

PARENTAL EMOTIONAL REGULATION, PERCEIVED COMPETENCE, AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP IN ADOLESCENTS

Muhammad Asad Ullah Zia^{a*}, Saira Majid Sheikh^b, & Alishba Malik^c

^{a,b,c} Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore Pakistan

*Correspondence to: Mr. Muhammad Asad Ullah Zia, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore Pakistan. Email: asadzia1280@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a time of increased emotional vulnerability and shifting family dynamics, and the parent–child relationship has a strong influence on psychological adjustment. The link between emotional regulation of parents and parenting quality has been examined, and the same is true for parents' sense of competence. However, these two variables have not been examined together from an adolescent's point of view, especially in non-Western cultures. The aims and objectives were to explore the links between adolescents' perceptions of emotional regulation of parents (indicated by their expressed emotion), perceived competence of parents and parent–child relationship quality (attachment) and to determine whether the first two factors predict the latter. The design used was quantitative – cross-sectional – correlational. A convenience sample of adolescents (N = 250; 66.4% aged 16-19 years; 53.2% male) who lived with at least one parent/primary caregiver in the school/college setting was recruited. They filled out the Level of Expressed Emotion (LEE) Scale, the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment–Revised (IPPA-R, Parent) and the Family Education Scale–Adolescent Report (PCSA). Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alpha, Pearson's correlation and multiple linear regression were used for data analysis. Higher parent–child attachment was related to lower parent expressed emotion (parent emotional regulation) ($r(250) = -.51, p < .001$). There was no correlation between perceived parental competence and either expressed emotion ($r = .02, p = .756$) or attachment ($r = .00, p = .996$). In the regression model ($R^2 = .26, F = 42.56, p < .001$), expressed emotion significantly predicted attachment ($\beta = -.51, p < .001$), whereas parental competence did not ($\beta = .01, p = .851$). This sample, the emotional context adults set for their children (as opposed to the children's perceptions of parental competence) was the most important correlates and predictors of relationship quality. Results indicate the effectiveness of interventions targeting families and their emotion regulation and communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are a vulnerable developmental age and are experiencing increased emotional reactivity as well as redefining their identities and the relationships with family. This is when parent–child relationships are having a strong impact on the child's psychological adjustment. Adolescents who feel supported, loved, and emotionally accessible by their parents have higher self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional self-control, and lower levels of anxiety, depression, and behaviour problems (Steinberg, 2001; Boutelle et al., 2009; Morris et al., 2023). Emotional regulation of parents is defined as parents' recognition, awareness, and management of their emotions during parenting and the ability to regulate their emotions in situations of stress so that they can respond warmly and supportively to their children (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Zitzmann et al., 2024). Overall, a meta-analysis of 53

studies revealed that parents who had more positive emotion regulation also had more positive parenting styles, and that parental emotion regulation predicted children's emotion regulation and reduced internalising and externalising problems (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). On the other hand, parental emotion dysregulation is associated with harsh parenting, inconsistent parenting and coercive parenting (Lorber, 2012) and adolescent internalizing symptoms and emotion dysregulation (Cheung, 2020; Shaffer & Obradović, 2019). Parents can influence emotional development by modelling, emotion related parenting practices, and the family emotional climate (Morris et al., 2007) and the perceived parenting style is at least as predictive of emotional regulation later in life as is parent's own self-report (Van Lissa et al., 2019).

