

FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN ADOLESCENTS: MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the mediating role of emotion regulation in relationship between family functioning and social competences in adolescents. ICPS Family Functioning Scale (Noller, Seth-Smith, Bouma, & Schweitzer, 1992), Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (Gullone & Taffe, 2012) and Social Competence Scale (Smart & Sanson, 2003) were used on 621 adolescents, selected by purposive sampling technique to measure the study variables. Results revealed that family functioning has significant positive relationship with cognitive reappraisal ($r=.17$, $p<0.01$), emotional regulation ($r=.14$, $p<0.01$) and social competence ($r=.36$, $p<0.01$). Social competence has significant positive correlation with suppression ($r=.14$, $p<0.01$), cognitive reappraisal ($r=.39$, $p<0.01$), and emotional regulation ($r=.34$, $p<0.01$). Family functioning ($\beta=.31$, $p<0.01$) and emotional regulation ($\beta=.29$, $p<0.01$) have significantly and positively predicted social competences in college students. Intimacy ($\beta=.39$, $p<0.01$) and conflict ($\beta=.11$, $p<0.01$) have significantly and positively predicted social competences in college students. Cognitive reappraisal ($\beta=.38$, $p<0.01$) has significantly and positively predicted social competences in college students. Cognitive reappraisal has partially mediated between family functioning and social competences of the adolescents. Implications are discussed in the light of the results.

Keywords: Adolescents, Intimacy, Parenting Style, Reappraisal, Social Competence.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important protective factors, necessary for adaptive social development is social competence which is socially relevant and learned behaviors that help a person to act appropriately with other individuals and refers to the person's ability to show social desirable responses. In addition, skills like cooperation, assertion, self-control, responsibility and empathy make extensive dimensions of social competence (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Social competence contributed in many areas of adolescence such as in academics, in forming intimate relationships, stable careers, adaptive marital relations, academic competence and better mental and social wellbeing (Clausen, 1991). These new areas prove to be fruitful for further development and improvement of social skills. It has been reported that less attention is given to investigate the social competence at developmental stage of adolescence as compared to young children and its contribution to wellbeing and adaptation (Smart & Sanson, 2003).

Social relationships considered as a crucial factor that influence social development of adolescents is family. Noller (1995) stated that positive family relationships help adolescents to get through the major transition from childhood to adulthood and determine the competence and confidence of adolescents. Adaptive family functioning is essential for adolescents to deal with major task of adolescence successfully and smoothly and help them to solve problems effectively that are associated with this stage of life in developing close interpersonal relationships.

Family also provides a context for socialization of emotional expression as individual first communicates and states his emotional needs and desires within family milieu. The ways in which

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family members interact and deal with emotions, affects how adolescents will experience, express and control their own emotions (Carpenter & Halberstadt, 2000). Therefore, family factors prove to be important in social and emotional functioning of adolescents. Silberberg (2001) conceptualized family functioning as about how families interact with each other, communicate information, make decisions regarding family matters, solve everyday problems and to maintain harmony in relationships. Noller, Seth-Smith, Bouma, and Schweitzer (1992) identified three main components of family functioning while studying interpersonal processes related to families of adolescents. These characteristics include intimacy, conflict and parenting style. Intimacy indicates sharing problems, closeness, commitment, open communication and emotional expressions. Conflict is characterized by misunderstandings, difficulties in problem solving, interference in other's matter and inability to make a plan. Lastly, the opinion of all family members is considered in taking important decisions regarding family matters if parents demonstrate democratic parenting style (Sheehan & Noller, 1998).

Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers and Robinson (2007) proposed a Tripartite Model to explain the impact of family context on children's emotion regulation and adjustment of social capability. According to the model, family context affects emotion regulation in three ways. Firstly, children learn emotion regulation through modeling in their families. Secondly, parenting behaviors provide a basis for emotional socialization which is important in influencing emotion regulation such as parents respond to emotions of their children, educate them, train them to express and experience emotions. Thirdly, emotional climate of the family influence emotion regulation. Emotional climate includes factors such as secure parent-child attachment, parenting style, and positive marital relations without conflicts.

