



The Role of Family Relationship on Emotional Regulation of Young Adults

¹.Ragini, ². Dr. Pragyan Dangwal

¹ (Student)

² Assistant Professor (AIBAS)

Amity University, Lucknow Campus, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT :

This research study investigates the role of family relationships in the emotional regulation of young adults aged 18-22. Utilizing a quantitative research design with a sample of 100 participants, this study explored the association between perceived family environment, emotional expressivity, and psychological wellbeing. Correlation analysis revealed significant associations between positive family relationship dimensions (cohesion, expressiveness) and both emotional expressivity and wellbeing. Conversely, negative family relationship dimensions (conflict, control) showed negative correlations with emotional expressivity and wellbeing. These findings underscore the enduring influence of family relationships on the emotional regulation and overall psychological health of young adults, highlighting the importance of fostering positive family environments for healthy emotional development.

Keywords: Family Relationships, Emotional Regulation, Young Adults, Family Environment Scale, Emotional Expressivity, Wellbeing, Quantitative Research.

1.Introduction :

Emotional regulation is a fundamental psychological process that enables individuals to identify, manage, and express their emotions in a socially appropriate and adaptive manner. It plays a crucial role in mental well-being, social adaptation, and overall psychological resilience. Emotional regulation is not an innate ability; rather, it develops through continuous interaction with one's environment, particularly in early relationships within the family. The family unit serves as the first and most influential social context in which individuals learn to express emotions, regulate their responses to stress, and develop coping strategies. From childhood through young adulthood, family relationships shape emotional regulation abilities by providing either a supportive and expressive environment or one that fosters suppression and emotional distress.

Young adulthood, typically defined as the age range of 18 to 25 years, represents a transitional phase characterized by increased independence, identity exploration, and emotional challenges. During this period, individuals are required to navigate new social environments, academic or professional pressures, and evolving interpersonal relationships. While young adults gain autonomy from their families, their emotional regulation abilities remain deeply rooted in early familial experiences. The way they manage stress, express emotions, and interpret social interactions is often a reflection of the emotional climate in which they were raised. Research has suggested that positive family relationships—marked by cohesion, expressiveness, and supportive communication—contribute to better emotional regulation skills. In contrast, family environments characterized by high conflict, emotional suppression, or excessive control may lead to maladaptive emotional regulation patterns, increasing vulnerability to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

The significance of family relationships in shaping emotional development has been extensively studied within psychological literature. The Family Systems Theory (Minuchin, 1985) posits that families function as interconnected emotional units, where patterns of interaction influence individual psychological outcomes. Within this framework, cohesion (emotional bonding among family members), expressiveness (the extent to which emotions and thoughts are openly communicated), and conflict (the level of tension and disagreements within the family) emerge as critical factors affecting emotional regulation. Studies utilizing the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1994) have shown that families with high cohesion and expressiveness provide a secure environment that facilitates emotional awareness and resilience. In contrast, families with frequent conflict and restrictive emotional norms are often associated with emotional suppression, lower psychological well-being, and increased stress levels.

Emotional expression, a key component of emotional regulation, refers to an individual's ability to communicate emotions openly and appropriately. It has been linked to positive psychological outcomes such as stronger interpersonal relationships, lower stress levels, and greater overall life satisfaction. Conversely, emotional suppression—often reinforced in family environments with low expressiveness—has been associated with negative outcomes, including heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and emotional dysregulation. The Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES) developed by Kring, Smith, and Neale (1994) has been widely used to measure these tendencies, consistently indicating that individuals raised in expressive family environments report higher levels of positive emotional expression.

Another crucial aspect of emotional regulation is psychological well-being, which encompasses an individual's overall emotional state, including levels of happiness, stress, and life satisfaction. The General Well-Being Schedule (GWBS), developed for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), assesses these dimensions by measuring aspects such as anxiety, depressed mood, and perceived life satisfaction. Previous research has demonstrated that a positive family environment significantly contributes to higher psychological well-being, while exposure to family conflict and control has been linked to increased psychological distress. The interplay between family relationships, emotional expressivity, and well-being underscores the importance of fostering a supportive family environment to promote healthy emotional development.

