points to taking on a role of an intermediary in some way:

“To question both of them. Or maybe sometimes just one person, whoever, wasn’t wasn’t anything that...but almost like umm asking them what, like asking what’s wrong? Or like thinking, how can we make this better or, you know, can I do something? Can I speak to dad? Can I speak to mom? Can I? Is there I can do kind of a situation” Saanya (90, 1-6)

The act of questioning her parents, facilitating conversations with her parents perhaps highlights her mediating role. My interpretation of the repeated use of “*I*” in the excerpt implies a strong sense of personal responsibility and duty that she felt to understand, address, potentially resolve the conflict and her emotional investment. It reflects her need to take on whatever responsibility is necessary, reflecting an adult-like readiness and similar to Samaira, engaging in activities that are not typically expected of a child.

Vedika reflects on assuming another specific adult-like role— an emotional caregiver for her mother:

“I tend I tended to go to my mom more and she used to cry so you know, you want, you dont want tha, you know that being an emotional person yourself, you want to like go and comfort your mother and stuff. So, like you know, I used to go and comfort her. I used to let her sit in my arms and cry till she calmed down and stuff like that” Vedika (41, 11-15; 42, 1-2)

Vedika seems to be acutely aware of her mother's emotional state, particularly distress and feels the need to frequently attend to it by comforting her. This behaviour and quality are rather associated with adult caregiving roles. The imagery of a child embracing a parent and comforting her in an intimate manner reflected in, "*I used to let her sit in my arms and cry till she calmed down*", further represents assuming of a premature adult role on Vedika's part. It seems to be a paradoxical experience as typically it is the role of the parent to be the nurturer that Vedika seems to convey and adopt instead. I wondered whether this supportive embrace also meant that she was being comforted in some way as a by-product, navigating her own emotional responses and needs "*being an emotional person*" herself.

In a slightly different context to the others above who make sense of their role as a child, Divya reflects on her caregiving role possibly as an adult and the impact it has on her in the context of IPC when she visits her home:

*"I feel so frustrated that whenever I go home, I go with that mental preparation ki I know there I will not have even a single minute of time. Either it's gonna be like all that (relentless conflict) or and when it's gonna be that, then I am the **only** one who has to go and sit with each person and not make them feel alone. So, at the end of the day, it's super exhausting for me. It's super, umm sorry, just two seconds (takes time out to have some water). umm it's difficult no"* Divya (56, 5-11)

Despite having some physical distance living away from home, it seems as though Divya is drawn into her caregiving role in the family upon her return, perhaps revealing the deeply ingrained and inescapable nature of this role. The need for "*mental preparation*" captures her anticipation regarding the challenges and responsibilities she is about to face upon her return, reflecting the constant demand either placed upon her or she places upon herself in the context of the family. Her emphasis on "*only*" one to attend to family members conveys an experience of feeling solely responsible and a sense of obligation in providing this

emotional care and support. Thus, I wondered whether her caregiving role is seen as central to the family dynamics. However, her acknowledgment of exhaustion highlights the personal cost and emotional toll of her caregiving role. It may be that her exhaustion stems from constantly having to prioritise the needs of the family over her own due to the responsibility she assumes and feels obligated to fulfil.

I found the hesitation and the needing to take a break to have water amidst the narrative of responsibility and exhaustion interesting. I interpret it as though it mirrored the overwhelming nature of her emotional experience associated with her role which perhaps also manifested physically, symbolising the need to momentarily step back from it. I wondered whether this subtle action is also a reflection of her unspoken need for self-care and respite from the emotional burden and responsibilities.

Prachi refers to being a “*parental figure*” for her sister which has extended into adulthood:

“because I’m the elder daughter umm so I would always feel responsible for my younger sister as well, because she was the kind who was, I used to think that she was a little innocent in that sense. I would try to be the parent figure for her. And that has kind of occurred even in adulthood. Like I still try to absorb all the negativity. I don’t try to let it reach her” Prachi (10, 2-7)

3.4 Group Experiential Theme 3: A Childhood I Didn’t Have

This GET captures the participants reflection on the quality of their childhood, encompassing the echoes of an emotionally unfulfilling childhood. To some extent, this theme considers the more indirect ways in which growing up with conflict had a bearing on their childhood/early experience. Participants speak to this through either one or both of the sub-themes.

3.4.1 Subtheme 3.1: Childhood in my dreams

This theme illuminates the participant's idealised version of childhood they never got to experience and captures their yearning for emotional sustenance (safety, security, protection), nurturance and nostalgia.

"I think there is a certain standard of uh when you when you bring the child into this world, there are certain things you need to do beyond just you know, materialist things or whatever, there's a certain environment you need to give your child and then there's a certain sense of safety that you need to create" Samaira (30, 1-5)

Here, Samaira explains what constitutes a nurturing childhood. By contrasting material needs with "*certain things*" that go beyond them, she perhaps is referring to essential emotional and psychological needs that are important. Her emphasis on "*certain*" aspects – environment, sense of safety emphasises the critical elements she considers necessary in childhood and upbringing. Although Samaira does not make direct reference to her own experience, I wondered whether talking about this from a distance through indirect and general language, she is implicitly revealing how these needs were not met or inadequately provided in her own childhood. It may be that she has come to realise the importance of the needs being discussed owing to the gaps in her own experience. Given the context of growing up in an environment marred by conflict, it seems as though she was looking beyond immediate material needs – for emotional sustenance, security and conveys an idealised, specific type of an environment – perhaps a harmonious, safe and secure one, that was lacking.

Echoing this sentiment, Aditi says:

“I won't say that they have not done anything for us. Definitely they have taken care of, you know, my mom taking care of the food or father has taken care of our you know, all the monetary needs whatever we need it [...]. But do you think that is only enough? [...]. But as a parent was, they not responsible to you know, to understand their child to understand each one of us. Like they have brought us into this world, okay, so it is their responsibility to understand each one of us and, you know, give attention to each one of us and what kind of a person we are” Aditi (15, 1-15).

Aditi acknowledges and, in a way, gives credit to her parents meeting the basic and material needs but shifts to contemplating the sufficiency of these tangible provisions, highlighting the absence of other essential needs. The use of “*only enough*” in the rhetorical question amplifies this sense of unfulfilled needs and conveys her possible dissatisfaction. I notice that Aditi directs this question to me and asks whether it is enough, perhaps seeking validation or indicating that others might share her view on this. The use of “*responsible*”, “*responsibility*” in her account, underscores a perceived, idealised duty/obligation that was not met by her parents, and she implies that they failed to meet their emotional responsibilities of attending to and nurturing her unique psychological needs. Overall, her account reveals the absence of emotional and psychological care and a longing for this idealised nurturance that was missing. I wondered whether this meant that she felt overlooked/unseen or emotionally deprived in some way.

Prachi reflects on a longing for a childhood filled with more emotional connection and bonding that she never got to experience:

“So, we would have time with our parents for not quality time, like time with our parents would usually mean ki they would be home in the evening, they would be helping us with homework and things, and that really was nice of them” Prachi (40, 10-11; 41, 1-3)

"I think that spending the quality time together was, that was something that didn't happen at that time, so I wish that, more of that would happen. Now we obviously spend time together, we plan trips and are more together and like just now like just before you called my mother, and I had taken our cat to the vet so we had really nice conversation in the car about things. I think this would have been really nice if we had been, if this had happened when we were kids too" Prachi (42, 1-8)

It seems as though the interactions with the parents were more routine and lacked deeper, emotional engagement, perhaps associated with "*quality time*". I wondered whether she views "*quality time*" as something more enriching and emotionally fulfilling than mere presence of parents and practical support that she contrasts this with, which "*didn't happen at that time*", suggesting to me, the lack of emotional connection and fulfilling upbringing. Contrasting current positive interactions that seems to be more emotionally satisfying to her, reflected in "*really nice conversation in the car about things*" against her childhood, perhaps conveys the idealised quality of childhood she yearned for, making the absence and longing more poignant to her.

By contrasting their own experience with that of their partners, Zoya and Rishi indicate a lack of a protected environment in their childhood.

*"he [husband] has not grown up with any family dispute per se, like their parents were, his parents were more of these kind of people that they obviously had their own problems, but they always sought to sort it out, you know, within themselves in closed walls like in their rooms, they would not let their kids know, you know, that really heated discussions have been happening between them, because they didn't want their kids to think that, oh, my parents are in dispute, which I think is **beautiful** [...] to hear that sounds so nice because as a child who's seen it and grown up **only seeing** it, I feel that would have been like a **really***

nice break from all the horrible memories I have in my head, which I would want to get rid of"
(15, 12; 16, 1-12)

"So, I could have probably seen, like, I I hear from my wife, she grew up in a house where there was no conflict. They've not had fights. They like, her mom, dad, never, they never fought in front of...they did fight, they would, she's not seen that so..." (37, 10-13)

Zoya describes how her husband's parents' conflicts were confined to the "closed walls", and he was not made aware of/exposed to them. The use of "closed walls" in this context evokes a thought in me of privacy, containment and protection. Thus, her husband's parents' private and protective approach lies in contrast with her own experience who has "grown up only seeing it", suggesting high visibility/exposure which meant that her parents did not shield/protect her from it. My understanding is that she idealises and admires this protective nature of her husband's parents as reflected in "which I think is beautiful" and thereby reveals a longing for a protected environment in her childhood. I wondered whether this idealisation perhaps would have contributed to a sense of safety and security, something that was possibly lacking in her own experience. The mention of "horrible memories" signifies the long-lasting impact, possibly trauma of not having a childhood shielded from such distress and being deprived of a nurturing and protected environment.

Similarly, Rishi describing his wife's lack of exposure to her parents' conflict "they never fought in front of...", "she's not seen that so", to me, points to the wistful longing for such protection that perhaps lies in contrast to his own experience, even though he doesn't explicitly mention that here. The fragmented speech and hesitation in completing the train of thoughts in his account, reflects an emotional struggle in articulating the full extent of his personal feelings or admission of what he particularly lacked in his own experience.

3.4.2 Subtheme 3.2: Missing a reliable, adult foundation/presence

This theme captures the tangible reality of disconnect, lack of reliable, supportive figures and anchors experienced by the participants in their upbringing, often leaving them lost and alone in navigating their lives.

“So, I’ve had a really difficult childhood since my parents always kept fighting, I never knew who to go to when I needed help or when I needed anything” Zoya (41, 8-11)

“So, whenever I had experiences that I, that were not, you know, supposed to be the normal for a girl, I had nobody to talk to, so I felt very, very, very lonely. Because when you’re a child, who do you have, like, we don’t go and talk to friends like intense emotions and everything because you know friends also sometimes make fun of you and everything. Like parents are the one you know you go and talk to. I never had that support system, which made me feel very lonely, very alone” Zoya (84, 5-12; 85, 1-2)

Zoya identifies her parents as expected sources of emotional support and guidance which she was deprived of in some way. The phrases, *“I never knew who to go to”, “I had nobody to talk to”, “I never had that support system”,* indicates a lack of accessible and reliable figures in her upbringing. This absence meant that she had to face her challenges alone and led to emotional isolation as reflected in *“I felt very, very, very lonely”*. The repeated use of “very” indicates the intensity of the isolation – that it was a deeply felt experience rooted in the context of persistent conflict and lack of reliable parental support.

Similarly, in the context of adolescence, Aditi says:

“Something has happened in school you want to tell, with whom you will tell? And then growing up already there will be a you know, a lot of emotions going on inside you right

especially when you are into your teenage years, right? and typically also hormonal changes, there's a lot of things happens right? But there was nobody, there was nobody to share" Aditi (17, 1-5)

Aditi suggests having no one to turn to, an absence of a reliable confidante and emotional outlet. The rhetorical question "*with whom you will tell?*", to me, signals that she expected her parents to be the primary sources of emotional support, which she lacked. The repetition of "*nobody*" suggests the total absence of a reliable and supportive figures during her formative critical years, underscoring the loneliness and emotional isolation she perhaps experienced in the absence of this fundamental support system.

Prachi talks about the absence of support and guidance in the context of navigating IP conflict:

"Like nobody told me that this was how you're supposed to be okay with it, they are your parents, and they'll sort it out, it's okay. Nobody ever told us that because we didn't have adults, any other adults around us" Prachi (20, 11; 21 1-3)

It appears as though Prachi was perhaps searching for a dependable figure to provide reassurance and guidance that was missing in her experience. The word "*adults*" evokes a thought in me of someone who is responsible, mature and reliable. Roles of support, nurturance and care are also typically associated with adult figures. Prachi's account reveals a lack of having such figures. I found the use of "*we didn't have adults*" before switching to "*any other adults around us*" interesting. I interpret the former as Prachi perhaps implying that her parents who are adults in her immediate environment perhaps didn't fulfil the qualities of what it means to be an adult – reliable, supportive etc. The latter then broadens the absence of such figures beyond her immediate family, indicating a lack of a support network.

Rishi found comfort in nurturing bonds and emotional anchors in others in light of the absence he experienced:

“If things were all fine and what I would learn from my mom and what I would learn from my dad is, I think very... But because they were not there were. They were absent for certain time in the way that I would want them. I sought for connections, in my friends, in other people [...] They gave me good advice, they kind of held my hand and we navigated for life”
Rishi (42, 6-9)

“I have a close friend who is almost fatherly. He's my age, he's probably six months younger but you think, the way he sees life, and what advice he's given his girlfriend now wife has given. So, I would treat them as my parents growing up obviously at that stage, when you really want some anchors in your life” Rishi (43, 1-6)

Rishi points to the missing foundation and anchors in his familial experience when he acknowledges the disparity between what he desired/needed from his parents and what was perhaps provided. My understanding is that he points to the lack of the emotional presence, support and connection from his parents which led him to fill the void through external connections. It appears as though he in a way replaced his parental figures to satisfy and fulfil his emotional needs in some way.

3.5 Group Experiential Theme 4: The Adult I Have Become

This final theme is more abstract and moves beyond reflecting on the immediate and past experience of what it was like to grow up with conflict than those presented previously and rather considers their reflection on the present and future as individuals, in a way integrating their experience into their adult realities. The primary focus is on how their early experience

has influenced and shaped their thoughts, feelings and actions as “individuals” as they navigate their lifeworld. Participants speak to this through either one or both of the sub-themes.

3.5.1 Sub-theme 4.1: You can’t shake off the enduring impact of the experience

This sub-theme delves into the accounts of participants that reveal a wide range of experience relating to the lasting negative impact of the past experience of living with conflict in various contexts, particularly complexities in interpersonal relating and mental health difficulties.

Zoya acknowledges the ever-lasting impact of growing up with conflict in her marriage:

*“So, when I say I’m the abusive one, I mean verbally only, like I say very, when I’m mad, I say very **MEAN** and hurtful things and then I realise why did I do that because my spouse does not do the same” Zoya (15, 7-11)*

“most of my behaviour that I think were more like her (mother) were when I, when I say really mean things to my husband, because my mother used to say a lot mean things to her husband, my father” Zoya (19, 10-12; 20, 1-2)

She identifies herself as a verbal aggressor in her relationship and makes a direct link between her behaviour and that of her mother’s. It seems as though she is mirroring past observed patterns in her own relationship, illuminating how living with conflict has shaped her own relational template. It represents how deeply the early experience persists and influences her as an adult.

Other participants elucidate the range of experience further. For example, Samaira commented:

"I guess maybe because of this experience, I, because I was supposed to or I was taking care of needs, of other people's needs, I feel like I am always trying to attune to someone else or trying to take care of them" Samaira (23, 3-6)

As explicated in GET 2, sub-theme 2.2, Samaira felt compelled to act as a mediator, feeling responsible to manage the conflict, emotions and needs of her parents. This early form of responsibility in response to living with conflict has quite a substantial impact on how she relates with others currently. To me, it suggests perhaps an internalised sense of responsibility to prioritise others' needs over own, replaying the role she took on her family. I also wonder whether this means that as an adult she is constantly overextending herself in interpersonal relationships and sacrificing herself in some way, which could be emotionally exhausting. Samaira is also a counsellor which requires her to attend/attune to her client's emotions and needs and I wonder whether emotional caretaking is familiar and an aspect that also contributes to her tendency to do so outside of her profession.