The Tripartite Model proposed that family context influence children's psychosocial development indirectly through emotion regulation (Eisenberg et al., 2003). Eisenberg, Cumberland and Spinrad (1998) proposed that emotion regulation act as a mediator between parenting style and children's social competence. Thus, parents who are sensitive, show support, warmth and express appropriate emotions in the home are likely to have children with adaptive emotion regulation skills, in turn these children are less likely to develop problem behaviors and are more likely to develop social competence. Spinrad et al. (2007) found that effortful control mediated the relation between maternal supportive behavior, warmth and low emotional problems and high social competence in young children. Additionally, poor behavioral regulation mediated the relationship between destructive and constructive marital conflict and psychological adjustment, social and emotional competence (Kayfitz, 2011).

Besides, Tripartite Model proposed that there are direct effects of family context on social competence. Kopko (2007) reported that democratic parents are more willing to consider and pay attention to their adolescents' viewpoint which help adolescents to develop outlook that their opinions are valued and in turn make them more socially competent, responsible, and autonomous. Other studies suggest that negative family functioning including high levels of conflicts (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003), lack of parental support and warmth (Sheeber, Hops, Alpert, Davis, & Andrews, 1997) and negative communication among family members (Dekovic, Wissink, & Meijer, 2004). Negative communication has a significant and negative effect on the development of social skills in children such as the capacity to identify constructive solutions to interpersonal and social problems (Demaray & Malecki, 2002) or to empathize with others and to take the perspective of other person, thus resulting in social incompetence. In contrast, positive family functioning such as supportive relations, sharing and conflict resolution skills as well as democratic parenting style foster feelings of higher self-esteem as well as increased social competence (Rubenstein & Feldman, 1993).

Empirical evidence indicates that adolescents who lack skills related to problem solving, decision making, dealing with negative emotions and stress have decreased overall psychosocial competence. Besides, their families have negative characteristics such as use of psychological control by parents, social aloofness, absence of benefits and resources and rejection at home (Ayub & Masood, 2013). In contrast, families that showed open pattern of communication, collaboration and support were likely to instill relational and social competence in children (Hajizadeh, Refahi, Bordbar, & Haghghi, 2012; Cigala, Venturelli, & Fruggeri, 2014).

Though Tripartite Model (Morris et al., 2007) has focused on the development of emotion regulation and adjustment in the family context, little research has carefully examined differential emotion regulation strategies according to specific outcomes, i.e., positive and negative outcomes for

reappraisal and expressive suppression. Previous researches have seldom focused on positive aspects of adjustment such as social competence. Instead more attention has been paid to negative aspects i.e., internalizing and externalizing problems (Stocker, Richmond, Rhoades, & Kiang, 2007; Dagne & Snyder, 2011). Previous researches including Tripartite Model focused on toddlers, preschoolers, children and early adolescents as targeted population while studying the impact of family context variables on emotion regulation and social competence (Eisenberg et al., 1997; Eisenberg, Vaughan & Hofer 2009; Morris et al., 2007) ignoring adolescents having age range of 17 to 21 years. The resultant consequence is that little is known about how emotion regulation and social competence has been influenced within family context among this age group. Besides, in Pakistan, limited data exist on family functioning and its impact on emotion regulation and social competence of adolescents. Those who have studied focused on single component of family functioning in relation to adjustment, emotion regulation, aggression (Jabeen, Anis-ul-Haque & Riaz, 2013; Sana & Masood, 2013; Sikandar & Younas, 2013).

To fill gaps in the existent literature, the present study examined mediating role of differentiated emotion regulation strategies in relationship between family functioning and social competence. Therefore, the aim of the present research is to test the hypotheses that 1) Family functioning is positively associated with emotional regulation and social competence among adolescents. 2) Social competency in adolescents is predictable by the family functioning and emotional regulation. 3) reappraisal and suppression will mediate the relationship between family functioning and social competence among adolescents.

Previous researches established cultural differences in consequences of using emotion regulation strategies (Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005; Yeh & Inose, 2002). Thus, the present study highlights the cultural differences with respect to emotion regulation strategies. Present study proves to be helpful in developing understanding of family functioning of collectivistic cultures like Pakistan. These cultures tend to emphasize family obligations and respect for the parents and a sense of obedience for elders which may have positive consequences for social adaptation among adolescents.

METHODS

Sample

The sample consisted of 621 adolescents (boys= 319 and girls=302) who were approached from Government Post Graduate College for Women Satellite Town Rawalpindi (for girls n = 151), Government Postgraduate College Asghar Mall Rawalpindi (for boys n= 104), Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad (for girls n= 151 and for boys n = 106) and Islamabad College for Boys Islamabad (for boys n =109). The inclusion criterion was that age of the participants ranged from 17 to 21 years ($M=18.91$, $SD=1.09$). Convenient sampling technique was applied for data collection. The mean education of participants was 12.77 years that is equivalent to intermediate level. No other particular inclusion criteria were specified other than age.