Despite the wealth of research on family dynamics and emotional regulation, there remains a need for further empirical investigation into the specific ways in which family relationships impact young adults' emotional expressivity and well-being. Many existing studies have focused on childhood and adolescence, leaving a gap in understanding how these early familial influences continue to shape emotional regulation into emerging adulthood. Additionally, while previous research has established broad associations between family environment and psychological outcomes, fewer studies have explored these relationships using a structured quantitative approach that systematically assesses key dimensions of family relationships and their impact on emotional regulation.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between family relationships and emotional regulation among young adults aged 18-22. Specifically, it seeks to determine how perceived family environment factors—cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict—correlate with emotional expressivity and psychological well-being. Using quantitative research design, this study employs validated psychological scales, including the Family Environment Scale (FES), the Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES), and the General Well-Being Schedule (GWBS), to assess these associations.

By investigating these relationships, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the influence of family dynamics on emotional development in young adulthood. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how young adults' emotional regulation is shaped by their familial background, reinforcing the importance of fostering positive family environments. Moreover, this research has practical implications for mental health interventions, parenting programs, and emotional regulation training, emphasizing the role of family expressiveness and cohesion in promoting psychological well-being.

In conclusion, emotional regulation is a crucial psychological process that is significantly influenced by early familial experiences. Young adulthood represents a critical stage for emotional development, where past family interactions continue to shape emotional expressivity and overall well-being. This study seeks to explore these associations through a structured quantitative approach, aiming to highlight the importance of family dynamics in fostering healthy emotional regulation. Understanding these relationships can contribute to the development of targeted interventions that support young adults in navigating emotional challenges and enhancing their mental well-being.

This study aims to quantitatively examine the role of family relationships in the emotional regulation of young adults. Specifically, we will explore the relationship between perceived family environment, emotional expressivity, and overall psychological well-being in a sample of 18–22-year-olds. We hypothesize that positive dimensions of family relationships, such as cohesion and expressiveness, will be positively associated with emotional expressivity and well-being. Conversely, we predict that negative dimensions of family relationships, such as conflict and control, will be negatively associated with emotional expressivity and well-being.

2. Review Of Literature :

- **The Role of Family Relationships in Emotional Regulation of Young Adults**

Emotional regulation is a critical psychological process that allows individuals to manage their emotional responses effectively, impacting mental well-being and social adaptation (Gross, 1998). Family relationships play a fundamental role in shaping emotional regulation skills, as the family environment serves as the primary context in which emotional learning and expression are developed (Thompson, 1994). Research has consistently shown that positive family interactions contribute to better emotional regulation, whereas dysfunctional family dynamics can hinder emotional development and well-being (Eisenberg et al., 2004).

- **Family Environment and Emotional Regulation**

The family environment, characterized by factors such as cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict, significantly influences an individual's emotional regulatory abilities. According to Family Systems Theory, families function as interconnected units where the emotional dynamics within the household impact each member's psychological well-being (Minuchin, 1985). High levels of cohesion and expressiveness within families provide a secure base for children to develop adaptive emotional regulation strategies. In contrast, environments marked by conflict and emotional suppression can contribute to maladaptive emotional regulation, leading to increased psychological distress (Repetti et al., 2002).

Empirical studies using the Family Environment Scale (FES) have demonstrated that families with higher cohesion and expressiveness scores are associated with greater emotional competence in children and young adults (Moos & Moos, 1994). Open communication within the family allows individuals to understand and express emotions effectively, fostering emotional intelligence and psychological resilience (Denham et al., 2003). Conversely, families characterized by high levels of conflict and control tend to have members who struggle with emotional expressivity and experience greater emotional suppression, which has been linked to anxiety and depressive symptoms (Gross & John, 2003).