Perceived competence is the subjective assessment of one's competence in a domain, and in the parenting literature is usually measured by parenting satisfaction and parenting efficacy (Johnston & Mash, 1989; Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978). Parents who feel competent are more likely to be warm, responsive, and disciplined and less likely to experience parenting stress (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Albanese et al., 2019). On the part of the adolescent, the Family Education model proposes four components of parental competence: demandingness/control, warmth/affection, education in fortitude/resilience, and education in privacy/respect, which have been associated with adolescent well-being and positive family relationships in various cultures (Osorio et al., 2021). It is the parent–child relationship that is one of the longest-lasting interpersonal relationships and is the first to shape children's capacity to express and regulate emotions. Adolescents are simultaneously seeking independence and a need for parental support and emotional safety. Low levels of parent–adolescent attachment, defined as low levels of trust, communication and low levels of alienation, predict lower rates of internalising and externalising problems over time (Buist et al., 2004; Allen et al., 2012), and open communication and levels of trust are key components of positive parent–adolescent relationships (Keijsers et al., 2010; Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

The study is based on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988). According to Social Learning Theory, emotional reactions and coping strategies are learned from models, primarily parents, for adolescents. According to Attachment Theory, secure internal working models will result from reliable, empathic, emotionally supportive parenting while insecure and problematic relationships will result from inconsistent, distant and dysregulated parenting. Combined, they suggest that when parents regulate their emotions, they demonstrate adaptive coping strategies, and provide sensitivity that forms a foundation for secure attachment and adolescent competence beliefs. Although significant effort was put into each of the constructs, there are four gaps. First, although numerous studies are based on parent-reported data, adolescents' self-perceptions are a key factor in relational and emotional outcomes (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005). Second, there are limited investigations that focus on both parental emotion regulation and perceived competence as correlates to relationship quality in adolescence (Morris et al., 2007; Coleman & Karraker, 2003). Third, most of the evidence is from western samples, and in collectivistic contexts, family structure, parental authority and emotional expression are different (Kagitcibasi, 2007); studies are lacking in Pakistan, and are largely concentrated on parenting styles, emotion regulation in children, or family functioning (Hanif & Mahmood, 2018; Shafiq et al., 2023; Najeeb & Khanum, 2024). Fourth, research has focused on individual outcomes (anxiety, depression, and/or behaviour problems) instead of relational outcomes (parent–child bond). These hypotheses were tested:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between the parental emotional regulation and QPR.
- H2: Perceived parental competence is significantly related to parent–child relationship quality.
- H3: Parental emotional regulation is significantly related to perceived parental competence.
- H4: Parental emotional regulation and perceived parental competence predict parent–child relationship quality.

II. METHOD

The research design adopted was quantitative, cross-sectional and correlational. This data was obtained by using self-report questionnaires which were standardised to standardised score data, and which were completed at one point, perceived parental emotional regulation, perceived parental competence and parent–child relationship quality. The aims of investigating correlation and the predictive nature of parental emotional regulation and perceived competence led to the use of a correlational design. The aims of examining correlations and the

predictive power of parental emotional regulation and perceived competence led to the use of a correlational design.

Participants

The sample of 250 adolescents was recruited from educational institutes, due to the constraints of access, time and availability of the participants for the study. Inclusion criteria were: age 13-19 years; both genders; current school or college enrollment; and having at least one parent/primary caregiver living in the child's household. The exclusion criteria included: Drug/alcohol intoxication during data collection, Neurological conditions that would impact cognitive function, Diagnosed serious psychiatric condition, Refusal and/or Withdrawal of assent/consent. Demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Measures

Demographic form. Age, gender, education (matric/ Intermediate), family system (separate/joint/nuclear), father/mother occupation and socioeconomic status (upper, upper-middle, middle, lower-middle). **[I]** Level of Expressed Emotion (LEE) Scale (Cole & Kazarian, 1988). A 38-item self-report instrument of perceived family emotional attitudes rated on a 4-point scale (true to untrue). It has four subscales: Lack of Emotional Support, Intrusiveness, Criticism, and Irritability. The higher scores the more perceived expressed emotion. In this study it assessed adolescents' perceptions of emotions expressed and regulated by their parents. **[II]** Family Education Scale (FES): Osorio et al. (2021) Parental Competence Scale – Adolescent Report (PCSA). A 35-item scale designed to assess adolescents' views on the extent to which their parents carried out parenting roles (on a scale from 1 (never/not at all) to 5 (always/totally)). It has four domains: Parental Demandingness/Control; Parental Warmth/Affection; Education in Fortitude/Resilience; and Education in Privacy/Respect. **[III]** The Parent and Peer Attachment Revised (IPPA-R), parent version (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). A scale measuring attachment to parents that consisted of three subscores: Trust, Communication and Alienation, with ratings ranging from 1 (almost never/never true) to 5 (almost always/always true) on each subscale. The higher the scores the more secure the attachment.