Aditi makes a remark on the inability to form and maintain genuine and meaningful friendships:

"Most of the time it happens that I will be like quiet when I'm in a group or something. It just because I am afraid of speaking, that people will make fun of me, okay, because thats all I have seen in my family. Because within the family that used to happen, right. So, but I have to, you know, justify it in a way that I'm introvert. Oh, I don't talk, or I am a good listener. I am a good listener, I know, but every time that is not the case, okay. I like talking, I want to talk to people, I want to have, you know, that people enjoys and all that. But because of that fear

and all I think I could not make good friends and all in my life. And in fact, I started living my life in a very lonely way” Aditi (52, 14-17; 53, 1-8)

Her account reveals a significant impact on her social life. The fear of ridicule and judgment seems significant to her and appears to be a direct extension of the familial experience reflected in *“that’s all I have seen in my family”*, pointing to perhaps either similar nature of relational experience between the parents or generally across the family. It appears as though she has internalised this fear and, in some way, this fear paralyses her to engage openly and authentically, pointing to the vulnerability her past experience prompts in interpersonal interactions. Her outward persona of identifying as an introvert lies in contrast to her true identity and desires in some way and masks her vulnerability, indicating how deeply she feels compelled to behave a particular way owing to her past experience. The deep isolation experienced as a result of her hindered ability to form genuine connections also reveals the emotional cost and lasting impact of her early experience.

Divya in the context of her friends says:

“Um, with friends...I think with like any of the friends like not the relationships I’m talking about right now, but only friends, that again, I would be super cautious, and I would be...my only thing would be that always, like, always observant of the person. Because I’m so...this has become an inbuilt thing to always observe the facial expressions or.. is it changing? Is it becoming furious? Am I causing them any kind of offence to them? So, these things have become a priority in my life” Divya (48, 8-12; 49, 1-2)

Here, Divya indicates the hyper-awareness and heightened anxiety in relating with others. The phrases *“super cautious”* and *“always observant of the person”* reflects this and suggests her need to scan and monitor social cues. I wondered whether she is looking out for cues of potential threat or conflict. The use of *“always”* in the phrases suggests the

pervasive nature of this vigilance – a constant state of alertness in her interactions. I interpret the constant vigilance - reading expressions and emotional states of others as an internalised fear of conflict and attempts to mitigate them, perhaps as a result of growing up with relentless conflict as explicated in her account in GET 1. The word “*inbuilt*” along with “*become a priority in my life*” suggests that this behaviour is deeply ingrained and, in some way, plays an integral part of who she is. To me, “*inbuilt*” also represents that this was perhaps developed during her early years of growing up with conflict and has thus solidified into her personality. I also wondered whether being hypervigilant means that she is unable to engage with others freely.

Rishi also comments on his experience in this regard, reflecting on the hyper-awareness and acute sensitivity to cues in his environment:

“So, I kind of started judging what umm the situation in the room is at all times. And that’s helped me understand now in even professional environments, or at, you know, in my personal life. Now that if things are not well, I’m able to, I’m very umm receptive to it, I can, I can see those things clearly, which is because I grew up in that state of conflict and state of tension” Rishi (16, 12-16; 17, 1)

Rishi refers to his ability to gauge, assess and interpret the emotional atmosphere in his environment. The phrase “*I’m very receptive to it*” indicates the profound and acute sensitivity to cues, perhaps changes in the emotional states or dynamics. He makes a direct and explicit link to his past experience, suggesting that it is something that is deeply ingrained and integrated into his adult identity and functioning. In GET 1, Rishi speaks to constantly being on edge when he mentions earlier in the interview “*walking on eggshells*” in navigating the volatile home environment and I infer this as being translated and persisting into his adulthood. Additionally, the mention of “*professional*” and “*personal*” means that this sensitivity is generalised across different domains of his life, also indicating in some way the

widespread impact of his past experience. At surface level, this excerpt suggests that Rishi views his abilities as something valuable and effective as reflected in *“that’s helped me”*, although I interpreted it slightly differently. My interpretation is that the heightened sensitivity, assessing the emotional climate means that he is constantly looking out for cues for potential conflicts and threats, which could perhaps be exhaustive. He later does add: *“I would rather have, you know, a place where I’m not always looking out for the next conflict or those things”* (17, 9-11), which, to me, is suggestive that it is not something that he feels is entirely helpful.

Vedika and Zoya make a direct link between growing up with IPC and their mental health difficulties:

“I know that my parents argued and because of that I’m into depression and anxiety” Vedika (70, 13-16)

“It’s a very, very depressing experience overall, which has honestly led to my depression, at least that’s what I would say” Zoya (6, 5-7)

3.6.2 Subtheme 4.2: “I’ll make it a point to not do that”: Differentiation.

This final sub-theme considers the participants’ learned lessons and insights gained from the challenging experiences of living with conflict and how they are committed and determined to differentiate either from their parents or their relational patterns.

Rishi reflects on the interactions and issues he witnessed in his parents’ marriage and says:

“I’ll remember what dad has done or what, what those interactions were, and I’ll make it, I’ll make it a point not to do that, with my wife. I told you about the females or the girls that dad

kind of be with or just interact like his friends' wives, he would be with them. But mom would not like it. So, in my life what that's translated is I'd be very clear with my wife of what I'm doing [...] I'll make it a point that if she's not comfortable with somebody, I'll I'll not do that. Like dad would in fact, go one step and would make sure to do it [...] But they were not... That's not the relationship that..." Rishi (26, 16; 27, 1-11)

Here, he is committed to differentiating from his father. The phrase *"I'll make it, I'll make it a point not to do that"*, conveys a sense of intentionality, deliberate effort to avoid replicating certain behaviours of his father's and actively choosing to be different. My understanding of his father's behaviour of purposefully engaging with people who made his mother uncomfortable as reflected in *"go one step and would make sure to do it"*, reflects a lack of consideration for his mothers' feelings and perhaps a passive-aggressive behaviour. In contrast, Rishi stating his commitment to avoiding behaviours that would make his wife uncomfortable, indicates how Rishi perhaps prioritises empathy and respect in his own marriage – highlighting a shift in his principles and behaviours. The incomplete thought *"That's not the relationship that..."* signals that there were aspects of his parent's relationship which were undesirable to him and therefore he holds a different standard for his own marriage.

Like Rishi, Zoya also differentiates her own behaviour from that of her mother's in her marriage:

*"I always also am aware or make myself aware that there is still a difference you know between what she did and what... she never, till date, she never accepts her fault. She says that I am always right, I don't do mistakes. I don't do mistakes like your father, I'm not wrong. And I will not ask sorry. She's **NEVER** asked for forgiveness for **any** of her behaviour because she thinks they are legit and that they they are valid. But I don't. If I do something*

wrong and I realise that it's wrong, I ask my husband for forgiveness right away. This was not right to do" Zoya (20, 2-12)

Despite the difficulties of mirroring certain negative patterns of her mother's behaviour as explored in Zoya's account in the sub-theme above, here, she acknowledges how "*there is still a difference*". She highlights her mother's denial, refusal to acknowledge her fault or her role in the dynamic with her father and a lack of an ability to apologise lies in contrast to her own behaviour in her marriage. The emphasised use of "*never*" and "*any*" emphasises the absolute extent of the critique she is referring to and perhaps is also suggestive of the possible dissatisfaction of this observed behaviour. The use of contrastive language "*I don't*", "*If I do*" highlights her effort to adopt a different approach. Zoya's willingness and ability to seek "*forgiveness right away*" indicates her drive to be accountable in her relationship. "*This was not right to do*" also demonstrates, her ability to acknowledge mistakes and take ownership, something that her mother never did, thus reflecting a shift in her behaviour on learning from her mother.

Prachi reveals a conscious decision to adopt a different parenting strategy for her future children:

"they (parents) would never do anything in secret. So, they used to be like, if it's happy times, we would all share them together. If it's unhappy times, we would also share them together. But then, so that would mean even like fighting in front of us. They never fought behind closed doors. That never happened. So, in I don't know why that was their reasoning. But that is something that I would personally not do with my kids because I know that it really, it stays with you for a while" Prachi (33, 1-8)

Here, Prachi begins by reflecting on her parents' practices in the family. The use of "*never do anything in secret*" suggests that they shared all aspects of their lives openly within the

family, as if nothing was hidden from her. Whilst it may reflect transparency within the family, it also meant that Prachi was exposed to a lot of adult issues and there was no discretion, particularly in handling conflicts. The use of “*even like fighting in front of us*” reveals the high visibility of conflict that her parents subjected her to. The phrase “*behind closed doors*” serves as a metaphor for actions that are to be kept private, unseen/unheard, confined. By stating that her parents “*never*” engaged in this practice, reflects the lack of handling their conflicts privately and instead exposing them. “*It says with you for a while*” indicates the enduring imprint such exposure had on Prachi. By affirming, “*that is something I would personally not do with my kids*”, she speaks to the decision to avoid repetition of her parents’ practices for her own family. She perhaps points to a more sensitive and private approach, wanting to shield and protect her children from the exposure and subsequent impact. Prachi perhaps wants to ensure that her children experience a different and secure home environment.

Aditi, in exploring what she learned not to do from her experience of growing up with conflict commented:

“Aap aapke partner ke saath, aapke conflicts hai ya kuch bhi hai, toh aap unki behzadti publicly mat karo na, aap apne issues privately aap solve karo right. Aap, agar ab issues hai, aur aap sab ke saamne ladna shuru ho jao, I don't think that is correct. And I have seen that thing a lot of times in my family. Kuch bhi issue hua, ladai hui, and my papa is you know, literally behzadti karna, gundi cheeze bolna and all that in front of others” Aditi (88, 5-14)

In a slightly similar vein to Prachi, Aditi reveals an understanding of dealing with issues privately and appears to be against public visibility of conflict, shaped by the negative experiences of public humiliation and exposure of conflict by her father. Aditi expresses her disapproval of such actions as reflected in, “*I don't think that is correct*”, indicating that she perhaps values respect and privacy in relationships. I wondered whether her dissatisfaction

of public humiliation and exposure, “*kuch bhi issue hai, ladai hui, and my papa is you know, literally behzadti karna, gundi cheeze bolna and all that in front of others*” also has a cultural implication. I interpret that she views this aspect as shameful given the context of being a part of a collectivist society, where family honour and respect is vital, in some way also shaping her own belief in upholding privacy and respect in relationships. I found the use of Hindi language in her account interesting as it enriches her narrative in a way. My understanding is that it perhaps allowed her to authentically express these aspects that were personal and emotionally meaningful to her more adequately.

Vedika, experienced a lack of emotional connection in her parents’ marriage that greatly affected her and is therefore determined to prioritise this in her own future relationship:

“I want a person to connect to me emotionally. Even though my parents if they had a love marriage, they never connected emotionally. They never realised. They’ve just been together, and their arguments just went on like, for years. They never connected emotionally; they never understood each other. And I don’t want that. I don’t want a person. It affected greatly in my life” Vedika (80, 14-15; 81, 1-6).

Chapter Four

4. Discussion

In this chapter, I begin by providing an overview of the IPA themes and findings that surfaced through the analysis. I will then explain and discuss the findings by locating them within the context of existing theoretical concepts and empirical literature. Following this, I will consider the findings' implications for practice and the wider context. Next, I outline the strengths and limitations of the study and highlight some future directions. Finally, I conclude the write-up of this study by turning to some personal reflections.

4.1. Overview of the IPA themes

Presented in the analysis were four IPA GETs: 'Living in a pressure-cooker environment' (GET 1), "Me in between oppositions" (GET 2), "A childhood I didn't have" (GET 3) and "The adult I have become" (GET 4). These themes together illuminate the lived experience of children growing up with IPC, capturing the internal and external worlds of the participants.

Participant's accounts reflected on what it was like to be captive to IPC, seemingly drawing a parallel to the tension of living in a high-pressure environment (GET 1). As presented in subtheme 1.1, IPC was experienced as relentless and pervasive. Perhaps, by virtue of this experience of constant presence of IPC that prevailed in their homes, participants responded to their environment by attempting to escape or block out either the IPC itself or the emotional anguish that it evoked. This is captured in subtheme 1.2. Nevertheless, these responses appear to be earnest attempts to evade the inevitable distressing reality of persistent IPC, which led them to question and reflect on the potential for their parents' divorce (subtheme 1.3), with some struggling with the possibility, whilst others favouring the possibility.

The second GET captured the participants experiences of the complex family dynamics they faced whilst navigating the disrupted family environment in light of IPC. IPC appeared to drive participants to either take sides between their parents or assume specific responsible roles, as a result of being subjected to and caught between IPC and the emotional demands of their environment. These aspects are captured in subtheme 2.1 and 2.2 respectively. As conceptualized in GET 3, analysis also indicated that amidst IPC, participants encountered a broader experience of an emotionally unfulfilling childhood encompassing echoes of the idealized version they longed for (subtheme 3.1) and the reality of missing a supportive and reliable adult presence in their formative years (sub-theme 3.2).

Finally, the fourth GET captured participants exploration of how their experience of IPC, in some way, extends into their present and/or prospects of future lives, shaping their ways of being and perspectives. Their early experience of IPC seemed to have a dual influence, from IPC shaping certain challenges and difficulties in their adult lives (sub-theme 4.1) to IPC fostering insights and instilling a strong sense of desire and commitment to behave differently in their own lives (sub-theme 4.2).

4.2 Discussion of the findings

4.2.1 Living in a pressure-cooker environment

In GET 1.1, on a surface and content level, participants highlight the nature of the IPC experienced. They point to aspects such as mutually uncooperative parental dynamics, frequent disagreements, lack of relational harmony, intense verbal hostility, unresolved tensions, and volatility. These descriptions about the nature of IPC that children experienced closely aligns with established and documented dimensions of IPC, some of which are outlined in the beginning of the introductory chapter. Specifically, those delineated by Grych and Fincham (1990) (frequency, intensity, and lack of resolution), destructive IPC (verbal hostility, uncooperative, avoidant; van Eldik, 2020) as well as the recent conceptualization of IPC by Davies et al., (2021) who refer to interparental disorganization, defined as “abrupt,

inexplicable changes in parental emotional lability, conflict tactics and verbalizations” (p.1) and unpredictability as a dimension of IPC, that aligns with the volatile and unpredictable nature of IPC that one of the participants (Samaira) described.

Although these various dimensions may appear to be reflected at a surface level in the study, a deeper analysis indicates that regardless of the nature of the IPC, participants used words that suggested that it was an ever-present, unrelenting, and persistent experience. This experiential aspect is also reflected within the empirical qualitative literature on children’s experiences of DV/IPV. For example, the experience and theme of violence as ever-present was indicated in the study by Chester & Josycelne (2018) and as persistent in the study by Dumont & Lessard (2019). Moreover, in light of experiencing IPC in this way, participants in the current study shared the affective consequences it led to such as stress, depressive feelings, hyper-vigilance, and uncertainty. This finding can be understood as resonating with the conceptualization of the emotional security hypothesis (EST; Cummings & Davies, 1998). According to EST, when IPC is recurrent and pervasive, as reflected by the participants in this study, children may experience a disruption in the emotional security (sense of safety, protection, stability) within the family environment, resulting in negative emotional reactions such as fear, anger, sadness, hyper-vigilance, some of which are reflected in the presented study.

Moving onto sub-theme 1.2, analysis suggested that participants endeavoured to escape/block out IPC itself or the distressing environment characterized by relentless, ever-present IPC, either physically or psychologically. This theme, overall, is related to the concept of “coping” in psychology. Coping as defined by Lazarus & Folkman (1987) refers to “cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (p.141).

Within the broader stress and coping literature, various typologies have emerged that offer an understanding of coping behaviour. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) conceptualize coping behaviour relying on two dichotomies; problem-focused coping - strategies oriented towards solving or changing the problem (e.g., initiating action) or emotion-focused coping - strategies aimed at alleviating distress and arousal (e.g., self-soothing). Band & Weisz (1988) consider primary control coping (approaches aimed to change stressful circumstances), secondary control coping (approaches aimed to adapt to the circumstances as they are), or relinquished control (trying neither to change or adapt to the stressful circumstances). Alternatively, Compas et al., (2001) provided a multi-dimensional model of coping, whereby they first categorized between voluntary response to stress (efforts that are within conscious control) and involuntary response to stress (i.e., automatic reactions that may or not may be under conscious awareness and are not under conscious control). They further distinguished voluntary coping in terms of engagement (directing attention/action towards a stressor, either through behavioural actions or cognitive efforts) or disengagement (efforts to shift away from the stressor, withdrawing from source of stress).