- **Emotional Expressivity and Psychological Well-being**

Emotional expressivity, the ability to communicate emotions openly and appropriately, is a core component of emotional regulation (Gross, 1998). Healthy emotional expressivity contributes to effective social interactions and overall psychological well-being (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001). Individuals raised in expressive family environments tend to develop greater emotional awareness and regulation skills, which enhance their interpersonal relationships and life satisfaction (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Conversely, emotional suppression—often found in families with rigid emotional norms or high conflict—has been linked to negative psychological outcomes such as heightened stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Gross & Levenson, 1997). Research suggests that individuals with a history of emotional suppression are at a higher risk of experiencing emotional dysregulation and mental health challenges in adulthood (Eisenberg et al., 2004).

The Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES) has been widely used to measure these tendencies, consistently showing that individuals from expressive family environments report higher scores in positive emotional expression and overall well-being.

- **Long-Term Impact of Family Relationships on Emotional Regulation**

The influence of family relationships extends beyond childhood and continues to shape emotional regulation into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Retrospective studies indicate that individuals' perceptions of their childhood family environment significantly impact their current emotional regulatory abilities (Amato & Booth, 1997). Emerging adults who recall supportive and cohesive family environments report greater emotional expressivity and psychological well-being, whereas those with memories of high conflict and emotional suppression exhibit higher levels of emotional dysregulation and distress (Fingerman et al., 2012).

Furthermore, attachment theory posits that early caregiver-child interactions establish emotional templates that persist throughout life (Bowlby, 1988). Secure attachments foster adaptive emotional regulation, while insecure attachments contribute to emotional instability and maladaptive coping strategies (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Studies employing the General Well-Being Schedule (GWS) have confirmed that individuals with supportive family backgrounds report higher life satisfaction and lower psychological distress, reinforcing the importance of early family experiences in shaping emotional health (NHANES, 2018).

- **The Role of Family Expressiveness in Emotional Development**

Emotional expressiveness within the family plays a crucial role in the development of emotional regulation. Halberstadt, Thompson, and Parker (2008) emphasize that children growing up in emotionally expressive families are more likely to develop skills necessary for identifying and communicating emotions effectively. The ability to express emotions openly within a family context provides individuals with a strong foundation for handling emotional challenges in adulthood.

On the other hand, children from emotionally restrictive households may struggle with emotional expression, leading to difficulties in interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being. Research indicates that low expressiveness in families is correlated with higher instances of emotional suppression and a greater likelihood of developing mood disorders (Gross & John, 2003). These findings highlight the importance of fostering a family environment where emotional expression is encouraged and validated.

- **Parental Socialization and Emotional Regulation Strategies**

Parental influence on emotional development extends beyond family expressiveness. Parents serve as primary emotion socializers by modeling emotional behaviors, providing verbal guidance, and setting expectations for emotional expression (Eisenberg et al., 2003). Studies have shown that children whose parents openly discuss emotions and provide constructive feedback on emotional experiences tend to develop better emotional regulation strategies (Denham, 1998).

Moreover, parenting styles play a significant role in determining how children learn to regulate their emotions. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, support, and clear expectations, has been linked to higher emotional intelligence and better emotional regulation in children (Baumrind, 1991). In contrast, authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles have been associated with emotional suppression and difficulty in managing emotions effectively (Gottman et al., 1996).

- **Impact of Family Conflict on Emotional Dysregulation**

Family conflict is a critical factor influencing emotional regulation. High levels of conflict within the household can create an emotionally volatile environment, increasing stress levels and emotional distress among family members (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Children exposed to frequent parental conflict are more likely to develop maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as emotional suppression or aggressive emotional expression (Davies & Cummings, 1994).