Procedure

The institutions involved and the authors of the instruments have been given permission. Each participant was provided with an information sheet and informed consent (assent for minors) was obtained and took about 15–20 minutes. The participants volunteered to join the study, were free to withdraw at any time and without penalty, the responses were anonymous and confidential, all the data were stored securely and kept for academic purposes only and the study was designed so that no harm of any physical, psychological or social nature would be caused to the participants. Data were analysed in SPSS version 27. Data were checked for mistakes, missing data and outliers. Demographic and study variables were summarised using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Cronbach's alpha was used as an indicator of internal consistency. Pearson product–moment correlations were used to investigate relationships between the scales and subscales. Multiple linear regression was used to examine whether the LEE (parental emotional regulation) and PCSA (perceived parental competence) predicted IPPA parent–child attachment. A p value of < .05 was considered statistically significant.

III. RESULTS

Table I: Demographic characteristics of participants (N = 250)

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age (years)	12	6	2.4
	13–15	78	31.2
	16–19	166	66.4
Gender	Male	133	53.2
	Female	116	46.4
	Prefer not to say	1	0.4
Education	Matric	120	48.0
	Intermediate	130	52.0
Family system	Separate	56	22.4
	Joint	123	49.2
	Nuclear	71	28.4
Parental employment	Father working	216	86.4
	Father not working	34	13.6
	Mother working	36	14.4
	Mother not working	214	85.6
Area of residence	Urban	181	72.4
	Rural	69	27.6
Socioeconomic status	Upper class	8	3.2
	Upper-middle class	88	35.2
	Middle class	143	57.2
	Lower-middle class	11	4.4

Note. *n* = number of participants.

The sample is described in Table 1. The age group of 16-19 years old accounted for the most participants (66.4%), slightly more than half were male (53.2%) and 52.0% were at intermediate level. Nearly half had their fathers employed (49.2%) and nearly half their mothers (86.4%) had fathers employed, 72.4% were living in urban areas, 57.2% reported middle socioeconomic status.

Table II: Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of the study measures (N = 250)

Scale / subscale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α
Level of Expressed Emotion (LEE)	80.00	14.22	.81
Lack of Emotional Support	25.39	6.14	.70
Criticism	20.47	4.25	.86
Intrusiveness	9.84	2.82	.79
Irritability	5.08	1.97	.78
Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)	83.49	12.58	.74
Trust	39.05	8.39	.85
Communication	29.51	5.62	.78
Alienation	14.92	4.81	.81
Parental Competence Scale for Adolescents (PCSA)	118.59	27.65	.98
Parental Demandingness	20.28	5.01	.90
Parental Warmth	37.13	9.00	.93
Education in Fortitude	27.14	6.63	.91
Education in Privacy	34.04	7.97	.93

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency are shown for all scales and subscales in Table 2. Total scales had an acceptable to excellent level of reliability (LEE $\alpha = .81$; IPPA $\alpha = .74$; PCSA $\alpha = .98$). Subscale alphas ranged from .70 to .86 for LEE, .78 to .85 for IPPA, and .90 to .93 for PCSA.