Participants in the current study reported various responses such as physical withdrawal (closing ears, retreating into their rooms, running away from home), seeking refuge in school, and immersing in alternative activities (listening to loud music, reading fantasy). It points to varied attempts directed towards reducing emotional distress, escape, or avoid the source of stress (i.e., IPC). Therefore, these fit the description of emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987), secondary control coping (Band & Weisz, 1988) as well as disengagement coping (Compas et al., 2001). One participant, Zoya, along with physical withdrawal also highlighted suicidal ideation and resorting to self-harm. This perhaps aligns with non-constructive coping which is referred to as “misguided strategies to change the situation or modify one’s emotions that are destructive to self or others” (Kerig, 2001; p. 216). Self-harm and suicidal ideation perhaps manifested as an extreme response to change

her psychological state or manage the overwhelming emotions she experienced stemming from the home environment and living with IPC.

Transitioning to specifically the context of IPC, EST is a framework that also offers an understanding of how children cope with exposure to IPC. One of the key components of EST is regulation of conflict exposure which has been operationalized as over-controlling, referring to behaviours where children engage excessively with the conflict (intervening, mediating) and avoidance (withdrawing, escaping, distraction). The responses highlighted in the current study lends itself with avoidance and can be understood as an attempt to regulate or alleviate the exposure to IPC and the distress associated with it.

This finding in the present study resonates with those in the literature exploring children's experiences of DV/IPV. The theme "*turning on music, reading a book, closing ones' ears*" in Overlien & Hyden (2009), "*going elsewhere inside the home*" in Chanmugam (2015), "*avoiding emotional reactions*" and "*escaping from violent episodes*" in Miranda et al., (2021) and "*escape-avoidance*" in Miranda et al., (2023) are all analogous to the theme "escaping/blocking out" and findings emerged in the present study in the context of IPC. Finally, I'd like to suggest that this theme can be understood as more than just coping and indicates that the children in this study experience IPC as one that engenders suffering.

Although the participants in the current study did not experience divorce first-hand, central to GET 1.3, is participants experiencing the prospect of divorce as a source of threat during childhood and for some, a welcomed resolve in adulthood. For the participants who found the idea of divorce threatening in their childhood indicated feelings of insecurity, fear of loss and anxiety. This finding can be explained using different theories.

Attachment theory emphasizes the crucial role of a secure base and secure relationships between children and their caregivers, providing them with a foundation from which they can explore the world (Bowlby, 1973). Therefore, it can be inferred that when the interparental

relationship marked by relentless conflict is threatened by the prospect of divorce, children may perceive this as a disruption to the secure base and attachment to one or both caregivers. The destabilization of their emotional foundations, fear of losing the closeness, availability, or consistency of attachment figures can evoke significant distress, leading children to perceive the prospect of divorce overwhelmingly threatening.

The Cognitive-Contextual Framework (Grych & Fincham, 1990) highlights the way in which children interpret and respond to IPC is not solely influenced by the conflict itself but also by their cognitive appraisals of the situation. Drawing from this framework, the idea of “threat appraisals” also offers a useful lens for understanding the finding in the current study. Threat appraisals refer to children’s evaluations regarding the negative aspects of conflict, particularly how threatening IPC is to them, their parents, their parents’ marital status. The finding in the current study, therefore, reflects this threat-focused appraisal process, whereby participants perceived IPC as threatening to their parents’ marital status which affected their own well-being, as reflected in their feelings of insecurity, fear and anxiety. Indeed, previous quantitative research has also explicated the link between IPC and threat appraisals in children (Grych et al., 2000, Gerard et al., 2005; Siffert & Schwarz, 2011; Camicasca et al., 2019). Therefore, the current study provides a qualitative account of this aspect, reflected in participants own words rather than solely relying on pre-determined self-report questionnaires capturing how children appraise IPC. Furthermore, most quantitative studies operationalize threat appraisals through multiple items (worry about parents’ divorce being one item among others), assessing children’s fears stemming from IPC, using the threat-appraisals subscale of CPIC. These items are typically aggregated and analysed as a unitary construct, making it difficult to disentangle what it is that children find most threatening. One cannot fully infer the relative salience of the prospect of divorce compared to other fears encompassed in threat appraisals in the current study, since other fears did not explicitly emerge in the current qualitative analysis. However, it can be argued that the prominence of viewing the prospect of divorce as threatening in participants’ accounts offers

a novel insight into how a specific dimension of threat appraisal may emerge as particularly salient or resonate strongly in children's experiences. This finding therefore also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of threat appraisals and challenges prior conceptualizations that treat threat appraisals as a homogenous construct.

Moreover, for those that found the prospect of divorce as threatening, the finding also resonates with the element of negative and insecure internal representations of the consequence of IPC on the welfare of the family and children's well-being, highlighted in EST as a result of disruption of emotional security derived from the parental system and the family as a whole.

In contrast, coming to those participants that welcomed and rather advocated for their parents' divorce as adults, this perspective can firstly be understood in light of their developmental growth that comes with age. Adults have the capacity for more complex, abstract thinking and understanding (Piaget, 1972). Thus, it may be that they are able to appraise the prospect of divorce no longer from an emotional lens solely and as a welcoming potential solution upon gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the detrimental aspects of IPC over time. In addition, younger children rely more often on their parents and are relatively confined to the home environment (Grych & Fincham, 1990). As children get older (i.e., as adults), they have a more growing ability to distance themselves from their families of origin or homes, along with more coping strategies and extensive support networks. This may also influence why as adults; these participants came to view the prospect of divorce as welcoming. Indeed, those that did express this view had a reasonable physical distance from their homes.

This particular insight also adds to and challenges the Cognitive-contextual framework. While the framework acknowledges that self-blame appraisals may be influenced and vary by developmental level and age (Grych & Fincham, 1990), the finding that participants as adults viewed the prospect of divorce as welcoming extends this idea by showing how threat

appraisals themselves may also evolve over time. This broadens the framework to encompass the developmental considerations of threat appraisals. It also adds a novel dimension that not all appraisals of divorce are rooted in threat, particularly in adulthood. Furthermore, the framework predominantly conceptualizes cognitive appraisals as reactions to threat or responsibility, focusing on the negative implications of IPC and appraisals. By identifying participants welcomed the idea of divorce, the current study challenges this emphasis by adding a dimension that there can be constructive interpretations or resolution focused appraisals of IPC.

Moreover, the findings suggest that it is not just a simple desire/preference for their parents' divorce. A detailed analysis suggests a more complex, deeper need: an emotional plea for relief from the strife of constant IPC. Their parents staying together is seen as something that is "spoiling" and "hurting" their lives and the family system. Thus, it reflects a profound need to alleviate their own suffering, welcoming and advocating the prospect of divorce as a way to break free from the conflict and restore their emotional well-being in some way. Divorce, in this sense, is perhaps seen as an act of liberation, one that allows the children to reclaim peace and expect a healthier environment free from the strain and suffering caused by their parents staying together despite persistent IPC. This finding may thereby indicate that some children perceive divorce as less harmful than enduring a high-conflict environment, which is line with research suggesting IPC may have a stronger impact on children than divorce itself (Amato, 2000; Lansford, 2009; Zemp et al., 2016).

Lastly, for those who expressed this view, the perspective can also be explained in the context of evolving cultural landscape in India. Traditionally, divorce was highly stigmatized in India owing to the family-centric culture and marriage seen as a lifelong commitment. However, societal perceptions of divorce have evolved, with an increasing normalization of divorce as a reasonable and acceptable response to relational conflict. The participants age indicates that they grew up amidst these shifts in India which can help us understand how

they perhaps relate to the idea of divorce and come to view it as a relatively more positive construct. In addition, as Indian society becomes more influenced by individualistic values through exposure, it may be that these participants might personally shift away from traditional collectivist ideals that emphasize family unity and preservation of relationships even when it comes at a cost. In this context, they might come to view parents' divorce as a desirable option and pathway to individual peace and personal fulfilment in face of IPC. However, this should be considered with caution, as while participants might personally appraise the prospect of divorce in this way, they also reflect their realities of facing limitations to their advocacy relating it to their parents' "commitment", "conservative", different "mindset". This indicates a tension between their views, perhaps influenced by broader societal changes in India and the more traditional, commitment-driven values of their parents, pointing to the differing generational contexts.

Overall, the dual perspective found in the current study in this sub-theme, reflects the complex realities of living with IPC. It also makes a unique contribution to the literature by indicating the dynamic nature of cognitive appraisals as reflected in childhood accounts versus the adult reflections.

4.2.2 Me in between oppositions

The second theme illuminated by the current study is "me in between oppositions", capturing children's experience of navigating, growing up in a home defined by relentless conflict that set their parents at odds with one another, which was categorized into two sub-themes; "taking sides is inevitable" and "assuming roles".

According to Amato & Afifi (2006), children caught in the middle of IPC often find themselves navigating three potential responses. The first is attempting to stay close and maintaining a positive relationship with both parents. Another response is that children might take sides, aligning with one parent over the other. Alternatively, a third response is that children disengage from both parents, rejecting both relationships. The sub-theme 2.1, "taking sides

is inevitable” identified in the current study aligns closely with the idea of children responding to IPC by taking sides and forming alliances with one parent over the other, as discussed by Amato & Afifi (2006).

This finding also resonates with the concept of triangulation within the context of family systems theory. Triangulation, as discussed in the introductory chapter, refers to the involvement of a third person (a child) in a dyadic conflict (parental conflict) to defuse stress, tension or conflict that exists between them (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). It is also conceptualized as children feeling the need to take sides even if they are not involved in the IPC (Keirg & Swanson, 2010). Detouring and cross-generational coalitions are two forms of triangulation described by Minuchin (1974). In detouring, parents experiencing difficulties in the marital subsystem divert their attention onto the child to avoid acknowledging or resolving their difficulties. In particular, “detouring attacking” is when parents form a coalition against the child, wherein the child is rejected or perceived to be the problem (Keirg & Swanson, 2010). Alternatively, “detouring supportive” (Keirg & Swanson, 2010), refers to when parents conceal their difficulties by focusing excessively on the child by caring or considering the child as special or fragile. Cross-generational coalition refers to a child forming an alliance with one of the parents against the other in a parental conflict (Minuchin, 1974). Therefore, more specifically, the findings of the current study resonate with the cross-generational coalition form of triangulation. In addition, analysis suggested that as a result of aligning with one parent, some participants had a more distant relationship with the other parent. This consequence of triangulation has been discussed by Erel & Burman (1995) who argued that the mechanism of triangulation and cross-generational coalition whilst results in a positive or close relationship with one parent also impacts the quality of parent-child relationship with the other parent. Moreover, the current study provides a unique and nuanced insight into how triangulation occurs: shared narratives and communication from one parent and visible signs of distress of one parent, which invites and enlists the support of the child.

Wang et al., (2024) highlight that cross-generational coalitions could be either stable or unstable. The former denotes a long-term alliance between a child and one parent, while the latter denotes wherein a child could switch allegiances between parents at different times. With regards to the current study and touching upon these notions, the participants appear to reflect a stable coalition, wherein they referred to taking sides with and aligning with one parent over time. However, interestingly, two of the participants, Rishi and Divya, highlighted a shift in perception, particularly, blame placing as adults. Historically, as they aligned with one parent, they perceived the non-favouring parent as the only “villain”. However, as adults, they reflected on considering the role of the allied parent in IPC, indicating a change in understanding. It is important to recognize that this doesn’t necessarily signify an unstable coalition, wherein the child aligns with the other parent at a different point in time. But rather represents a shift from a polarized view to a more a balanced one, in which they begin to recognize the complexities and contributions of both parents that was perhaps previously overlooked when they were younger. This reflects a maturation in emotional and cognitive processing that comes with age and life experiences. The current study, therefore, contributes to a unique finding, that captures how blame placing in the context of triangulation and IPC may function across development. Although, children when younger, may unequivocally place blame on only one parent, they perhaps develop a greater capacity to take on multiple perspectives as adults, reframing the nature of blame placing and assignment of roles in the context of IPC.

In addition, Rishi and Divya’s childhood accounts categorizing the other parent as “bad”, while reflecting on their alignment with one parent can be understood through the lens of splitting, a concept described in psychoanalytic theory (Klein, 1946; Fairbairn, 1994). Splitting refers to a phenomenon in which individuals views themselves, others or situations in extreme, polarized, black and white terms due to overwhelming conflicting emotions. In the context of IPC, it can be argued that alignment with one parent can lead to the

unconscious need to idealize the favoured parent whilst vilifying the other as a way of coping with overwhelming emotional weight of the conflicting parental figures and stress stemming from having conflicting emotions towards both the parents.

Moving onto sub-theme 2.2, the current study found that participants assumed a responsible role of an intermediary, mediator, emotional caregiver, and anchor in the family in the context of IPC. This finding can be understood in relation to the phenomenon of parentification (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973) – a role reversal, in which children bound by adverse family circumstances assume developmentally demanding adult responsibilities usually carried out by another adult or performed by the parent for a child. Jurkovic (1997) delineated two types of parentification: instrumental and emotional. Instrumental parentification refers to a child assuming functional caretaking responsibilities and maintaining the physical welfare of the family (e.g., household duties such as cooking or cleaning, providing financial support, or caring for siblings). Emotional parentification, on the other hand, refers to a child involved in fulfilling the psychological or emotional needs of the parent or the family as a whole (e.g., mediating conflict, adopting a role of a peacekeeper, serving as a confidante to a parent). The findings of the current study could fit the description of “emotional parentification”. Parentification has been found in earlier research in different contexts such as children of divorced families (Jurkovic Thirkield & Morrell, 2001), children growing up with parental mental/ physical illness (van Parys et al., 2014), children experiencing parental infidelity (Salih & Chaudry, 2023), parental substance abuse (Burnett et al., 2006).

Although most children engage in caretaking behaviours in their families, children taking adult and parent like roles and responsibilities that are not usually entrusted to them and inappropriate for their developmental stage, can result in undue burdens on them, often leading to negative implications. The current study found the personal costs of participants

taking on such a role such as the inability to experience a more typical childhood owing to accelerated development and emotional exhaustion.

The portrayal of role-reversed family dynamics in the current study may reflect boundary dissolution within the family system. According to FST, maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries are important to ensure healthy relational and family functioning (Minuchin, 1974). Boundaries define “appropriate family roles, demarcate developmental differences among family members, ensure that parents meet their adult emotional needs in the couple relationship rather than turning to their children in developmentally inappropriate ways” (Kerig & Swanson, p. 62). One of the facets of boundary dissolution is confusion of roles and parentification, which undermines the natural hierarchical relationship between parents and children. In the current study, participants described dynamics reflecting role-reversal and emotional parentification, reflecting this boundary dissolution or violation. However, it is important to recognize that the concept of boundaries may differ in collectivist cultures, such as the population in the current study. In these contexts, family roles are often more fluid, influenced by cultural ideals of interdependence and familial duty. As such, while boundary dissolution in terms of parentification may be evident in these participants experiences, it should be viewed with sensitivity.

Moreover, while most children worldwide may experience a sense of responsibility in some form in the context of growing up with IPC with attempts to intervene, mediate, comfort their parents, particularly within the Indian ethnic population in the current study, it can be argued that this sense of responsibility is more pronounced and poignant. In collectivist cultures, such as India, the concept of family is central and there appears to be a strong sense of duty to maintain harmony and support within the family unit. Filial piety and responsibility (Narayan & Sriram, 2023), the belief in honouring and caring for one’s parents and the family is a deeply embedded cultural value. Therefore, it is important to discuss the finding in relation to the cultural framework which often positions the child as an integral part of a

collective system, where the well-being of the family is seen as paramount. Hence, it can be argued that in the context of IPC, participants in the current study coming from a collectivist culture may feel an amplified sense of obligation and responsibility to mediate, act as an emotional caregiver and anchor within the family system. It perhaps can be seen as an integral part of the child's role within the family and a reflection of collectivist ideals that emphasizes the interconnectedness of family members.