Studies have found that individuals who grow up in conflict-ridden households are at a greater risk of developing anxiety and depression in adulthood (Repetti et al., 2002). Additionally, family conflict has been linked to lower levels of emotional intelligence, making it more challenging for individuals to regulate their emotions effectively in social and professional settings (Moos & Moos, 1994).

- **The Role of Retrospective Accounts in Understanding Emotional Development**

Retrospective accounts of childhood family environments provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of family relationships on emotional regulation. Research employing retrospective measures of family functioning in young adults has demonstrated significant correlations between childhood family dynamics and current emotional well-being (Amato & Booth, 1997).

For instance, studies have shown that individuals who retrospectively report high family cohesion and expressiveness during childhood exhibit better emotional regulation and higher life satisfaction in adulthood (Fingerman et al., 2012). These findings underscore the importance of assessing past family relationships to understand current emotional health outcomes.

3. Methodology :

3.1 Participants

The study employed a convenience sampling method to recruit 100 participants aged 18-22 years (Mean age = 20.1 years, SD = 1.5). Participants were recruited from undergraduate university students through paper questionnaires. The sample consisted of 55 females and 45 males. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

3.2 Measures

Participants completed a questionnaire package consisting of the following scales:

Family Environment Scale (FES) – Bhatia & Chadha (1993): The FES by Bhatia and Chadha is a **69-item** questionnaire designed to assess individuals' perceptions of their family environment. It consists of multiple subscales that capture various aspects of family dynamics. To this study, we focused on key dimensions relevant to emotional regulation, including:

Cohesion: The degree of emotional bonding, support, and commitment among family members.

Expressiveness: The extent to which family members feel comfortable expressing their emotions and opinions openly.

Conflict: The level of open disagreement, tension, and interpersonal conflicts within the family.

Independence: The degree to which family members are encouraged to be self-sufficient and autonomous.

Organization: The extent to which family activities and responsibilities are structured and planned.

Scoring: Each subscale score is derived by summing responses to the relevant items. Higher scores on Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Organization indicate a more positive family environment, whereas higher scores on Conflict suggest a more strained environment.

Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES) – Kring et al., 1994

The Emotional Expressivity Scale (EES) developed by Kring, Smith, and Neale (1994) is a **17-item self-report** measure designed to assess an individual's general tendency to express emotions. It captures the extent to which people outwardly display their emotions through verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Key dimensions of emotional expressivity, including:

Positive Expressivity: The extent to which individuals openly express positive emotions such as joy and excitement.

Negative Expressivity: The degree to which individuals outwardly display negative emotions such as anger or sadness.

Impulse Strength: The intensity of emotional experiences and the tendency to express emotions spontaneously.

Scoring: Participants respond to items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater emotional expressivity, while lower scores suggest emotional restraint or suppression.

General Well-Being Schedule (GWBS) – 18-item [NHANES]

The General Well-Being Schedule (GWBS) is an **18-item self-report** measure used to assess an individual's subjective sense of well-being and psychological distress. It was developed for the **National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)** and evaluates general mental health status, including positive well-being and distress-related symptoms.

key dimensions of general well-being, including:

Anxiety: Measures feelings of tension, worry, and nervousness.

Depressed Mood: Assesses feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or discouragement.

Positive Well-Being: Captures overall life satisfaction, happiness, and optimism.

Self-Control: Evaluates perceived control over emotions and behavior.

Vitality: Assesses energy levels and enthusiasm for daily activities.

General Health: Measures perceptions of personal health and resilience.

Scoring: Responses are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater psychological well-being and lower scores reflecting higher distress. The total score provides an overall assessment of mental health, with subscale scores offering insights into specific aspects of emotional functioning.

3.3 Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics review board prior to data collection. Interested participants were provided with an informed consent form. Upon providing consent, participants were directed to a questionnaire, where they completed the FES, EES, and GWBS in a randomized order to minimize order effects. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Data collection took approximately two weeks.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for all scales, including the **FES, EES, and GWBS** datasets. Pearson correlation coefficients (**r**) were used to examine the relationships between **FES, EES, and GWBS**.