Table III: Pearson Correlations among Level of Expressed Emotion, Parent and Peer Attachment, and Parental Competence and their Subscales (N = 250)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Lack of Emotional Support	—								
2. Criticism	.24**	—							
3. Intrusiveness	.60**	.20**	—						
4. Irritability	.63**	.08	.55**	—					
5. Trust	-.52**	.17**	-.40**	-.49**	—				
6. Communication	-.47**	-.08	-.44**	-.45**	.61**	—			
7. Alienation	.09	-.54**	.12	.15*	-.32**	.03	—		
8. Level of Expressed Emotion	.85**	.62**	.71**	.63**	-.36**	-.46**	-.16**	—	
9. Parent and Peer Attachment	-.52**	-.13*	-.42**	-.47**	.82**	.86**	.18**	-.51**	—
10. Parental Competence	.01	.04	.04	.04	.01	.01	-.02	.02	.00

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlations. Subscales for each measure were interrelated, with the subscales of the LEE generally being positively correlated (e.g., Lack of Emotional Support with Irritability, $r = .63$; with Intrusiveness, $r = .60$); the subscales of the Trust and Communication were highly correlated ($r = .61$); and the subscales of the Trust was negatively correlated with Alienation ($r = -.32$). All four subscales of the PCSA were highly intercorrelated ($r = .89$ to $.92$) and correlated .95 to .97 with the PCSA total. The LEE total score was significantly and negatively correlated with the IPPA total score, $r(250) = -.51$, $p < .001$, which was a moderate association, supporting the main hypotheses (H1 supported), such that higher scores on the LEE were associated with lower scores on the IPPA. LEE total was, again, negatively correlated with Alienation ($r = -.16$) and Communication ($r = -.46$), and, surprisingly, with Trust ($r = -.36$). The subscales were all significantly negatively correlated with IPPA total at subscale level with Lack of Emotional Support showing a strong negative correlation ($r = -.52$), Intrusiveness ($r = -.42$) and Irritability ($r = -.47$). Criticism had a smaller negative correlation ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$). Lack of Emotional Support ($r = -.40$ to $-.52$) and Intrusiveness ($r = -.44$ to $-.50$) were all negatively related to Trust and Communication. In contrast, PCSA total was unrelated to the IPPA total, $r(250) = .00$, $p = .996$ (H2 not supported), and unrelated to the LEE total, $r(250) = .02$, $p = .756$ (H3 not supported). At subscale level, there was no significant correlation between any of the four PCSA domains and any LEE or IPPA subscale scores or total (all $|r| \leq .08$).

Table IV: Multiple linear regression predicting Parent–Child Attachment from Expressed Emotion and Parental Competence

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>
(Constant)	118.78	4.88	—	24.34	< .001	[109.16, 128.39]
Expressed Emotion	-0.45	0.05	-.51	-9.23	< .001	[-0.54, -0.35]
Parental Competence	0.01	0.03	.01	0.19	.851	[-0.04, 0.05]

Note. $R = .51$, $R^2 = .26$, adjusted $R^2 = .25$, $F = 42.56$, $p < .001$. *B* = unstandardised coefficient; *SE B* = standard error; β = standardised coefficient.

A multiple linear regression was used to test the prediction of parent–child attachment by expressed emotion and parental competence (Table 4). The model was significant and explained 26% of the variance ($R = .51$, $R^2 = .26$, adjusted $R^2 = .25$, $F = 42.56$, $p < .001$). Expressed emotion was a significant negative predictor of attachment ($B = -0.45$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = -.51$, $t = -9.23$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.54, -0.35]); each unit increase in perceived expressed emotion corresponded to a 0.45-point decrease in attachment. Parental competence did not predict attachment ($B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = .01$, $t = 0.19$, $p = .851$, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.05]). It was thus partially confirmed that parental emotional regulation and not perceived parental competence predicted relationship quality.