4.2.3 A Childhood I Didn't Have

The third theme elucidates a broader, nuanced experience and reflection of childhood growing up with IPC, which was split into two sub-themes: "childhood in my dreams" and "missing a reliable, adult foundation/presence". In sub-theme 3.1, the participants reflect on an idealized childhood, one they yearned for but never experienced. The current study found how children may look beyond immediate and material needs, expressing a deep longing for safety, security, nurturing, protection – qualities of childhood, they envision as fundamental to a fulfilling childhood. In contrast, sub-theme 3.2, underscores the tangible reality of disconnect and absence of available, consistent, supportive figures and anchors who could provide the emotional scaffolding necessary, leaving the participants feeling alone and lost in navigating their early lives.

Together, these two themes illuminate the finding that there was a profound experience of unmet emotional and psychological needs satisfaction in the context of IPC. This finding is also identified as one of the themes in a qualitative synthesis regarding children's perceptions of their parents in the context of DV (Hui & Maddern, 2021). A recent study by Zhen et al., (2022) also found that IPC was associated with maternal antipathy and neglect and lack of psychological needs satisfaction.

The finding in the current study can be explained by the spillover hypothesis (Erel & Burman, 1995), that elucidates one of the pathways of the interrelatedness of the marital and parent-child relationship. The spillover hypothesis posits that the effect of IPC often transfers into the parent-child relationship, disrupting parenting practices and diminishing emotional availability (Erel & Burman, 1995, Grych & Fincham, 1990). It suggests that when the marital relationship is conflictual and under stress, parents tend to be emotionally drained and unavailable to sensitively attend to their children, undermining their ability to provide effective parenting and caregiving (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988). Previous research has shown the association between IPC and parents' emotional unavailability and unsupportive behaviours (Sturge-Apple, 2008; Warmuth et al., 2020). Therefore, considering the spillover hypothesis, it can be argued that the parents' relentless conflict in their marital relationship perhaps resulted in their diminished capacity to be emotionally available and sensitive to the emotional needs of their children, leaving the participants with a relational void that they longed for and required, pointing to the emotional deprivation or neglect they experienced.

Furthermore, emotional unavailability linked to IPC can impede children's ability to develop a secure base. As noted in attachment theory, secure attachment is developed in environments where children experience consistent emotional responsiveness and caregiving (Bowlby, 1988). The participants longing for emotional sustenance together with their lived realities of disconnect, lack of support, guidance, and emotional anchors as found in the current study, thereby may reflect the foundational attachment needs that were unmet, perhaps indicating a disruption of a secure attachment system between parent-child.

Lastly, these findings can also hold particular cultural significance. Within the Indian collectivist context, where cultural narratives emphasize interdependence and parents are positioned as sources of support and guidance, the lack of emotional sustenance may be experienced by the participants with particular intensity, amplifying their sense of loss.

4.2.4 The Adult I Have Become

As captured in the two sub-themes in this GET, for many participants in the current study, their experience of growing up living with IPC seemed to influence their present and/or hopes for future, shaping their internal and external realities and landscapes.

As reflected in sub-theme 4.1, participants spoke of the varied relational and psychological residues they carried into their adult lives. For many participants, it appears that their childhood experience of IPC, often brought complexities in interpersonal relating. One participant poignantly described mirroring verbal aggressive behaviours learned from a parent in her own marital life. This finding aligns with the principles of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and the idea of intergenerational transmission of relational patterns, where relational dynamics are learned through observation of significant figures in their lives, particularly parents and perpetuated across generations. This particular finding has been found in earlier quantitative studies that have found an association between IPC and similar conflict characteristics in offspring's own relationships (Whitton et al., 2008; Sagkaland & Ozdemir, 2019).

Another participant recounted how she has become highly attuned to the emotional needs of others, often taking on a caregiving role in social contexts, a role rooted in her childhood experience growing up with IPC. This may perhaps reflect the long-term consequence of parentification, whereby this role persists as an automatic behavioural pattern in relationships outside of the family and well into adulthood. Valteau et al., (1995) proposed that adults who assume caregiving and parental roles during childhood, tend to take on caregiving roles in adulthood as well, a phenomenon they referred to as the "caretaking syndrome". Moreover, in the context of romantic relationships, Bourassa (2010) found a positive association between emotional parentification as children and caregiving in later romantic relationships.

A couple of participants described experiences of hyper-vigilance and acute sensitivity to social cues in interpersonal contexts as a result of growing up with relentless conflict and tension between parents. Exposure to IPC heightens children's sensitivity to interpersonal conflict, fostering hyper-vigilance to signs of conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Davies et al., 1999). This sensitivity could extend and generalize to interpersonal relationships more broadly, resulting in heightened expectations for conflict to minor, subtle or vague signs of conflict (Simon & Furman, 2010; Crick & Dodge, 1994). The finding in the current study, therefore, can be argued to be in support of this idea. Moreover, the finding can be understood through the lens of schema therapy (Young, Klosko & Weishaar., 2006) which posits that adaptive coping strategies developed in childhood may become ingrained and persist into adulthood. In childhood, for these participants, hyper-vigilance may have developed in response to the relentless conflict experienced, serving as an adaptive survival strategy. However, it appears that this heightened sensitivity does not necessarily diminish in adulthood and continues to persist as attentiveness to potential cues of tension and discord, shaping how they perceive and interpret their environment as adults. It can be argued that this ongoing vigilance shaped by early experiences reflects how early adaptive strategies, while no longer necessary, can continue to influence interpersonal relationships and emotional responses into adulthood.

Mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety were also described by a couple of participants, linking it to their experience of IPC. This aligns with internalizing problems (Achenbach, 1996) that refers to those that are related to one's internal psychological environment, particularly emotional difficulties. This finding is consistent with well-documented longitudinal association between IPC and internalizing problems (Cummings et al., 2006; Cummings et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2016; Warmuth et al., 2018). However, to note, most of these studies provided evidence for the link between IPC and internalizing problems using a sample of younger children or adolescents. The current study in some

ways provides evidence for association between IPC and internalizing problems in a sample of adults which is in line with a few studies that have reported on this association using a sample of young adults (Keeports & Pittman, 2015; Fosco, Weymouth & Feinberg, 2023).

On the other hand, in sub-theme 4.2, participants spoke of the varied ways in which they strive to differentiate either from their parents or their relational patterns, influenced by the experience of growing up with IPC and witnessing their parents' marriage. This finding introduces a nuanced perspective that complicates the propositions of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which mainly emphasizes the role of observational learning and replication of modelled behaviours. The participants in this study, within this theme, actively demonstrated a commitment to diverge from patterns or behaviours observed. Instead of simply adopting modelled behaviours, the data suggests that they used their observations as a "negative example" and a basis for reconfiguring relational templates. The lessons learnt by these children is an understanding of what to avoid emulating. The finding in the current study, therefore, can suggest and introduce a process of counter-modelling that appeared to be central in the participants reflections.

Participants commitment to redefine their relational approaches in their own lives aligns with Bowen's (1978) concept of differentiation of self. Differentiation implicates an individual's ability to separate their emotional functioning from that of their family system, enabling them to form independent values. In the current study, the participant's intentional practices such as prioritizing spouse's needs, taking accountability, fostering emotional connection within their relationships, shielding children from exposure to IPC (that was absent in the relational dynamics observed in their family of origin) perhaps reflects this degree of differentiation of self. The finding in this theme, can also be further explained by the concepts of repetitive and corrective scripts in family therapy (Byng-Hall, 1998). Repetitive script occurs when individuals replicate the patterns of behaviour observed in their family of origin, whereas corrective scripts represent an individual's intentional effort to diverge from the dysfunctional

patterns witnessed in the family of origin. Differentiating and learning what not to do may fit the description of participants demonstrating a corrective script.

Additionally, more broadly, the participants' narratives reflect elements of post-traumatic growth, which refers to the positive changes resulting from adversity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Their ability to reframe the past adversity of growing up with IPC, as a learning tool for their own lives suggests constructive adaptability, highlighting the potential for growth. Therefore, the current study contributes a novel finding to the body of research in the field of IPC that has mainly focused on negative child outcomes in the context of IPC. Such a finding that the experience of destructive IPC can also result in personal growth and positive changes in children's lives appears to be limited. However, the positive influence or growth from adversity in the context of DV has been indicated in the study by Chester & Joscelyne (2019) and Band-Winterstein (2013). Fozard & Gubi (2017) also found that participants learned from their parents' marriage.

4.3 Implications

4.3.1 Working directly with children

4.3.1.1 Addressing Coping and Emotional Expression

The current study highlights how children employ various strategies to avoid or escape the relentless IPC or tension experienced including physical avoidance (retreating to a room), distraction/mental escape (listening to loud music or immersing self in fantasy literature) and external escapes (school as a refuge or running away from home). This suggests that it is imperative for clinicians to consider and recognize that coping is multi-faceted and therefore, time must be invested in understanding each child's unique strategy.

Avoidance/escapism can serve as an adaptive and survival mechanism for children living in chronically high-conflict environments, enabling them to adapt to, navigate and respond to an unpredictable and often threatening emotional landscape. However, it can also prevent them from processing their emotions. Therefore, clinicians must validate the protective function of avoidance while gradually introducing tools to address the underlying emotions and needs. In this regard, assessing and recognizing avoidance could serve as an entry point for emotional exploration. For example, a feelings chart could help children identify and articulate the emotions underlying the avoidance. Facilitating discussions around the “why” and meaning behind the specific behaviours could help clinicians explore what children are seeking to avoid and what they hope to gain through their strategies that can lead to meaningful insights that can help inform further interventions. For those children that are younger or who find it difficult to verbalize, clinicians can gently guide children through creative and expressive modalities such as art-based interventions or play therapy to allow them to explore and understand their feelings. Overall, psychoeducation and interventions tailored to children’s developmental levels can help normalize their feelings and direct them to express and process their emotions rather than solely resorting to escapism/avoidance.

The finding of destructive coping like self-harm found in the current study also emphasizes how important it is for clinicians to screen and assess for such behaviours in children living with IPC. It also illustrates the importance of distinguishing between adaptive and destructive coping and the need for clinicians to hold in mind that children living with IPC may experience severe distress and underlying emotional dysregulation. Therefore, it is also vital for clinicians to help children develop tools for managing intense emotions and regulate themselves such as introducing mindfulness interventions, deep breathing, and grounding exercises. In this way, clinicians may teach them alternative, healthier ways of coping and expand their repertoire of coping.

4.3.1.2 Addressing Roles and Interconnected Boundaries

The current study found that children assumed a responsible role in the family amidst IPC such as being a mediator, peacekeeper, emotional caretaker, and anchor in their family. These roles can be seen as a form of boundary dissolution and could have significant emotional and psychological implications for the children. However, as discussed, in collectivist contexts like India, these roles may also carry cultural significance such as engagement with family needs', duty and responsibility towards the family members and the interdependent values. Therefore, clinicians must address this sensitively and in a culturally informed manner whilst working with children.

Eagerness on the part of the clinicians to assume solely pathological interpretations of this family process, without considering these behaviours/ dynamics as a part of the broader cultural and familial context, could lead to unintended negative consequences for the child. Working merely on stripping off their roles and responsibility based on Western constructs of boundaries, might create a cultural dissonance, further distress, or "loss" for the children. Thus, clinicians should strive to provide a therapeutic environment that respects cultural and familial values while simultaneously prioritize the emotional well-being and autonomy of the child. Clinicians can help children to recognize small ways in which they can set "workable" boundaries that reflect a balance between familial responsibility and personal well-being. They can help them recognize the limits of their responsibility and normalize self-care. Empowering children to recognize their own needs and feelings, distinguishing them from those of their parents or the family unit can help foster emotional autonomy. Moreover, clinicians can gently guide them to understand the distinction between the roles of the parents and children generally, helping them to gain a perspective on their family dynamics and their place within it. In addition, if appropriate and feasible, clinicians can encourage involving parents in a few sessions for a collective exploration of family roles and psycho-

educating the parents. By addressing this within a family context, children can be supported in navigating their roles more healthily and without guilt.

4.3.1.3 Facilitating Relational Anchors

Given that the analysis in the current study indicates children yearning for emotional sustenance and adult support, reflecting unmet needs. It seems important that clinicians help children in identifying, cultivating, and strengthening relationships with stable, supportive adult figures. Furthermore, clinicians must prioritize the therapeutic relationship itself, recognizing it as a model for healthy and supportive relationship. Within the framework of schema therapy (Young, Klosko & Weishaar, 2006), the therapist embodies a limited parenting role, offering an experience of attunement and care that addresses core unmet needs such as nurturance, security, safety. Adopting this stance could be one of the many ways in which clinicians can help children feel what it means to have their needs met and provide them with a corrective emotional experience. The therapeutic relationship itself becomes not just a supportive alliance, but also a vehicle for healing, eventually helping them reconstruct their internal and relational worlds.

4.3.2 Assessing IPC in Clinical Practice

Individuals may often present to therapy with emotional or interpersonal difficulties. Given that analysis revealed such challenges as a result of growing up with IPC, this finding has a particular implication for clinical practice. When individuals present with symptoms of depression or anxiety or relational challenges, it is crucial for counselling psychologists to consider and assess the potential role of IPC. IPC may function as a hidden but significant contextual factor, influencing both mental health outcomes and relational difficulties. By explicitly exploring this during the assessment phase, clinicians can hold in mind the broader relational context and its potential influence on the client's emotional well-being and

interpersonal functioning. It can allow clinicians to design interventions that address both the immediate concerns and the broader developmental issues at play, that might otherwise go unaddressed.

4.3.3 Integrating a Dual Perspective on Adversity

As discussed, the current study found the dual influence of IPC on children as adults manifesting as both relational and mental health challenges and as opportunities for personal growth. Integrating this finding into practice, highlights the importance of counselling psychologists adopting an expanded approach that acknowledges the complex interplay of risk and resilience. Acknowledging both dimensions allows for a more holistic understanding of human potential that can transform how clinicians assess, conceptualize, and consult cases involving IPC. For instance, assessments should not only focus on identifying the difficulties arising as a result of IPC but also how clients may have adapted, learned, or developed values from their experience. Interventions can then address areas of vulnerability while building on strengths, creating an environment that supports healing as well growth. By integrating this dual approach, counselling psychologists can enable clients to see their struggles as a part of a broader narrative that also includes resilience and personal growth, paving the way for more empowering therapeutic practices. Such an approach aligns with the growing body of research advocating for strengths-based frameworks in counselling psychology (Stevens et al., 2024), enriching the field's understanding of adversity and human potential.

4.3.4 Community-based Support Systems

It is not uncommon for parents embroiled in IPC to experience significant distress and perhaps rely on their children for support. Similarly, as discussed, children experience unmet psychological needs as a result of IPC perhaps spilling over to the parent-child subsystem,

diminishing the parents' ability to remain emotionally available and provide support, nurturance, and guidance to their children, leaving them emotionally unfulfilled and isolated. Thus, it highlights the importance of community-based initiatives, for both parents and children of families experiencing IPC respectively, such as support groups advocated, developed, and facilitated by clinicians. It can serve as a vital resource, offering a safe space where they can share and process their experiences, feel seen, supported and less alone.

4.3.5 Supporting Parents

Overall, the findings of the current study also highlight the pivotal role of counselling psychologists to work closely with parents. This may involve developing and facilitating psychoeducational programs in India to help understand the extent to which their conflict affects children, how triangulation occurs or the roles within a family. Moreover, development and implementation of couple-based intervention programs that focus on skill-building such as communication, conflict-resolution, handling of conflicts can provide practical tools and strategies for parents, in a way minimizing and reducing the influence on children. Besides, counselling psychologists working with couples/parents in therapy may also hold a unique position to mitigate the effects of IPC on children. If and when appropriate, counselling psychologists can direct some of the therapeutic work towards addressing constructive ways of expressing and resolving conflict, promoting emotional regulation in parents, addressing co-parenting dynamics, addressing parental mental health and behaviour, encouraging parents to seek adult sources of support, and supporting parents to become emotionally available to their children.