Measures

ICPS Family Functioning Scale

It consists of 30 items which measures parenting style (democratic), intimacy and conflict (Noller et al., 1992). Parenting style consisted of 8 items, intimacy comprised of 12 items and conflict included 10 items. No items need reversing. All items are measured on a 6-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). On present data, reliability coefficients of intimacy, parenting style and conflict are .80, .69 and .60 respectively. Less than 2 value of skewness and 7 for kurtosis indicate data is normally distributed (as per criteria given by West, Finch & Curran, 1995).

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA)

10 items (Gullone & Taffe, 2012) was used to assess individual differences in the use of emotion regulation styles: Cognitive reappraisal and suppression. Participants are asked to rate their emotions using a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). On present data, reliability coefficient of expressive suppression is .54 and for cognitive reappraisal is .63. In addition, the values of skewness and kurtosis for expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal are less than 2 and 7 respectively indicating data is normally distributed (as per criteria given by West et al., 1995).

Social Competence Scale

It consists of 17 items which comprises four sub-scales: Assertiveness, empathy, responsibility, and self-control (Smart & Sanson, 2003), response categories ranging from never (1) to always (5). On present data, reliability coefficient for Social Competence Scale is .81. Less than 2 value for skewness and 7 for kurtosis indicate data is normally distributed (as per criteria given by West et al., 1995).

Procedure

First, permission was taken from the authority of the academic institutions. Informed consent was taken from participants and they were given brief introduction about the objective of the study and its importance. A booklet comprising of demographic sheet along with questions were handed over to the participants. The verbal instructions were also given to respondents by the researcher. Respondents were assured about the confidentiality of the information being provided by them. The valuable cooperation of the participants was acknowledged and thanked in the end.

RESULTS

The results are obtained on the sample of 621 students by analysis conducted in SPSS version 21.

Table No. 1

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Inter-correlation among Scales of Family Functioning Scale, Emotional Regulation (ER), and Social Competence (SC) among Students (n=621)

Scales/subscales	M	SD	ER	Suppression	Reappraisal	SC
Family Functioning	130.17	15.09	.14**	.06	.17**	.36**
Emotional Regulation	34.56	5.63	-	.75**	.84**	.34**
Suppression	12.69	3.17	-	-	.278**	.14**
Cognitive Reappraisal	21.87	3.86	-	-	-	.39**
Social Competence	64.03	9.92	-	-	-	-

Note: M=Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; **p<0.01.

Table 1 shows Pearson product moment correlation of family functioning, with emotion regulation and social competence. Results revealed that family functioning has significant positive relationship with cognitive reappraisal ($r=.17$, $p<0.01$), emotional regulation ($r=.14$, $p<0.01$) and social competence ($r=.36$, $p<0.01$). Social competence has significant positive correlation with suppression ($r=.14$, $p<0.01$), cognitive reappraisal ($r=.39$, $p<0.01$), and emotional regulation ($r=.34$, $p<0.01$).

Table No. 2

Multiple Regression for Predicting Social Competence from ICPS Family Functioning Scale and Emotional Regulation among the students (n = 621).

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	19.444	3.526		5.51	.000
1 FF	.205	.024	.311	8.61	.000
ER	.520	.064	.295	8.16	.000

Table 2 shows role of family functioning and emotional regulation in predicting social competence. Results revealed that that 21% of variance in social competence is accounted by family functioning and emotional regulation strategies of the adolescents [$R^2=.21$, $F(2, 618)= 83.23$, $p<0.01$]. Family functioning ($\beta=.31$, $p<0.01$) and emotional regulation ($\beta=.29$, $p<0.01$) have significantly and positively predicted social competences in college students.

Table No. 3

Multiple Regression for Predicting Social Competence from subscales of ICPS Family Functioning Scale and Emotional Regulation among the students (n = 621).