IV.DISCUSSION

In the present study, the relationships among adolescents' perceptions of parental emotional regulation and parent-child relationship quality were explored within a Pakistani sample. The main result is that the emotional climate parents provided, rather than adolescents' judgments of parental competence, was related to and predicted relationship quality. More criticism, intrusiveness, irritability, and less emotional support were correlated with less attachment, and this accounted for a significant amount (26%) of variance in attachment. This aligns with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988), which also favors parent sensitivity and emotional responsiveness as sources of secure bonds and with the emotion-socialisation view which sees the family emotional climate as influencing children's adjustment (Morris et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 1998). It is also consistent with evidence gathered that parents who regulate their emotions are more likely to respond with warmth and support while parents who are dysregulated are more likely to respond with criticism, avoidance, or harshness (Lorber, 2012; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022; Morelen et al., 2016). Parental emotionality can be misinterpreted as rejection or criticism, decreasing trust and communication for the adolescent, since they are emotionally sensitive and in need of understanding. In Pakistani families, where authority and bonding between family members are important, it could be more noticeable. The subscale pattern provides information. The poorest negative correlations were with the factors of emotional support, intrusiveness, and irritability with regard to trust and communication, and with criticism and total attachment. The correlations between the two relations were two in contrast to the expectations; criticism correlated positively with trust ($r = .17$), and negatively with alienation ($r = -.54$), while the total LEE correlated negatively with alienation. They could be caused by the way the points were allocated or the wording of the items, as well as overlapping items, or by the cultural norms of parents in the context of criticism being interpreted as relationally positive or not, and should be discussed in future psychometric studies using Pakistani samples. The support of the model was limited to H4 with only LEE contributing independently to the model.

At both the scale and subscale level, perceived parental competence was not related to relationship quality or to parental emotional regulation, and was not predictive of attachment. This is different than the relationship between parental competence and self-efficacy with warmth responsiveness and relationship quality (Bogenschneider et al., 1997; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Albanese et al., 2019), and the extension of social-cognitive predictions (Bandura, 1997) to this relational outcome is not supported. There are a couple of possible reasons. Competent parenting (guidance, supervision, provision, discipline) may be seen as the normative role of a parent rather than the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship; parents can be competent and sometimes critical or over-involved. There has also been much prior research that relied on parent-reported competence, while the present research relied on adolescent self-ratings of competence, which would weaken associations between competence and rater differences (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005). Finally, the PCSA subscales were essentially correlated ($r = .89-.92$) indicating a high general response tendency (e.g., halo or acquiescence) that could have decreased the discriminating power of the scale.

Implications

Parent emotion regulation was identified as a significant correlate of the quality of the relationship, indicating that clinical psychologists and family therapists might include emotion-regulation training, communication skills training and psychoeducation regarding the impact of emotional expression on adolescents in family-oriented interventions. Parent workshops, hosted by schools and school counsellors, on emotional reactions and adolescent development may be available. Although perceived competence was not related to relationship quality here, parents should continue to provide guidance and support. The implications are culturally relevant evidence for policy and practice to create family-oriented programs in Pakistan.

Limitations and Future Directions

First, it is important to realize that conclusions about causal effects are not possible with the cross-sectional design; the relationship between attachment and expressed emotion could be two-way and needs to be actioned in a longitudinal or experimental design. Second, all data were self-reports by adolescents, which could reflect response bias and shared-method variance and/or social desirability, and should be complemented by parent reports and observational methods or interviews in future studies. Third, the convenience sampling from a small area has limitations for generalisability, and there were fewer than the minimum age of 13. Fourth, LEE is an index of perceived, not actual, expressed emotion; and PCSA is an index of perceived, not actual, competence. Fifth,

other correlates of relationship quality (e.g., parenting style, family functioning, emotional intelligence, mental health of parents, social support) were not included in the model, and mediation by competence was not tested. Further studies should involve participants from multiple cities and provinces, include both adolescent and parent responses, analyze intervening and moderating factors, and test the effectiveness of interventions that enhance parental emotional regulation and communication.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study tested the relationship between perceived parental EE and parent–teen attachment in a sample of 250 adolescents from Pakistan, with the result that higher EE was found to be related to lower attachment and significantly accounted for 26% of the variance in parent–teen attachment, but perceived parental competence was found to be unrelated to either EE or attachment. The findings suggest that the emotional climate of a family is a key factor in the quality of family relationships during adolescence and point to a need for family-level interventions to improve family communication and emotion regulation.

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