4.4. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several aspects need to be taken into account when reflecting on the limitations of the current study and considering ways in which future research can further develop and build upon its insights.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the retrospective nature of the study such as recall bias, forgetting, self-protective responses (van Parys et al., 2014). While such a design has provided rich data, the passage of time may have influenced the participants' ability to be aware of or deeply engage with the intrinsic emotions, qualities, and nuanced processes of their childhood experience of IPC, potentially leading to a more generalized account or reflecting an imperfect/incomplete picture. Future research could benefit from exploring the real-time experiences of children living with IPC that could capture more richer and immediate processes at play, mitigating the limitations of retrospective recall. Another important observation through conducting this research is that some participants continued to make sense of their childhood experiences of IPC, their roles, processes, and its impact throughout different stages of their lives, influenced by different contexts and life experiences. Future research could adopt a narrative analysis to explore how individuals construct and reconstruct the stories of living with IPC across their life course. Additionally, longitudinal qualitative research could be valuable, following participants over time to capture how their understanding and interpretations shift in response to major life transitions such as entering adolescence, adulthood, or experiences they had during their life course such as moving away from home, reactions and comparisons of others etc.

Secondly, the current study may also be limited by the specific characteristics of the participant group as a whole. All the participants in the current study are Indians, with the majority being female. Future research could thus explore whether individuals from other collectivist societies, from distinct cultural backgrounds (such as from individualistic

societies) or with a sample of greater proportion of male participants might have experienced or processed their experience in a similar or different way. Next, the current study exclusively focused on participants from intact families, where parents remained married, excluding those from divorced families. It would be interesting for future work to also include participants from divorced families. Comparative studies between children from intact and divorced families could shed light on how family structure may play a role in influencing children's experiences of IPC. It could help explore whether and how dissolution of marriage shapes children's experiences of IPC or provide insights into whether divorce, in some cases, serves as a buffer against the effects of IPC or if it introduces new stressors that uniquely influence children.

Additionally, although the current study did not focus on siblings, some participants mentioned their siblings' emotions and processes in the context of their experiences and IPC. This also raises an interesting avenue for future research to explore and compare siblings' experiences of IPC. It could be valuable in understanding the diverse ways children within the same family experience, navigate and make sense of IPC. Moreover, certain aspects of participants' experiences as generated in the current study warrant further attention. For instance, several participants reflected on how growing up with destructive IPC enabled them to differentiate from their families of origin and gain valuable lessons for their lives. This insight- that exposure to IPC can lead to personal growth and development has not been widely captured in existing literature and presents a unique avenue for future research as it seems to challenge the focus of studying the negative effects of IPC on children.

Lastly, another aspect to consider involves the methodological limitations. A notable limitation of IPA methodology is its reliance on language as the primary medium for conveying meaning and the participants' ability to articulate their experiences effectively (Willig, 2022). During the interviews, I observed that some participants struggled to express

their emotional experiences in words, which may have limited the depth and nuance of their accounts. Additionally, as English was not the first language for all the participants in the current study, this might have posed challenges of expression and further limited their ability to fully convey their emotions, thoughts, meanings of their experiences, potentially leading to gaps or simplifications in their narratives. Future research could address this by integrating creative methods such as drawings to help participants convey their emotional experiences more fully or using different methodologies, triangulating the IPC phenomenon. Furthermore, conducting interviews in participants' first language, with appropriate translation and transcription processes could also provide richer data.

A further point to consider is that the current study relied on a single interview with each participant. While one-time interviews can provide valuable insights, rapport and trust often develops and deepens over-time, which is especially relevant in the cultural context of India. Most participants mentioned that this was the first time they were discussing family related matters such as their experience of IPC, which may have influenced the openness and depth of their accounts within the constraints of a single interview. Moreover, it appeared that participants were actively making sense of their experience in the moment, reflecting, and formulating their understanding as they spoke. Future research could consider adopting multiple interviews approach, allowing participants to build rapport and trust and more time to reflect and process their experiences for more richer and nuanced data. Follow-up interviews could also give the participants and the researcher the opportunity to revisit their accounts with greater depth and clarity. Additionally, integrating pre-interview preparation methods such as guided journaling could also help participants organize their thoughts before engaging in the interview process.

4.5 Concluding Reflections

As discussed in the methodology chapter, I gave thought to my challenge in striving to balance between the descriptive and interpretative level of exploratory noting and the particular and the whole. I would like to point that, similarly, in the discussion chapter, I found myself deliberating over how to contextualize and generalize the findings as a whole as I was hesitant to lose out on the particular. At first, I found this process challenging and complex but to navigate this, I worked to maintain a dynamic tension between specificity and broader applicability, ensuring the unique perspectives were adequately represented and discussed, while also connecting these insights into broader theoretical frameworks and literature. By embracing a more fluid approach, I allowed for space where the particularities of participants' experiences could inform the larger narrative. This process was central in ensuring that the discussion was neither oversimplified or overgeneralized, but instead captured the complexities in a balanced and meaningful way.

On a personal level, conducting this research has led me to develop a greater tolerance for uncertainty. Throughout the process, I often found myself grappling with the ambiguity of qualitative data- where meanings are not always clear cut and interpretations are open to multiple possibilities. This inherent uncertainty required me to become more comfortable with not having immediate or definitive answers, which was challenging for me. It taught me to sit with ambiguity, trust myself and the process. Thus, it has been a valuable personal growth experience, helping me to be more patient. Engaging in a project of this size has also undeniably tested my strength and motivation at times, but now as I come to an end, I am proud of my perseverance and resilience. Despite the challenges, I remained committed to the process, navigating emotional, intellectual, personal hurdles along the way. This journey has reinforced my ability to stay focused and push through moments of hardships and difficulties. Additionally, at times, listening to my participant's experiences brought up complex emotions and I found myself relating to. At other times, I was struck by aspects and

elements of this experience that I had never considered before, which also has been valuable for me.

On a more professional level, this research has enhanced my ability to reflect on my own biases and assumptions. It allowed me to confront the ways in which my own experiences and worldview may have shaped the interpretations of the data. This has made me more conscious of the need for self-awareness in both research and practice. This research has deepened my commitment to understanding the intersections of family experiences/dynamics, emotional experiences, and psychological well-being that can inform my counselling work. It has made me recognize the profound interest in working therapeutically, particularly in approaches that explore the interplay between childhood/past experiences and their lasting imprint on present-day functioning and overall well-being.

Most importantly, one of the gratifying aspects of this research was hearing from the participants, their appreciation for being part of a study that gave voice to their experiences, making this a rewarding experience. They were pleased to know that someone was conducting research in this area and above all that there was a willingness to listen to children's perspectives. This sense of validation was not only affirming to them but to me as well, reinforcing the importance of this work and my contribution to field.

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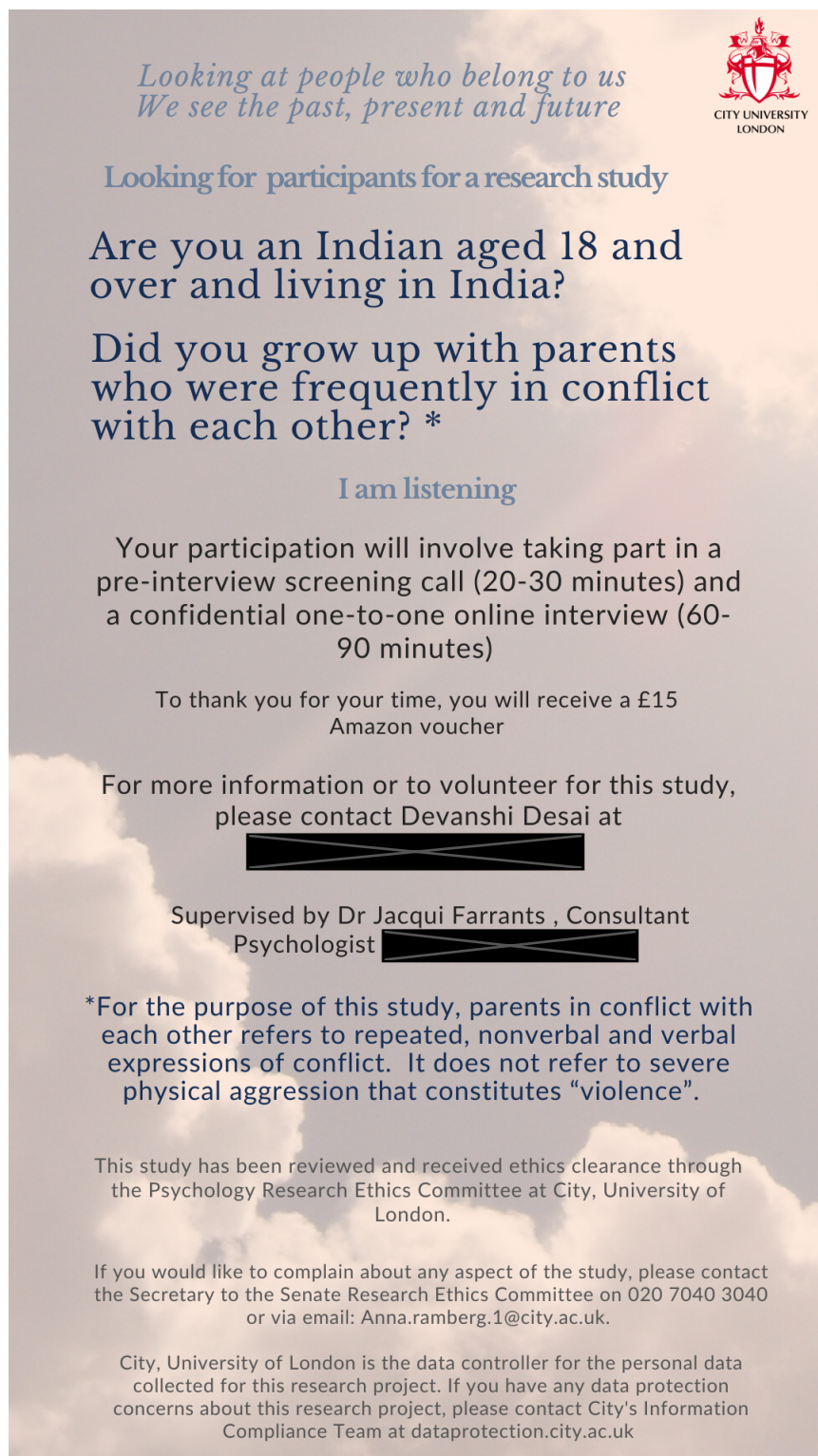
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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Poster



*Looking at people who belong to us
We see the past, present and future*

Looking for participants for a research study

Are you an Indian aged 18 and over and living in India?

Did you grow up with parents who were frequently in conflict with each other? *

I am listening

Your participation will involve taking part in a pre-interview screening call (20-30 minutes) and a confidential one-to-one online interview (60-90 minutes)

To thank you for your time, you will receive a £15 Amazon voucher

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please contact Devanshi Desai at [REDACTED]

Supervised by Dr Jacqui Farrants , Consultant Psychologist [REDACTED]

***For the purpose of this study, parents in conflict with each other refers to repeated, nonverbal and verbal expressions of conflict. It does not refer to severe physical aggression that constitutes "violence".**

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Psychology Research Ethics Committee at City, University of London.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: Anna.ramberg.1@city.ac.uk.

City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. If you have any data protection concerns about this research project, please contact City's Information Compliance Team at dataprotection.city.ac.uk

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

ETH2122-0408, 05/05/2022

Project Title: *"Growing up living with Interparental Conflict: An IPA study within the Indian context"*

Name of Principal Researcher: Devanshi Desai

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study to explore the individuals' experience of growing up living with interparental conflict (i.e., conflict between parents) within the Indian context. (This study is being undertaken as part of a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology programme at City University London.)

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to participate in this study because you have responded to my research project advert in which I am seeking to recruit individuals living in India aged 18 and over who have grown up with non-violent interparental conflict.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in the project is voluntary and it is completely up to you whether or not you take part. If you do decide to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form, but you are free to withdraw at any time without reason and without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

You can feel free to withdraw your data/ redact parts of your data until your audio recording from the interview has been converted into text. If you do wish to withdraw, the data collected up to the point of withdrawal will be destroyed. Your data will be encrypted, safely secured and be disposed once the research requirements are fulfilled.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to sign a consent form to take part in a pre-interview screening call to ensure suitability and safety.

If you are selected, you will be provided with a second consent form to be interviewed. You will be asked to take part in an audio-recorded interview, via Zoom, lasting 60-90 minutes to

talk about your experience of growing up with interparental conflict. I will have a few open-ended questions that will help you share your experience.

If you have consented to be contacted for a follow up call, I will kindly invite you to take part in a second audio-recorded interview lasting no longer than 30 minutes. You can expect this follow-up call to take place within two months of the first interview date. For any reason, you have chosen to withdraw your interview data within the time limits of data withdrawal mentioned below in this sheet, you will not be contacted for this follow-up call.

The information you share will be confidential and all names and identifying information will be changed when the study is written up.

What do I have to do?

I will ask you a series of questions during the interview about your experience of growing up living with interparental conflict. It is important that you are as open and as honest as you can be during the interview, but there is no obligation to answer any questions that you feel triggering or uncomfortable with.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is possible that talking about your experiences may cause you to feel emotionally distressed. However, there is no obligation for you to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with, and we can pause or end the interview at any point. Following the interview, I will give you some support information.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

- You will have the opportunity to tell someone about your experience of growing up living with interparental conflict, whether positive, negative or both.
- You will have the opportunity to develop an understanding of your experience.
- By sharing your experience and developing an understanding of what it is like to grow up living with interparental conflict, you may make a valuable contribution to our current understanding of how individuals experience interparental conflict and how children living with interparental conflict could be supported in the future.

What will happen when the research study stops?

Once the data is no longer needed, it will be destroyed securely.

If you have consented to be contacted with a copy of the findings/outcomes of the study, you will be sent a document.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

I will be the only one who will have access to your data.

Your data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and be backed up onto my external hard-drive which will be password-protected as well.

All names and other identifying details will be anonymised and be replaced using a pseudonym which is only known to me.

I may need to discuss the data with the research supervisor; however, anonymity will be maintained, and I will only refer to you using the pseudonym.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

If you have indicated that you would like to receive a summary of the findings once the research is complete, I will email this to you. The study will be published as part of the current thesis and your anonymous data will be made open access i.e., may be published in a research journal or an opportunity for further dissemination arises such as discussing the results of the study in conferences in the future. Your data will remain de-identified and you will be referred to by a pseudonym, however, direct quotes or short extracts may be included in the final report/journal publication to highlight your experience.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You are free to withdraw from the interview without a reason or penalty. You are also free to withdraw your interview data or redact parts of your data until the audio recording has been converted into text and all names and identifying information has been de-identified i.e., up to two weeks from interview date.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns, or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone +44 20 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: *"Growing up living with Interparental Conflict: An IPA study using an Indian sample"*

You can also write to the Secretary at:
Anna Ramberg
Research Integrity Manager
City, University of London, Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB
Email: [REDACTED]

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study, you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details.

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the research supervisor, Dr Jacqui Farrants via email [REDACTED] or myself via email on [REDACTED]

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix C

Pre-interview screening call Consent Form



Consent Form

Name of principal researcher: *Devanshi Desai*

REC Number: ETH2122-0408

Project Title: *"Growing up living with Interparental Conflict: An IPA study within the Indian context"*

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated [05/05/2022] for the above study.	
2	I agree to take part in the screening call in order to proceed with the study.	
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason without being penalised or disadvantaged.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix D

Pre- Interview Screening Call Questions

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. The purpose of this telephone conversation is to check that you are suitable to participate, to give you information about the study, and what it will involve for you if you participate. I am also happy to answer any questions you may have.

Check eligibility with the following questions:

How did you hear about the research project?

What has driven you to participate in this project?

What is your nationality?

How young are you?

Where is home for you?

Can you tell me roughly young you were when you first heard or saw your parents in conflict with each other?

Can you tell me if you have witnessed severe physical aggression in any form amongst your parents?

Can you tell me the current status of the relationship between your parents?

Do you feel ready/ to talk about experience of living with interparental conflict?

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not at all and 10 being most certainly) how likely are you to get distressed talking about your experience of growing up with parents' conflicts?

Are you currently experiencing a high level of anxiety or emotional distress?

Do you currently have thoughts of harming yourself?

Are you currently having thoughts of harming someone else?

If you participated in the study and you became distressed, do you have access to mental health service or a person you can identify who could support you?