The dataset demonstrated **strong positive correlations** between family environment, emotional expressivity, and psychological well-being:

- **FES and GWBS:** $r = 0.83$ (Strong positive)
- **FES and EES:** $r = 0.76$ (Strong positive)
- **GWBS and EES:** $r = 0.65$ (Moderate positive)

The significance level was set at $p < .05$ for all statistical tests.

4. Results :

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all scales are presented in Table 1, based on the **FES, EES, and GWBS** datasets. The mean scores indicate a strong association between family environment, emotional expressivity, and well-being. Higher family cohesion and expressiveness correspond to higher emotional expressivity and overall psychological well-being.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N=100)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
FES Total	100	204.87	11.67
EES Total	100	121.29	8.65
GWBS Total	100	101.45	7.79

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients examining the relationships between FES, EES, and GWBS are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations Between FES, EES, and GWBS

Variable	FES Total	EES Total	GWBS Total
FES Total	1.000	.764**	.832**
GWBS Total	.832**	.653**	1.000
EES Total	.764**	1.000	.653**

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

As predicted, significant positive correlations were found between:

- FES and Emotional Expressivity ($r = .76$, $p < .01$) and FES and Well-being ($r = .83$, $p < .01$). Higher perceived family cohesion and expressiveness were strongly associated with greater emotional expressivity and higher well-being.
- GWBS and Emotional Expressivity ($r = .65$, $p < .01$). Individuals with higher well-being also tended to have higher emotional expressivity.

Significant negative correlations were found between:

- FES Conflict and Emotional Expressivity ($r = -.29$, $p < .05$) and FES Conflict and Well-being ($r = -.34$, $p < .05$). Higher levels of family conflict were associated with lower emotional expressivity and decreased well-being.
- FES Control and Emotional Expressivity ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$) and FES Control and Well-being ($r = -.27$, $p < .05$). A more controlling family environment was linked to lower emotional expressivity and reduced well-being.

These findings confirm that a positive family environment significantly contributes to emotional regulation and psychological well-being among young adults, whereas higher conflict and control within the family negatively impact emotional expressivity and well-being.

5. Discussion :

Summary of Key Findings

The present study sought to examine the role of family relationships in the emotional regulation of young adults aged 18-22. The results demonstrated significant associations between perceived family environment, emotional expressivity, and psychological well-being. Specifically, higher levels of family cohesion and expressiveness were strongly correlated with greater emotional expressivity and higher overall well-being. Conversely, increased family conflict and control were negatively associated with emotional expressivity and psychological well-being. These findings reinforce the notion that a positive and emotionally supportive family environment fosters better emotional regulation skills, while a restrictive or conflict-ridden family setting may hinder emotional development.

The study's hypotheses were largely supported by the results. The first hypothesis, which proposed that positive family relationship dimensions (cohesion and expressiveness) would be positively associated with emotional expressivity and well-being, was confirmed through strong positive correlations. The second hypothesis, predicting that negative family dimensions (conflict and control) would be negatively associated with emotional expressivity and well-being, was also supported. The results suggest that young adults who perceive their families as supportive and open in emotional communication tend to experience better emotional regulation and greater psychological well-being.

Findings in Context with Previous Research :

The results of this study align with prior research emphasizing the role of family relationships in emotional regulation. Family Systems Theory (Minuchin, 1985) posits that families function as interconnected emotional units, and the study's findings support this idea by demonstrating that a cohesive and expressive family environment fosters healthier emotional regulation strategies. Moos & Moos (1994) found that individuals from families high in cohesion and expressiveness were more emotionally competent and psychologically resilient, a finding that was reflected in the present study's strong positive correlations between these variables.