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	32.385	3.321		9.75	.000
1 intimacy	.394	.057	.343	6.95	.000
parenting style	.112	.071	.077	1.58	.114
conflict	.110	.045	.092	2.43	.015

Table 3 shows role of subscales of family functioning (intimacy, parenting style, and conflict) in predicting social competence. Results revealed that that 15% of variance in social competence is accounted by family functioning and emotional regulation strategies of the adolescents [$R^2=.15$, $F(3, 617) = 37.14$, $p<0.01$]. Intimacy ($\beta=.39$, $p<0.01$) and conflict ($\beta=.11$, $p<0.01$) have significantly and

positively predicted social competences in college students. Parenting style has nonsignificant role in social competence of the adolescents.

Table No. 4

Multiple Regression for Predicting Social Competence from Subscales of Emotional Regulation among the students (n = 621).

Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
1	(Constant)	41.457	2.310		17.95	.000
	Reappraisal	.976	.099	.380	9.85	.000
	Suppression	.097	.121	.031	.80	.423

Table 4 shows role of subscales of emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal and suppression) in predicting social competence. Results revealed that that 15% of variance in social competence is accounted by family functioning and emotional regulation strategies of the adolescents [$R^2=.15$, $F(2, 618) = 55.35$, $p<0.01$]. Cognitive reappraisal ($\beta=.38$, $p<0.01$) has significantly and positively predicted social competences in college students. Suppression of emotions has nonsignificant role in social competence of the adolescents.

Figure 1

Mediating Effect of Emotional Regulation between Family Functioning and Social Competence (N = 621)in AMOS-24

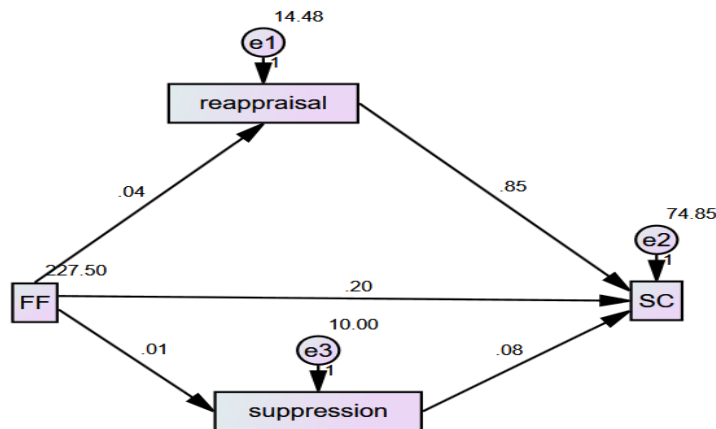


Figure 1 shows that structure equation model for mediating role of emotional regulation (suppression and cognitive reappraisal) between family functioning and social competence in adolescents. The direct impact of family functioning in social competence of the adolescents is significant ($\beta=.20$, $p<0.01$). However, the indirect effect of family functioning through cognitive reappraisal is significant ($\beta=.85$, $p<0.01$) but insignificant for suppression in social competences of the adolescents. Therefore, cognitive reappraisal has partially mediated between family functioning and social competences of the adolescents.

DISCUSSION

The present study has examined the relationship and impact of family functioning and emotion regulation on social competence among adolescents. Family functioning is a positive predictor of social competence (Saleem, & Gul, 2016; Newhart, 2019). Moreover, it was found that correlation between expressive suppression and reappraisal is higher in Eastern than in Western culture thus indicating the individuals of collectivistic culture have balanced use of both strategies and may benefit from use of suppression (Matsumoto, Yoo & Nakagawa, 2008). These individuals do not use expressive suppression completely and strictly but that they move to other emotion regulation strategies i.e., cognitive reappraisal when they perceive suppression would have a negative consequence (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007). In contrast, people of individualistic culture use one emotion regulation strategy at a time and they frequently use reappraisal as Matsumoto et al., (as cited in Matsumoto, 2006) found that Americans have higher scores on reappraisal and the Japanese having higher scores on suppression than Americans. This may be reason that adolescents use reappraisal and suppression as emotion regulation

strategies at a time and both strategies may together mediate the relationship between family functioning and social competence instead separately.

Intimacy is positive predictor of social competence. Prior studies suggested that indicators of intimacy contribute in social competence. Smith, Prinz, Dumas, and Laughlin (2001) reported that family order, cohesiveness in family, communication, organization, rules and regulations were positively related to children's social competence and with emotional and behavioral outcomes. Families with higher in positive attributes of cohesiveness, open and positive expression of emotions, and lower attributes of conflicts and disagreement, autonomy, order and control showed significant role in determining socio-emotional adjustment of adolescents (Deepshikha & Bhanot, 2011).