Appendix E

Emotional Support Resources

1. Aasra – Crisis intervention and counselling service (+91 22 2754 6669 – All days, 24 hours)
2. Anubhav – Mental Health Helpline (+91 9830021567 – Mon-Sat, 10AM-5PM)
3. iCall – Mental Health Helpline (+ 91 2225563291 – Mon-Fri, 11AM- 10 PM)
4. Maithri – Mental Health Helpline (+91 4842540530 - All days, 10AM- 7PM)
5. Sneha Foundation – Mental Health Helpline (+ 91 8976994777)
6. Samaritans – Mental Health Helpline (+91 22 3247 3267 / 22-2307 3451, All days, 3.00AM- 9 PM)

Appendix F

Interview Consent Form



Consent Form

Name of principal researcher: *Devanshi Desai*

REC Number: ETH2122-0408

Project Title: *"Growing up living with Interparental Conflict: An IPA study within the Indian context"*

1	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason without being penalised or disadvantaged.	
3.	I understand that I am free to refuse answering any question.	
4.	I agree to the interview being audio OR video recorded.	
5.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
6.	I understand that no identifiable personal data, such as names or locations, will be included in any write-up of this research, future journal publications or given to any other party.	
7.	I understand that direct quotes or short extracts may be included in the final report to highlight my experience, but a pseudonym will be used.	
8.	I understand that my anonymous data will be made open access, e.g.: to underpin journal publication	
9.	I agree to be contacted again after the first interview for a follow-up call if the researcher wants to clarify or know further about my experience.	
10.	I would like to be informed of the results of this study once it has been completed and understand that my contact details will be retained for this purpose.	
11.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix G

Interview Schedule

Potential Questions

What has motivated you to take part in the study?

If you were to tell someone what interparental conflict means to you, what would you say?

Please tell me about your experience of growing up living with interparental conflict?

- What was it like for you?
- What did you think?
- How did you respond to your thoughts?
- What did you do?
- What were some of the emotions you experienced at the time?

How did you make sense of that experience at the time?

What do you think about that time now?

If at all, are there any ways you think your experience of growing up living with interparental conflict has come in the way/ helped you in different areas of your life?

If there was something you wanted to tell your younger self growing up living with interparental conflict, what would you say?

If you knew a child that is currently living with interparental conflict, what advice would you give him/her?

Is there anything that will help me understand your experience better?

Is there anything else that you would like to share before we finish?

Additional Prompts

Could you explain that further?

Can you please tell me more about that?

What do you mean by that?

Are you thinking of a specific example, if so, can you describe it?

How did that make you feel?

Appendix H

Participant Debrief



Project Title: *"Growing up living with Interparental Conflict: An IPA study within the Indian context"*

Debrief Information

Thank you for taking part in this study. I would like to explain the rationale behind the work now that we have successfully finished our interview.

The aim of this research was to give children the opportunity to share and voice their experience of growing up with interparental conflict. It is hoped that the insights from this study will paint a picture for therapists and give them a better idea of how children living with interparental conflict think, feel and negotiate life and could lead to changes in how young people are supported. The shared experience may also help others experiencing and living with interparental conflict.

Due to majority of the research done previously in this area on younger children and adolescents, we chose to focus on the experience of adults (18+). Moreover, we decided it would be best to interview individuals over 18 years of age so that we wouldn't have to seek parental consent.

If you would like to speak to anyone, I have included a list of local counselling services, telephone support lines and websites with further information.

We hope you found the study interesting. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

Researcher: Devanshi Desai

Supervisor: Dr. Jacqui Farrants

Appendix I

An example of annotated transcript

1 P 03:41

2 So we, I would get really upset because I'm the elder daughter *Her role in the family / towards sister*

3 umm so I would always feel responsible for my younger sister as *elder: caring, assisting, bringing wisdom*

4 well, because she was the kind who was, I used to think that she *Does this have anything to do with being in a hierarchical sort of culture where the "elder" one is seen as an*

5 was a little innocent in that sense. I would try to be the parent figure *has to look out / coming out certain responsibility (implicit pressure of being an elder child?)*

6 for her. And that has kind of occurred even in adulthood. Like I still *Self-imposed? role*

7 try to absorb all the negativity. I don't try to let it reach her even *implies a degree of perception > role defined by herself*

8 though she is just a year younger and it's not much of an age gap *received authority than just mere responsibility*

9 or anything. Umm,, but yeah, I mean, I would I wouldn't try to take *enjoy up*

10 sides but then somehow of the other reason I would always take *"absorb": takes in / engulf / she would've wanted / longed for*

11 my mother's side I don't know why that happens umm but *shielding / protecting*

perhaps like a sponge

Reflecting on her positioning in the family amidst it conflict.

"I would, I wouldn't try to take sides": reflecting hesitation.

"always": unswerving allegiance / negotiating with self?

not a conscious / intentional effort or work?

perhaps a natural inclination?

function: need to support / stand with mum?

sympathising with her?

to not feel in the middle & taking a side

to less confusing?

because maintaining perhaps neutrality is hard?

Received / self-imposed responsibility to shield / protect sister - to be a parent.

Departure from neutrality; natural inclination towards mother.

1 whenever I used to see her crying like I used to always take her *Siding with mother triggered by mother's visible distress.*

2 side and then even when she wouldn't talk to dad, I would not talk *strong emotional connection with mum? / sympathy towards*

3 to dad. I don't know maybe that was.. nobody really told me that *"always take her side": repetition / unswerving allegiance?*

4 we're not supposed to talk to him or anything but that always *following / mimicking mother's behaviours towards dad.*

5 happened and when moms resumed talking to dad and I would get *easy to group with mum? / channeling own feelings*

6 confused, like oh when am I supposed to start talking to him again? *reveling? / no standards or*

7 *pressure from mum > individual response / pressure*

8 R 04:43 *"resume": begin again after pause / resumption*

9 Hmm *confused / unsure of*

10 *perhaps felt unclear / uncertain about the interruption?*

11 P 04:44 *breaking free from that to begin the connection with him.*

mother perhaps left her hanging?

Unswerving allegiance with mother triggered by visible signs of distress.

Intuitive strong alignment with mum which becomes a guiding principle -> distancing from what

Intuitively aligned to self-protecting

1 And even, sorry, even like resolving the issues weren't really *Recognition of what was ineffective in the way parents handled conflicts.*

2 happening like in a healthy way I think because they would fight in *→ paradox of what was exposed/apparent vs hidden/concealed*

3 front of us but they wouldn't resolve it in front of us So somehow *"in front": suggests visibility/awareness / field of vision or awareness
being 9-10 yrs kids due to parents keeping things separate?*

4 that demarcation wasn't really clear here (speaks in Hindi)... I mean *"demarcation": conjures things like something that separates two things / marking of line / limits / boundaries / separation*

5 fight is over or not. We didn't really know. Like you just don't care *→ blurred lines / boundaries of what is made visible / distinguishing, brought to awareness, visibility?*

6 any more and you're like, you're gonna fight over make up anyway. *current feelings about parents' conflict & how they navigated it. hypothesis*

7 You don't want to get dragged in. And now it's just a fun thing. (We) *"you, just don't care anymore": perhaps indicates frustration / feeling detached / aloof / distanced
"you": obtaining some distance? + distanced / normalizing the response?*

8 just make fun of them. But at that time, it was not really fun. *"use of 'us' & 'we'": words in grouping / indicating is shared / collective experience → sister? distinguish / aloof together with "fun": making it something more treatable?*

9

10 R 05:11 *"fun": difficult to express emotion / speaking casually about the feelings / lenient or making it lighter?*

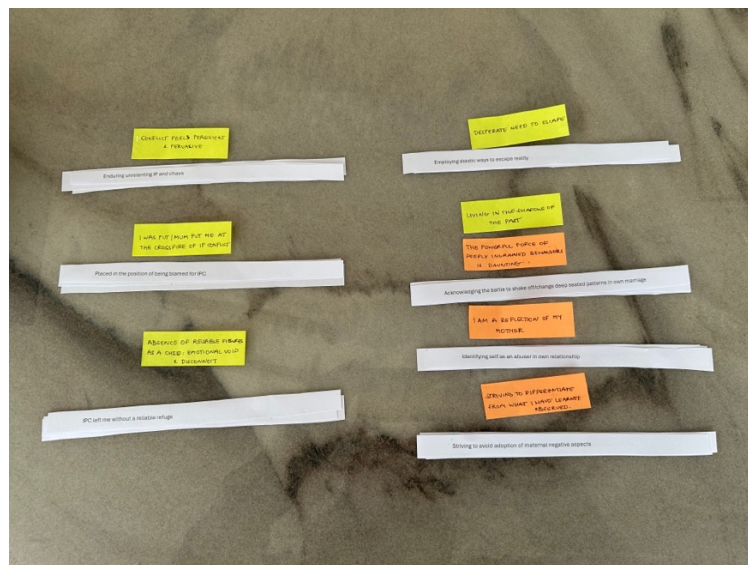
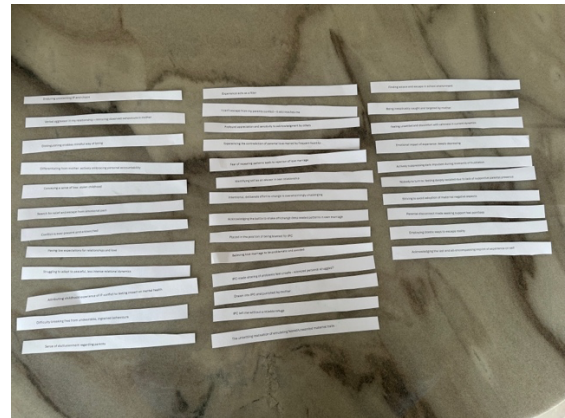
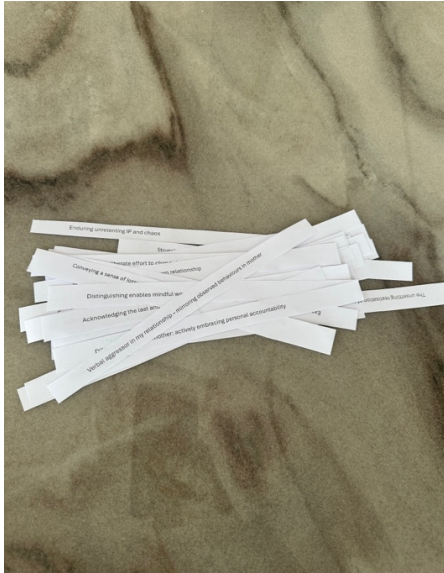
Indication between what was visible / apparent vs hidden.

Indicating presence of blurred lines leaving uncertainty

Feeling distanced & detached from the situation now

Appendix J

Process of searching connections for the development of PET table



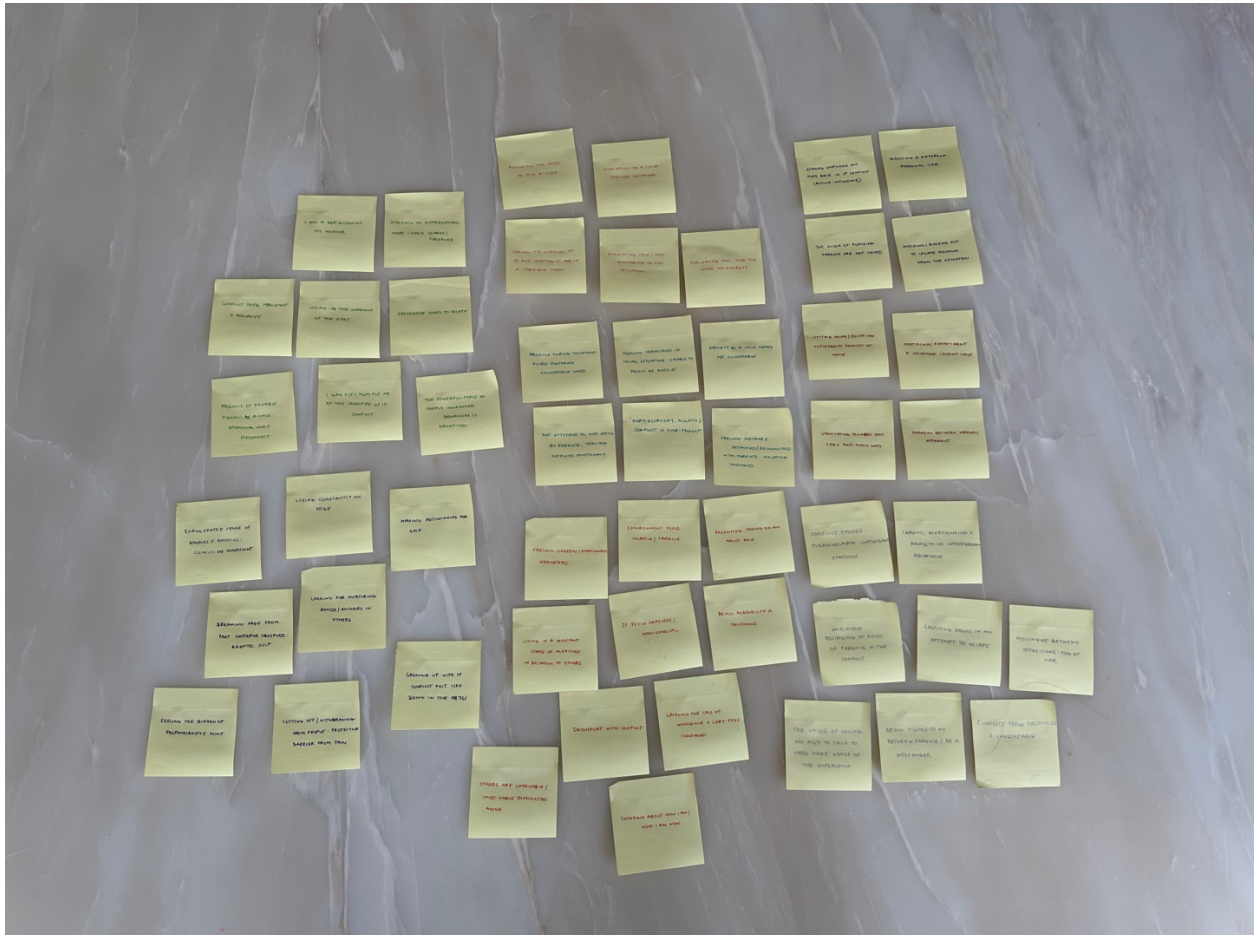
Appendix K

Example PET Table – “Zoya”