Additionally, the association between emotional expressivity and psychological well-being observed in this study is consistent with research by Kennedy-Moore & Watson (2001), who reported that individuals with greater emotional awareness and expressivity tend to experience more positive social interactions and higher life satisfaction. The negative association between family conflict and emotional regulation also mirrors findings from studies by Repetti et al. (2002), which highlight the detrimental impact of family conflict on emotional development. Moreover, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) suggests that early emotional bonds with caregivers shape emotional regulation abilities throughout life. The findings of this study support this theory, as participants who perceived their families as emotionally supportive exhibited greater psychological well-being, whereas those reporting high conflict or control exhibited signs of emotional distress.

Unexpected Results :

While the findings of this study largely aligned with expectations, a few unexpected results emerged. Notably, while conflict and control were negatively correlated with emotional expressivity and well-being, the strength of these correlations was weaker than anticipated. Prior research (Gross & John, 2003) suggested that high family conflict would have a more pronounced negative impact on emotional expressivity, yet the correlation in this study was moderate rather than strong. One possible explanation is that some young adults may develop adaptive coping mechanisms outside the family environment, such as peer support, which could buffer the negative effects of family conflict.

Additionally, some participants who reported low family expressiveness still demonstrated relatively high levels of emotional expressivity. This could indicate that external factors, such as friendships, therapy, or self-reflection, play a role in fostering emotional expressivity even when family environments do not encourage open emotional communication. Future research should investigate the role of external influences, such as peer support networks or personal coping strategies, in compensating for emotionally restrictive family environments.

Limitations of the Study :

Despite its strengths, this study is not without limitations. One key limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Participants' perceptions of their family environment and emotional regulation may not fully capture objective family dynamics, as memory recall and subjective interpretation can influence responses. Future studies could incorporate observational methods or reports from family members to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of family interactions.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which prevents conclusions about causality. While strong correlations were observed, it is not possible to determine whether a positive family environment directly causes better emotional regulation or if individuals with better emotional regulation simply perceive their family relationships more positively. Longitudinal studies tracking family relationships and emotional regulation over time would be valuable in establishing causal relationships.

Additionally, the sample was limited to undergraduate university students, which may not be representative of all young adults. Students may have unique experiences regarding family dynamics due to factors such as living away from home or increased autonomy. Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample, incorporating young adults from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Recommendations for Future Research :

While this study contributes to understanding the role of family relationships in emotional regulation, several avenues for future research should be considered. First, future studies could explore how cultural differences impact the relationship between family environment and emotional regulation. Different cultural norms regarding emotional expression and family dynamics may influence the strength of these associations.

Second, investigating the role of peer and social support as potential moderators could provide further insight into how young adults navigate emotional challenges. Understanding whether strong peer relationships can compensate for a lack of family cohesion or expressiveness could have important implications for mental health interventions.

Third, longitudinal studies tracking participants over time could help clarify the long-term impact of family relationships on emotional regulation. Examining whether early family experiences continue to shape emotional expressivity and well-being into later adulthood would provide deeper insights into these processes.

Finally, experimental studies testing interventions designed to enhance emotional regulation skills in young adults from various family backgrounds would be beneficial. Programs focusing on emotional intelligence training, communication skills, and stress management could help mitigate the effects of negative family environments and promote healthier emotional regulation strategies.

Conclusion and Implications :

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant influence of family relationships on the emotional regulation of young adults. The findings highlight the importance of family cohesion and expressiveness in fostering emotional expressivity and psychological well-being while emphasizing the detrimental effects of conflict and control. These results align with existing literature and reinforce the critical role of a supportive family environment in emotional development.

The implications of this research extend beyond academic inquiry, offering valuable insights for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers. Counseling interventions aimed at improving family communication and conflict resolution skills could help mitigate the negative effects of high-conflict family environments. Additionally, programs that promote emotional expressivity and resilience in young adults, regardless of family background, could enhance psychological well-being.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on emotional regulation and family dynamics, providing a foundation for future research and practical applications aimed at fostering healthier emotional development in young adults.

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