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Family Emotional Climate and Emotion Regulation in Relation to Mental Health of Emerging Adults

Benjamin J. Houltberg, Ph.D.
Jacqueline B. McCoy
California State University Northridge
Scott W. Plunkett, Ph.D.
University of Fort Wayne
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne

Introduction

- Emotion regulation is the process through which one maintains and modulates the expression, occurrence and intensity of emotions.
- Emotion reactivity is the tendency to react to stressors with high degrees of emotional liability, including anger, irritability, and frustration.
- The family system’s perspective posits families consist of multiple subsystems, each of which affects and is affected by the processes of other subsystems within the family.
- However, there has been little investigation of the underlying mechanisms by which the family emotional climate is related to individual mental health outcomes in emerging adults.

The Current Study

- The current study examined the role of emotion regulation processes (e.g. regulation, reactivity) in explaining the link between the family emotional climate (e.g. interpersonal conflict styles) and mental health indicators in an emerging adult sample.

Methods

Participants
- N= 755 emerging adults (73.2% female), Mean age = 20.31
- 46% Hispanic/Latino, 18% Asian, 13% Caucasian 33% other minority groups
- 64.4 % of families were married, 12.6 % divorced, 9.1 % never married

Measures
Young adults reported on:
- Overt and covert parental conflict that was combined for an overall parental conflict score (11 items).
- “How often do your parents insult you? (do you respect for each other)?”
- Interpersonal conflict resolution (5-items) included items such as:
  - “How often do disagreements between your parents end in a positive manner?”
- Anger regulation (5 items) and reactivity (3 items) was measured using Zeman’s coping scales.
  - “When I am feeling mad, I control my temper” or “I do things like slam doors when I am mad.”
- Mental health outcomes of the participants were measured using CES-D scale for depressive symptoms and GAD-7 scale for anxiety symptoms.

Results

Table 1. Correlations between interpersonal conflict, anger regulation processes and mental health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overt Parental Conflict</th>
<th>Covert Parental Conflict</th>
<th>Parental Conflict Resolution</th>
<th>Anger Regulation</th>
<th>Disregulation Expression</th>
<th>Anxiety Symptoms</th>
<th>Depressive Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overt Parental Conflict</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covert Parental Conflict</td>
<td>.702***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>- .590**</td>
<td>- .599**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger Regulation</td>
<td>-.075*</td>
<td>-.095*</td>
<td>-.201*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger Deregulation</td>
<td>.210*</td>
<td>.215*</td>
<td>-.184*</td>
<td>-.337*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Symptoms</td>
<td>.262*</td>
<td>.274*</td>
<td>-.327*</td>
<td>-.180*</td>
<td>.254*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressive Symptoms</td>
<td>.290*</td>
<td>.329*</td>
<td>-.321*</td>
<td>-.148*</td>
<td>.258*</td>
<td>.702*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conclusions

- Interactions in the spousal subsystem may continue to impact mental health indicators in young adulthood.
- Positive interactions around conflict in the spousal subsystem may positively relate to their children’s ability to manage anger in appropriate ways which in turn is related to less anxiety symptoms.
- More negative ways of handling conflict in the spousal subsystem may lend to more anger reactivity which can leave the children vulnerable to more depression and anxiety.
- Intervention and prevention efforts aimed at mental health in young adults in a college setting may benefit from focusing on the family emotional client and individual emotion regulation.

Figure 1. Family System Qualities, Parenting Behaviors, Exposure to Violence and pro-social behavior:

- Parental conflict was positively related to both depression and anxiety symptoms and parental conflict resolution was negatively related to depression.
- Parental conflict was also related to depression and anxiety through a positive relationship with anger reactivity.
- Parental conflict resolution was positively related to anger regulation which in turn was negatively related to anxiety.

Table 2 Bootstrapping Technique of Magnitude and Significance

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<tr>
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<th>Young Adult Depression</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental conflict via anger reactivity</td>
<td>-0.01*[-0.02, -0.007]</td>
<td>-0.05***[-0.06, -0.04]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental conflict via anger regulation</td>
<td>-0.01*[-0.01, -0.006]</td>
<td>-0.02[-0.03, -0.008]</td>
</tr>
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Indirect paths tested with 2,000 bootstraps. Two-tailed. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. CI = confidence intervals, β and CI’s are standardized

- The confidence intervals for both indirect effects did not contain zero which indicates that these relationships were significant.

Analyses

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