PET 1: CONFLICT FEELS PERSISTENT AND PERVERSIVE		
Enduring unrelenting IP conflict and chaos	just a lot of fighting, verbal abuse (pause). I wouldn't know honestly, to put it into words because it's such a feeling right now for me more than anything, because I've only grown watching it so it's, it's more of a thing that I've watched but yeah, a lot of fighting a lot of violent behavior, if not violence, per se, but (pause) just a lot of chaos.	page 3, 7-12
Conflict is ever-present and entrenched	I would say that ever since I know of being existent, I've seen my parents not just fight, you know a fight, you say that, oh, somebody's having a disagreement. It was not a disagreement, because it was really intense, strong, negative emotions, shown towards two people who claim to love each other, who claim to have built this family for themselves, and umm yet choose to almost every day uh hurt each other in front of their children. It's a very, very depressing experience overall.	page 5, 9-12, page 6, 1-6
I can't escape from my parents conflict - it still reaches me	even though that like physically like my parents live in Chennai, and I'm here, it's still those problems still come and when my parents fight there in Chennai, my mother calls me up here and she tells me oh, I'm just calling you to tell you this this happened just sunane ki liye. You know that thing.	page 74, 6-11
PET 2: CONFLICT SPILLS OVER: I WAS PUT/MUM PUT ME AT THE CROSSFIRE OF IP CONFLICT		
Placed in the position of being blamed for IP conflict	saying ki like see because of you we are fighting. You're the reason why we're fighting. You are eliciting these fights. You are you know, basically sparking the fire for these fights. You know you're causing them. And I felt really, I used to feel really horrible.	page 27, 8-11; page 28, 1
Being inexplicably caught and targeted by mother	so till date when they have a fight, it somehow still like comes on me the blame or in any way or the other she'll fight, find a reason to find fault with me or fight with me or just anything	page 76, 1-4
Drawn into IP conflict & punished by mother	something happens over there, she'd call me here and then she'll start blaming again and she'll be like, oh, you always take your father's side, you're gonna support her, him only and then she'll like cut the call, and then she'd stop talking to me like for months straight.	page 75, 4-8
PET 3: ABSENCE OF RELIABLE FIGURES AS A CHILD - EMOTIONAL VOID AND DISCONNECT		
IPC left me without a reliable refuge	So I've had a really difficult childhood since my parents always kept fighting, I never knew who to go to when I needed help or when I needed anything.	page 41, 8-11
Nobody to turn to: Feeling deeply isolated due to lack of supportive parental presence	So, whenever I had experiences that I, that were not, you know, supposed to be the normal for a girl, I had nobody to talk to so I felt very, very, very lonely. Because when you're a child, who do you have, like, we don't go and talk to friends like intense emotions and everything because you know friends also sometimes make fun of you and everything. Like parents are the one you know you go and talk to. I never had that support system, which made me feel very lonely, very alone.	page 84, 5-12; page 85, 1-2
IPC made sharing of problems feel unsafe - silenced personal struggles?	So any other horrible experience that I had, because my parents had been so violent with each other, I always felt that if I could tell them, this is how they are going to deal with me also.	page 45, 8-11
Parental disconnect made seeking support feel pointless	It never felt like, oh, if we talk to our parents, they're gonna sit and talk to us, they're gonna explain things to us, because that's not what they did with each other. Yell, abuse.	page 47, 9-12
PET 4: DESPERATE NEED TO ESCAPE		
Finding solace and escape in school environment	I remember haating to go home from school. Yeah, this was one experience that really, really, I felt a lot of times, I always loved going to school, because it felt like an escape almost like it felt like, oh, my parents are not going to be I'm not going to be seeing them fighting or not going to be having to deal with my mother yelling at me, hitting me or doing anything negative.	page 60, 5-7, 11-12; page 61, 1-4
Search for relief and escape from emotional pain	I always had the will to harm myself, harm myself, precisely cut myself, and also wanting to hurt myself in the most painful way, for some reason, because the pain that I felt psychologically was so much more than I wanted to cover it up with any physical pain. And it kind of felt good also, sometimes.	page 55, 8-12, page 56, 1
Employing drastic ways to escape reality	Most often wanted to kill myself (laughs), run away, hurt myself. I've I've run away from my house, once <i>childishly, like I knew I was just, you know, pretending, once I actually did.</i>	page 25, 1-4
PET 5: LIVING IN THE SHADOWS OF MY PAST		
Subtheme: THE POWERFUL FORCE OF DEEPLY INGRAINED BEHAVIORS IS DAUNTING		
Difficulty breaking free from undesirable, ingrained behaviors	and I know those things are wrong. I still know it. I know I'm not supposed, because of my learnings and everything and still (stresses on this word) its so, like reflex almost, you know? And then I'm like, yeah, when I know how horrible this is, why do I land up doing the exact same thing I promised myself I would never do. Because I almost feel helpless at those times because I don't want to do it.	page 10, 4-11
Acknowledging the battle to shake off and change deep seated patterns in own marriage	Like, my whole life has become this (pause) Almost like a shadow what I've seen. growing up, it's so hard to unlearn those things because what, if 23 years of my life, I saw that and to change it in say even a few years, I've been married for four years, change it in few years also it's very, very hard and difficult and I'm still on that journey to change the behaviours I know for sure are not right but it's hard	page 12, 1-12
Intentional, deliberate effort to change is overwhelmingly challenging	And just me knowing that does not help. I need to consciously work on them to change them and that's the harder part for me, because I'm not able to just change like, oh, I know this is wrong and I know I'm doing it so I should not do it. It's not that easy, honestly. It's, it's, extremely (stresses on the word) difficult.	page 13, 8-12, page 14, 1
Acknowledging the lasting imprint of experience on self	so much of what I have seen growing up, you would think ki okay, that was just, you know, during my childhood, and I would forget it, or I would let go and grow up to be this normal human being, nooooo way, no, it affects me, every single day of my life, every choice I make, every decision I make, every behavior that I exhibit towards my partner, shows so much of what I have seen and most often it is so unconscious, like, I don't do it consciously but then when I actually think about it, or reflect on it, I could see so much of what my what I've seen when I was a child, that's what I kind of behave like when I'm an adult now	page 9, 5-12; page 10, 1-4
Subtheme: I AM A REFLECTION OF "MY MOTHER"		
Identifying self as an abuser in own relationship	being in this field I have known how abusive relationships are and can hurt and can, you know, literally make or break somebody's life and I feel I am the abusive one in my relationship and sometimes I feel soooo horrible about it...but it's hard to know that you're the abusive one in the relationship	page 13, 4-8, page 14, 2-3
Verbal aggressor in my relationship - mirroring observed behaviors of the mother	So when I say I'm the abusive one, I mean verbally only, like I say very, when I'm mad I say very meaaaan and hurtful things and then I realise why did I do that because my spouse does not do the same. 2) most of my behaviour that I think we're more like her were when I, when I say really mean things to my husband, because my mother used to say a lot mean things to her husband, my father.	page 15, 7-11; page 19, 10-12; page 11, 1
The unsettling realisation of emulating feared/unwanted maternal traits	I neverrr want to be like my mother but at times I do certain things and I'm like, damn I am a mother. You know that, that that feeling, it hits and it's so hard. That, that the one thing that I've been running away from all my life, I see it in me, every now and then, in fact, and it it disturbs a lot.	page 17, 9-12; page 18, 1-3
Subtheme: STRIVING TO DIFFERENTIATE FROM WHAT I HAVE LEARNED/OBSERVED		
Striving to avoid adoption of maternal negative aspects	I grew up constantly telling myself that I will not be my mother in the negative things only, she's done a lot of good for me, she's given me good values, but I will only see her for those, or I will only learn and depict those behaviors only and not the negative one, the negative ones	page 17, 4-9
Differentiating from mother: actively embracing personal accountability	I always also am aware or make myself aware that there is still difference you know between what she did and what... she never, till date, she never accepts her fault. She says that I am always right, I don't do mistakes. I don't do mistakes like your father, I'm not wrong. And I will not ask sorry. She's neverrr asked for forgiveness for any of her behaviour because she thinks they are legit and that they are valid. But I don't. If I do something wrong and I realise that it's wrong, I ask my husband for forgiveness right away. This was not right to do.	page 20, 2-12
Actively suppressing dark impulses during moments of intense frustration	sometimes when you're reaaaally mad, you know they see badua (hindi word), like you know, wishing something horrible to happen to somebody. Sometimes I would get those feelings like that, like from deep within me because I've seen, that that's all I've seen her do. The the one person I used to see the most of my life, of my time, I've seen her do that sooooo much that sometimes when I'm super mad, like there's this this urge for me to do it, but I don't, I don't do it. But it's there at the back of my head like, I don't do it. I never act upon it.	page 21, 5-12' page 22, 1-2
Experience acts as a filter -determined to avoid replicating negative patterns in own relationships	there are few things I know for sure that I will never, ever, ever do it to my loved ones, that at least now I know, the learning this learning that I have that I'm not ever supposed to come remotely close to doing anything like this to people I love, to my kid or my husband; these experiences helped me umm umm kind of filter out the things I wouldn't want to do in my relationships.	page 59, 6-11; page 67, 4-6
Distinguishing enables mindful way of being	I'm able to distinguish my behaviour from my mother's and mine, and then try to take my self into behaving more more sensitive towards you know, specifically relationship wise	page 72, 9-12

Appendix L

Process of clustering all themes across participants



Appendix M

Table of GETs

GET 1: LIVING IN A PRESSURE-COOKER ENVIORNMENT	
Subtheme 1.1: You are always in the blast zone	
Divya	
Relentless discord - inability to escape the reach of conflict	interparental conflict for me is like, never having any mutual, consensual life at all, on anything, any decision anything, like anything, like life has always been on conflict and clash for the parents (1, 11-12; 2, 1-2)
Harmonious environment feels out of reach, even the smallest things were explosive	what that looks like for me at home is, like, always stressful. I don't know exactly what a happy family actually looks like. For me, all I get to see happy family definition is in movies, TV, or friends. And then I look at my family and then I'm like, like, what happened? Like, why is it so difficult to, for two people to reaaally come on some middle way, some middle path for anything for something as basic as breakfast? I mean, anything I can't even think of, which could be the tiniest thing because even the tiniest of the things in my house have had blast issues (3, 6-12; 4, 1-4)
Rishi	
Lingering tension, just a spark away from conflict	you kind of have a fight one day and then things quieten down, nobody's kind of you know, solved the issue on which the fight happened or nobody's spoken about, it is just that everybody's tired so you go to sleep or just kind of go separate ways. But the undercurrents, the tension is still there. So whatever the environment is still very rife with tension. And you know that anything can lead towards the spark again, you're always on your toes, you're what do you call - walking on eggshells.. (14, 9-16; 15, 1)
Samaira	
Peace was temporary- anything could ignite a fight	I think it means that umm, you know one day things are fine, everything is going fine but then suddenly there is a trigger, and then there is a fight and then things are okay again but then there is a fight, so it's like you don't know... there's no sense of like umm certainty, with how things are going to go because anything can be a trigger and then it can be a fight (4, 4-9)
Aditi	
Every, Every day - relentless conflict	So, yeah, you'll have all sorts of conflicts, even, not only in the, you know, big things, but every, every day, like a small thing, small issues (3, 5-9)
Conflict was ever-present	So yeah, there had been always like conflict, like when we were born, okay. I mean, like when I was like, one or two year I don't remember for that but yeah, like the last, the oldest memory which we could remember like we three siblings used to discuss. So there had been always conflict and we could remember huge fights, even some huge fights between them. And I guess, they were never in harmony (6, 7-14)
Zoya	
Conflict was entrenched and ever-present	I would say that ever since I know of being existent, I've seen my parents not just fight, you know a fight, you say that, oh, somebody's having a disagreement. It was not a disagreement, because it was really intense, strong, negative emotions, shown towards two people who claim to love each other, who claim to have built this family for themselves, and umm yet choose to almost every day uh hurt each other in front of their children. It's a very, very depressing experience overall (5, 9-12, 6, 1-6)
Subtheme 1.2: Escaping/Blocking out	
Divya	
Retreating and shutting down	I would just straight stand up and go in some corner of the room. Just take one corner and just sit and do nothing (17, 2-4)
Detaching/disconnecting from the pain and reality	more like numbness, more of you know, just hiding and like, wanting to run away or wanting to find a corner. And like, I would wish that umm like, I don't want to face it (20, 1-4)
Zoya	
Contemplating drastic ways to escape the reality altogether	Most often wanted to kill myself (laughs), run away, hurt myself. I've I've run away from my house, once childishly, like I knew I was just, you know, pretending, once I actually did (25, 1-4)
Search for relief and escape from emotional pain	I always had the will to harm myself, harm myself, precisely cut myself, and also wanting to hurt myself in the most painful way, for some reason, because the pain that I felt psychologically was so much more that I wanted to cover it up with any physical pain. And it kind of felt good also, sometimes (55, 8-12, 56, 1)
Finding refuge in school - like an escape	I remember haaating to go home from school. Yeah, this was one experience that really, really, I felt a lot of times, I always loved going to school, because it felt like an escape almost like it felt like, oh, my parents are not going to be I'm not going to be seeing them fighting or not going to be having to deal with my mother yelling at me, hitting me or doing anything negative (60, 5-7, 11-12; 61, 1-4)
Prachi	
Transporting into a "fantasy" land - envisioning an alternate reality offered solace and comfort	I started reading fantasy at that time, my mother had just gotten us a library membership so Harry Potter was one of our first novels that I like, fantasy novel that I remember reading. I kind of got obsessed with it and I would love, I would wait till the next book to come out and that's obviously a lot of Potter fans are like that, like we love the series. But for me, it was also an escapism, because that used to live in my head ki, there's a magic school that exists and things are fine. The books obviously aren't perfect either but it was just a fantasy land in my head so that was a very nice way to escape for me (26, 1-10)
School was a sweet escape - source of joy/fulfillment?	So at the time school was an escape also, for me, because I used to, I honestly loved school, like I loved every bit of school, I was into sports, I was into debates, I was into every extracurricular possible. I loved school, and then I made some really nice friends there and they would always like, obviously, they never knew about these issues at home but they were very good to me (36, 6-11)
Vedika	
Emotional overwhelm and withdrawal	you end up crying like you don't want to hear it, you tend to like close your ears. Like you know, no, no, no, no, no, like, you know, stop it (page 7, 3-6)
Escaping and draining out the conflict	I used to go in my room, put on my headphones and put music very loudly so that I don't have to even if I'm away from them, and their arguments are not coming to my ears. So, I used to just like put the headphone on and listen to loud music (17, 2-6)
Subtheme 1.3: All roads lead to divorce	
Prachi	
Being exposed to the notion of divorce was threatening	like even threatening insecurity, like using the word divorce in front of kids was, it doesn't seem very big, but it was a big deal to us, because our parents were our heroes are our heroes as kids, so seeing that kind of break apart is heartbreaking (54, 5-9)
Vedika	
Potentiality of divorce evoked intense fear	Most scary thing is like, you know, it's mostly scared because you're not realizing that maybe your parents will get divorced. Or like, you know, that you know, you don't want that and you don't want to be.. it was verrry scary (12, 11-15)
Rishi	
Fearful of parents seperation	"umm fear of losing because there were times when mom would just decide or mom, dad would decide okay, this is it, this is it, you know we are going to go separate ways and I would start thinking how life would be" Rishi (21, 6-10)
Aditi	
Advocating for parents' divorce as a resolution	So later on when I started getting understanding of it slowly slowly, then we only used to suggest them if you can't manage with each other then why don't you both take divorce and you know, just separate. We only used to say to them that you know why you're spoiling you know just, you can, both can live your
Zoya	
Desperation for relief made the idea of parents' seperation seem like a hopeful outcome	But right now, since I'm an adult, I tell them like, if you guys want to separate, I'll support y'all, just do it because you guys are not just hurting yourself, you're hurting everybody else that's around you [...] So I tell them you want to get married to other people also, just just do it. I really like I'd like, be in on it, I will celebrate with you guys. I've literally told this to my parents, you know, do it do it. Just go your own ways. But their mindset is different with things right that like they're old, they say, they say that they're old now to be thinking about and their family is also very conservative right, they also have their own take on all these things (93, 11-12; 94, 1-12)