Results of present study revealed that democratic parenting does not significantly predict social competence. Previous finding showed the same similar findings. Vijila, Thomas and Ponnusamy (2013) found that authoritative parenting style is non-significant predictor of social competence. Moreover, numerous studies found that collectivistic cultures that promote interdependence and harmony (e.g., Turkish, Chinese, Indian, Latin American, Asian, and Puerto Rican) commonly use higher level of psychological control for children that is a characteristic of authoritarian parenting style (Wu et al., 2002; Yaman et al., 2010; Rudy & Grusec, 2001). Grusec, Rudy and Martini (1997) rationalize for difference in use of authoritarian parenting style between individualistic and collectivistic culture. They argue that in collectivist groups, individuals are encouraged to suppress their own wants and needs and respond to the needs of others that belong to their own group i.e., family. For this reason, parents use authoritarian parenting style for controlling the behavior of their children as parents believe that by using authoritarian parenting style, they are able to foster social adaptation in their children during interpersonal interaction. Thus, in collectivistic culture like our own, authoritarian parenting style is commonly endorsed which has different consequences for adolescents in terms of social competence as compared to democratic parenting style. This may be the reason that democratic parenting style has no impact on social competence in collectivistic culture.

Conflict (as component of family functioning) is a predictor of social competence. Results of current study indicate that conflict is significantly positively predicting social competence, although the variance explained by conflict in social competence is 1% which is low as compared to intimacy. Amato and Ochiltree (1986) suggested that adolescents are less vulnerable to family conflict as compared to young children as they are cognitively superior to young children and can understand the causes of family conflicts due to which conflicts may not negatively affect their social competence. Furthermore, Grych and Fincham (1990) proposed if a conflict occurs in families where already existing relationships are positive and supportive, it has less threatening impact on social outcome of children because they perceive that conflicts may not harm the synchronization and steadiness of the family. Therefore, negative impact of family conflict on social competence depends upon existing family relationships. Warm and supportive relationships in the family may act as a buffer against negative consequences of conflict.

It was hypothesized that reappraisal and expressive suppression (as strategies of emotion regulation) predict social competence among adolescents. Results revealed that reappraisal significantly predict social competence. The findings of current study highlighted partial support for tripartite model. There is recent evidence that people of collectivistic culture use balanced coping strategies which enable them to express and suppress emotions. Similarly, Miyamoto and Ryff (2010) found that individuals of collectivistic culture use both up and down emotion regulation strategies in order to experience balance of positive and negative emotions, thus resulting in better mental health among themselves.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that intimacy is the strongest predictor of social competence among. Moreover, family functioning is indirectly related to social competence through mediation of reappraisal only among adolescents.

Limitations and Suggestions

Shortcoming of the study was the reliance on self-report data. Because this study relied only on adolescents' perceptions of family functioning, emotion regulation and social competence, it is not clear whether these phenomena were depicted accurately. The generalizability of the findings is limited to adolescents. The extent to which the results characterize to other population is a matter of debate. A negative family functioning resulted in emotion dysregulation, but an adolescent's emotion

dysregulation may itself worsen the family functioning, therefore causal inferences should not be inferred.

Some directions for future research include developmental or longitudinal studies which examine the sequence and characteristics of changes in family relationships, emotion regulation and social competence during adolescence with a more diverse adolescent population. For example, minority groups, different ethnic groups and working class samples might be included in the study. Future research may include siblings, grandparents living in the home to investigate extensive family impact on emotion regulation and social competence among adolescents in the context of the relatives.

Implications

Emotion regulation indicate early prevention of social maladjustment in adolescents. Indeed, prevention programs that target adolescents' emotion regulation skills have shown to be associated with improvements in adolescents' social competence. The current findings have important implications for preventive interventions and suggested techniques inclusion that promote adaptation of positive emotions and intonation of negative emotions. The results of this study have implication for preventive programs to improve family communication and family dynamics. Moreover, parents' education and family counseling may be viable mechanisms by which to educate their impact in adolescence and adulthood. The current findings highlight the importance of family involvement in intervention for adolescent's emotional and behavioral problems resolution.

The findings of current study proved to be fruitful at the policy level, government might need to advocate policies more on family functioning issues. Current laws relating to families, included the ingredient of adolescent social enhancement into educational polices and measure educational laws to protect and help adolescents with deficiency in social competence, and endorsed parenting skills for this matter of fact.

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