GET 2: ME IN BETWEEN OPPOSITIONS	
Subtheme 2.1: Taking sides is inevitable	
Divya	
Reflection of overly polarised/negative perception of father	<i>So, because there was more sharing from mom, so we would feel that okay, dad is the only villain in the house. So that's how we, till the longest time, we would always know that okay, he is the worst of the person, he is the monster or he is the like, the most bad thinking person ever existed, kind (32, 10-12, 33, 1-3)</i>
Re-evaluating past perception of roles and assigned blame	<i>infact mom is also very much like that, in so many things. So now, at this point we still get confused that was it, it, was it dad only the worst person there for us or the other person was also doing things to trigger or you know, causing that clash or we don't know (38, 5-9)</i>
Rishi	
Aligning with father and vilifying mother	<i>so I think I was close to my dad at that time and mom wasn't, because, mom felt outnumbered, she wasn't that matured, I would say. Uh dad kind of kept talking to me so I had his side of the story. So in my head for some time I had mom as the villain. I had mom as you know someone who is, she could fix it, but she's not fixing it (23, 13-16; 24, 1)</i>
Moving beyond binary perception of blame	<i>When I grew up after like a couple of years, and when things quietened down. They both also matured, they both mellowed down. I could see that, it was both. I could see the other side also (24, 2-4)</i>
Prachi	
The pull towards forming alliances/ making one an ally	<i>my sister and I we would get involved and not taking sides but we would obviously as kids, we would try to gravitate towards one parent (4, 9-11)</i>
Strong emotional pull and alignment with mother	<i>I mean, I would I wouldn't try to take sides but then somehow of the other reason I would always take my mother's side I don't know why that happens umm but whenever I used to see her crying like I used to always take her side and then even when she wouldn't talk to dad, I would not talk to dad. I don't know maybe that was.. nobody really told me that we're not supposed to talk to him or anything but that always happened (10, 9-11; 11, 1-5)</i>
Saanya	
Recognising mutual responsibility in IP conflict as an adult - making sense of parental roles	<i>It was, I think, in the early I mean, early years of my life, it was from whatever I understood was that it was from the father towards the mother. But then growing up, it almost feels like it's just the same with the two. It could be a result of..that, that's just my assumption right? That's, but I see it happening equally as well (4, 4-9)</i>
Conflicted feelings regarding divisions- agaisnt father	<i>Yeah, it was just (pause), it felt like teams in a way that even right now, as I speak, I know there's so much that I can and want to and have experienced from my mom's side, too, but everything is becoming... It's almost like, you know, the father's fault. It is. And that's not actually the reality. So this is kind of what I experienced as a child to where it was a team of three versus him (39, 10-12; 40, 1-4)</i>
Feeling caught and torn between loyalty and sides	<i>I think again, confusing battle or having to make choices. And having to be in one team, you know, having to decide which team you want to be in, nobody is asking for it. But that's just something that, you know, if I'm here, if I understand this person more than the other person would be like, I am not close to them (41, 2-7)</i>
Subtheme 2.2: Assuming a responsible role	
Samaira	
Mediator role led me to become an adult prematurely	<i>A lot of times, I remember, like (laughs), I was like, there in the umm (sound), I was there, and I was like, I had to resolve it. So I feel like that also has happened at times. I feel like I maybe grew up like earlier than what I was like supposed to, because of that role that I was playing of like this mediator (6,9-11; 7, 1-3)</i>
Saanya	
Active involvement: taking on a role of peacemaker and mediator?	<i>To question both of them. Or maybe sometimes just one person, whoever, wasn't wasn't anything that...but almost like umm asking them what, like asking what's wrong? Or like, how can we make this better or, you know, can I do something? Can I speak to dad? Can I speak to mom? Can I? Is there I can do kind of a situation (90, 1-6)</i>
Vedika	
Adopting a nurturing, parent-like role	<i>I tend I tended to go to my mom more and she used to cry so you know, you want, you dont want tha, you know that being an emotional person yourself, you want to like go and comfort your mother and stuff. So like you know, I used to go and comfort her I used to let her sit in my arms and cry till she calmed down and stuff like that (41, 11-15; 42, 1-2)</i>
Divya	
Acting as an emotional anchor and care-giver in the family is draining	<i>I feel so frustrated that whenever I go home, I go with that mental preparation ki I know there I will not have even a single minute of time. Either it's gonna be like all that or and when it's gonna be that, then I am the only one who has to go and sit with each person and not make them feel alone. So, at the end of the day, it's super exhausting for me. It's super, umm sorry, just two seconds (takes time out to have some water). umm it's difficult no (56, 5-11)</i>
Prachi	
Acting as parenal figure/sponge for sister	<i>"so I would always feel responsible for my younger sister as well, because she was the kind who was, I used to think that she was a little innocent in that sense. I would try to be the parent figure for her. And that has kind of occurred even in adulthood. Like I still try to absorb all the negativity. I don't try to let it reach her" Prachi (10, 3-7)</i>

GET 3: A CHILDHOOD I DIDN'T HAVE	
Subtheme 3.1: Childhood of my dreams	
Samaira	
Articulating the need for nurturing and secure environment - not experienced?	<i>I think there is a certain standard of uh when you when you bring the child into this world, there are certain things you need to do beyond just you know, materialist things or whatever, there's a certain environment you need to give your child and then there's a certain sense of safety that you need to create (30, 1-5)</i>
Prachi	
Time with parents was present but not deeply fulfilling	<i>So we would have time with our parents for not quality time, like time with our parents would usually mean ki they would be home in the evening, they would be helping us with homework and things, and that really was nice of them (40, 10-11; 41, 1-3)</i>
It would have been ideal to experience more than just the ordinary/routine - deeper emotional connection?	<i>I think that spending the quality time together was, that was something that didn't happen at that time, so I wish that, more of that would happen. Now we obviously spend time together, we plan trips, and more together and like just now like just before you called my mother and I had taken our cat to the vet so we had really nice conversation in the car about things. I think this would have been really nice if we had been if this had happened when we were kids too (42, 1-8)</i>
Zoya	
Idealising the protected environment her husband got to experience	<i>he has not grown up with any family dispute per se, like their parents were, his parents were more of these kind of people that they obviously had their own problems, but they always sought to sort it out, you know, within themselves in closed walls like in their rooms, they would not let their kids know, you know, that really heated discussions have been happening between them, because they didn't want their kids to think that, oh, my parents are in dispute, which I think is beautiful. I don't know if it helps or not, but to, to hear that sounds so nice because as a child who's seen it and grown up only seeing it, I feel that would have been like a really nice break from all the horrible memories I have in my head, which I would want to get rid of (15, 12; 16, 1-12)</i>
Rishi	
Admiring the lack of exposure to fights his wife grew up in	<i>"so I could have probably seen, like, I hear from my wife, she grew up in a house where there was no conflict. They've not had fights. They like, her mom, dad, never, they never fought in front of...they did fight, they would, she's not seen that so..." (37, 10-13)</i>
Aditi	
Reflecting on the ideal role of parents - to nurture, care, meet the needs of children	<i>I won't say that they have not done anything for us. Definitely they have taken care of, you know, my mom taking care of the food or father has taken care of our you know, all the monetary needs whatever we need it. So we are like, we got educated because of them only okay, they have sent us to good school, college, everything that was there. But do you think that is that only enough? Okay, they have played their role, but they were, that is all what you would you say materialistic thing. But as a parent was they not responsible to you know, to understand their child to understand each one of us. Like they have brought us into this world, okay, so it is their responsibility to understand each one of us and, you know, give attention to each one of us and what kind of a person we are (15, 1-15).</i>
Subtheme 3.2: Missing a reliable, adult foundation/presence pieces	
Zoya	
IPC left me without a reliable refuge	<i>So I've had a really difficult childhood since my parents always kept fighting, I never knew who to go to when I needed help or when I needed anything (41, 8-11)</i>
Feeling isolated due to lack of supportive parental presence	<i>So, whenever I had experiences that I, that were not, you know, supposed to be the normal for a girl, I had nobody to talk to so I felt very, very, very lonely. Because when you're a child, who do you have, like, we don't go and talk to friends like intense emotions and everything because you know friends also sometimes make fun of you and everything. Like parents are the one you know you go and talk to. I never had that support system, which made me feel very lonely, very alone (84, 5-12; 85, 1-2)</i>
Rishi	
Grasping for emotional presence and support amidst parental neglect and absence	<i>If things were all fine and what I would learn from my mom and what I would learn from my dad is, I think very...it's in, like, hardwired into us, I feel. But because they were not there were. They were absent for certain time in the way that I would want them. I sought for connections, in my friends, in other people, like, thankfully, really, thankfully, those people turned out to be good influences. They gave me good advice, they kind of held my hand and we navigated for life (42, 6-9)</i>
Finding anchors and supportive relationships in others in absence of parental availability	<i>I have a close friend who is almost fatherly. He's my age, he's probably six months younger but you think, the way he sees life, and what advice he's given his girlfriend now wife has given. So I would treat them as my parents growing up obviously at that stage, when you really want some anchors in your life (43, 1-6)</i>
Aditi	
Grappling with emotional disconnect with parents	<i>we didn't have that kind of rapport or bonding that's what I'm saying that it's not about ki, see there will be things like you know, child, they hide the things because they feel like okay, they will scold that is a different feeling, I think the scolding thing. But this was like you know, like this is a very small example which I gave but I never was comfortable even till date sharing anything with them because they, I don't know they are, the they never understand what I feel like they never cared what we are going through (15, 8-17)</i>
No one to confide in due to absence of nurturing figures - growing up alone?	<i>Something has happened in school you want to tell, with whom you will tell. And then growing up already there will be a you know, a lot of emotions going on inside you right especially when you are into your teenage years, right? and typically also hormonal changes, there's a lot of things happens right? But there was nobody, there was nobody to share (17, 1-5)</i>
Prachi	
Lack of reassuring, reliable, supportive adult presence	<i>Like nobody told me that this was how you're supposed to be okay with it, they are your parents and they'll sort it out, it's okay. Nobody ever told us that because we didn't have adults, any other adults around us (20, 11; 21 1-3)</i>

GET 4: THE ADULT I HAVE BECOME	
Subtheme 4.1: You can't shake off the enduring impact of the experience	
Divya	
Being hyper-vigilant in interactions with others	Um, with friends...I think with like any of the friends like not the relationships I'm talking about right now, but only friends, that again, I would be super cautious and I would be...my only thing would be that always, like, always observant of the person. Because I'm so...this has become an inbuilt thing to always observe the facial expressions or... is it changing? Is it becoming furious? Am I causing them any kind of offence to them? So these things have become a priority in my life (48, 8-12, 49, 1-4)
Rishi	
Hyper-awareness extends beyond family life - really helpful?	So I kind of started judging what umm the situation in the room is at all times. And that's helped me understand now in even professional environments, or at, you know, in my personal life now that if things are not, well, I'm able to, I'm very umm receptive to it, I can, I can see those things clearly, which is because I grew up in that state of conflict and state of tension (16, 12-16; 17, 1)
Keen sensitivity to conflict cues in the environment	I would rather have, you know, a place where I'm not always looking out for the next conflict or those things.
Samaira	
Emotional caregiving role replays and extends beyond family life	I guess maybe because of this experience, I, because I was supposed to or I was taking care of needs, of other peoples needs, I feel like I am always trying to attune to someone else or trying to take care of them (23, 3-8)
Being hyper-vigilant, over reading cues - anticipating negative responses?	I think, that there's a lot of anticipation of needs that happens where, um based on like subtle body language, tone of voice, um really small cues which other people also wouldn't notice, I always, I'm like oh maybe this means and sometimes it doesn't even mean anything but I'm like maybe this means that this person is annoyed or irritated, or pissed off with me (24, 1-7)
Aditi	
Paralysing fear of ridicule inhibits genuine engagement with others	most of the time it happens that I will be like quiet when I'm in a group or something. It just because I am afraid of speaking, that people will make fun of me, okay, because that's all I have seen in my family. Because within the family that used to happen, right. So but I have to, you know, justify it in a way that I'm introvert. Oh, I don't talk or I am a good listener. I am a good listener, I know, but every time that is not the case, okay. I like talking, I want to talk to people, I want to have, you know, that people enjoys and all that. But because of that fear and all I think I could not make good friends and all in my life. And in fact, I started living my life in a very lonely way (52, 14-17; 53, 1-8)
Zoya	
Acknowledging the lasting and all-encompassing imprint of experience on self	so much of what I have seen growing up, you would think ki okay, that was just, you know, during my childhood, and I would forget it, or I would let go and grow up to be this normal human being, nooooo way, no, it affects me, every single day of my life, every choice I make, every decision I make, every behavior that I exhibit towards my partner, shows so much of what I have seen and and most often it is so unconscious, like, I don't do it consciously but then when I actually think about it, or reflect on it, I could see so much of what my what I've seen when I was a child, that's what I kind of behave like when I'm an adult now (9, 5-12; 10, 1-4)
Verbal aggressor in my marital relationship - mirroring observed behaviors by mother	So when I say I'm the abusive one, I mean verbally only, like I say very, when I'm mad I say very neeaaan and hurtful things and then I realise why did I do that because my spouse does not do the same (15, 7-11)
	most of my behaviour that I think we're more like her were when I, when I say really mean things to my husband, because my mother used to say a lot mean things to her husband, my father (19, 10-12; 20, 1-2)
Subtheme 4.2: I'll make it a point to not do that: Differentiating	
Rishi	
Valuing timely communication and addressing issues hands on	I was able to see things clearly for what they are I understood the importance of calling out even if it's a difficult conversation, it's best to have it out right at the start when you see it. Otherwise, if you just brush it under the carpet, or you know, keep it for later, it's going to develop into a monster of itself (17, 2-7)
	I'll remember what dad has done or what, what those interactions were, and I'll make it, I'll make it a point not to do that, with my wife. I told you about the females or the girls that dad kind of be with or just interact like his friends wives, you would be with them. But mom would not like it. So in my life what that's translated is I'd be very clear with my wife of what I'm doing. Of course, she's very understanding, my wife, we have our internal jokes, and we tease each other about it. But I'll make it a point that if she's not comfortable with somebody, I'll I'll not do that. Like dad would in fact, go one step and you would make sure to do it. Like pick that person out because mom doesn't like it just to kind of tease her. But they were not. That's not the relationship that... ((26, 16; 27, 1-11)
Differentiating from father: Determined to cultivate a partnership characterised	
Zoya	
Differentiating from mother: actively embracing personal accountability	I always also am aware or make myself aware that there is still difference you know between what she did and what... she never, till date, she never accepts her fault. She says that I am always right, I don't do mistakes. I don't do mistakes like your father, I'm not wrong. And I will not ask sorry. She's neverrrr asked for forgiveness for aany of her behaviour because she thinks they are legit and that they are valid. But I don't. If I do something wrong and I realise that it's wrong, I ask my husband for forgiveness right away. This was not right to do (17, 4-9)
Actively suppressing dark impulses during moments of intense frustration	sometimes when you're reaally mad, you know they see badua (hindi word), like you know, wishing something horrible to happen to somebody. Sometimes I would get those feelings like that, like from deep within me because I've seen, that that's all I've seen her do. The the one person I used to see the most of my life, of my time, I've seen her do that sooooo much that sometimes when I'm super mad, like there's this this urge for me to do it, but I don't, I don't do it. But it's there at the back of my head like, I don't do it. I never act upon it (21, 5-12; 22, 1-2)
Experience acts as a filter -determined to avoid replicating negative patterns in own	there are few things I know for sure that I will never, ever, ever do it to my loved ones, that at least now I know, the learning this learning that I have that I'm not ever supposed to come remotely close to doing anything like this to people I love, to my kid or my husband; these experiences helped me umm umm kind of filter out the things I wouldn't not want to do in my relationships (59, 6-11; 67, 4-6)
Distunguishing enables mindful way of being	I'm able to distinguish my behaviour from my mother's and mine, and then try to take my self into behaving more more sensitive towards you know, specifically relationship wise (72, 9-12)
Vedika	
Looking for a partner different from father	So you know, I don't want a person who's like my dad (Right) who, who like, argues, who gets angry very fast or like that. I love my dad. He is a very good person. But I don't want that person (77, 9-13)
Making emotional intimacy a priority/criterion for own relationship	I want a person connect to me emotionally. Even though my parents if they had a love marriage, they never connected emotionally. They never realised. They've just been together and their arguments just went on like, for years. They never connected emotionally, they never understood each other. And I don't want that. I don't want a person. It affected greatly in my life, like small, small things (80, 14-15; 81, 1-6)
Prachi	
Protect/shield own children from visible rows - limiting exposure and lasting impression	I think my parents also had this logic that they would never do anything in secret. So they used to be like, if it's happy times, we would all share them together. If it's unhappy times, we would also share them together. But then, so that would mean even like fighting in front of us. They never fought behind closed doors. That never happened. So in I don't know why that was their reasoning. But that is something that I would personally not do with my kids because I know that it really, it stays with you for a while (32, 11; 33, 1-8)
Striving to eradicate potential sources of discord	So I think like it has contributed a lot to my thought process in the sense that now I think money is important. Like people in my generation don't really care much about they just earn money and spend money, but we are very (inaudible word) to an extent with money umm because we we've seen that that is like that, at least in our family, that was the cause of a lot of conflict so money is important for us now (47, 8-11; 48, 1-3)
Mindful of qualities I want/don't want for my relationship	I'm being very particular about kind of the red flags that I see because I don't want my future partner to have, you know, like a very low threshold for anger or not being willing to communicate at all. So those things are, communication is very important to me now, especially like I don't care much about like him having a six pack ab or anything like that. These other things matter more for future generations too (50, 4-10)
Aditi	
Adopting a stance against visibility of disputes and handling conflicts privately	Aap aapke partner ke saath, aapke conflicts hai ya kuch bhi hai, toh aap unki behzadti publicly mat karo na, aap apne issues privately aap solve karo right. Aap, agar ab issues hai, aur aap sab ke saamne ladna shuru ho jao, I don't think that is correct. And I have seen that thing a lot of times in my family. Kuch bhi issue hua, ladai hai, and my papa is you know, literally behzadti karna, gundi cheeze bolna and all that in front of others" (88, 5-14)