

Chapter # 13

PSYCHOSOCIAL SKILLS, EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND RESILIENCE RELATED TO ATTACHMENT IN YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a stage of development of psycho-social skills through training and education. The goal of our research is on the bases of scientific theory and empirical research assemble psychoeducational methodology for development of emotional regulation and resilience of students and adolescents. The sample consisted of 367 adolescents. The respondents completed questionnaires The Child and Youth Resilience Measure, modified version of Situational Test of Emotional Understanding and a questionnaire of trait emotional intelligence. To obtain the results, we used a battery of questionnaires, which consisted also of IPPA-R questionnaire designed to measure the quality of the attachment to the mother, father and peers. The results have shown that adolescents in middle adolescence have lower rates of emotional regulation and resilience. We found out that the quality of the attachment influences the effectiveness of emotional regulation of adolescents. Our results also show that adolescents usually form a secure attachment in their relationships. We also found out that they form the least quality with their fathers and the most quality relationship with their peers.

Keywords: psycho - social skills, emotional regulation, attachment, relationships, resilience.

1. INTRODUCTION

A new trend in the investigation of emotional intelligence is also one of the elements of emotional intelligence, namely emotional regulation.

Emotion regulation became the subject of research in the 1980s, initially being incorporated into research dealing with emotions and their development (Thompson, 1994; Cox, 1994; Gross, 1999). According to Gross (1999), we can define emotional regulation as a set of processes enabling individuals to modify the expression and experience of unpleasant and positive emotions. Emotion regulation affects whatever emotions we have when we have them, how emotions are experienced by individuals (Gross, 1999). Thompson (1994) divides emotional regulation based on its regulatory sources into two types: self-regulation and social regulation (parents, friends). The most frequently defined elements of emotional intelligence models written by authors and researchers in their models are empathy, interpersonal relationships, evaluation and expression of emotions, self-awareness, motivation and communication.

Resilience - psychological resistance is classified as a modern term. Resilience first appeared in the 1980s. to the 1990s (Šolcová, 2009). Křivohlavý (2009) and Šolcová (2009) point to the connection between resilience and social support based on E. Werner's research from 1954. Resilience represents a dynamic process, the ability to become visible later in life after overcoming a problem or an adverse life situation (Newman & Blackburn, 2002). The authors describe the ways in which a child manages a negative life situation as: coping

focused on emotions (Coleman & Hendry, 1999), coping focused on a problem (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). Masten and Obradović (2006) defines resilience as the ability to withstand an adverse life situation or gain resilience when overcoming a negative life situation (trauma, death) and continue to develop effectively. He characterizes psychological resilience as a person's ability to successfully adapt despite negative and dangerous conditions in 3 forms (Masten & Obradović, 2006): at-risk children achieve satisfactory development, children manage stressful situations, and children are able to recover from psychological trauma. Despite all these definitions, as stated by McLean and Breen (2009), there is no unified and recognized definition of resilience.

We can define communication competences as abilities that allow us to communicate in interpersonal relationships (Hall & Lindzey, 1997). Liptáková et al. (2011) defines communication competences as human abilities enabling communication based on acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, which are related to compliance with norms, principles, rules and tools of verbal interaction. According to Hall and Lindzey (1997), the basis for communication skills are innate personality traits, intelligence and emotional intelligence, proven ways of communication that are culturally conditioned from the point of view of the environment in which a person developed and currently develops.

According to a transdisciplinary American commission composed of elite scientists and practitioners (C.C.R., 2023), the alarming increase in the number of children and adolescents at risk of risky behaviour, depression, violence, various forms of addictive behaviour, as well as disinterest in education and culture, is linked to fundamental deficiencies in the educational and, in particular, relational environment. Both psychology and current neuroscientific findings confirm that there is a typical, ontogenetic and innate tendency for humans to associate specifically with close and trusted people, to seek mutual unity and understanding with other people, and to search for meaning and significance in their existence. According to neuroscientists, these innate tendencies are exerted by the interaction of stimuli from the environment and from within the organism (Vancu et al., 2024).

The basis of the functioning of the nervous system is integration, i.e. the way in which, based on the interaction of these stimuli, the individual components of the nervous system organise themselves into a functional whole, which is crucial for psychological balance and the functioning of the individual in the environment and in social relationships (Siegel, 2012).

The self-organising capacity of the developing brain operates under the conditions of a special relationship with close people, and depending on its quality, either psychological resilience or vulnerability is established (Schore, 2003). According to affective neuroscience (Damasio, 1998), emotions are dynamic integrative processes that originate in the socially conditioned evaluative processes of the brain. Another important finding is that the propensity of adolescents to take risks and seek out new and exciting stimuli and experiences is linked to physiological changes in the brain, which continues to develop and significantly reshape itself (Vancu et al., 2024).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The Adolescence Period

During adolescence, adolescents seek to detach themselves from their primary relational figures and achieve emotional and behavioural autonomy (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). This autonomy is not understood in terms of complete separation from relational figures, but is directed towards the adolescent's individuation. During this period, relational attachment functions are transferred from parents to peers and later to romantic partners

(Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Although detachment from the family is characteristic of this period, the established relational attachment to the family persists (Říčan, 2013).

Emotional regulation plays an important role in the emotional experiences of adolescents (Opitz, Gross, & Urry, 2012). During these stages, individuals acquire a broad repertoire of emotion regulation strategies, including adaptive strategies such as problem solving and cognitive reappraisal. As development progresses through these stages, acquired strategies can be used more flexibly and adapted to situational demands (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Gabrieli et al., 2014). During adolescence, the ability to adapt regulatory strategies to a specific situation increases (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). However, it is important to note that this development may not be linear, and the situations faced by individuals during adolescence may vary in terms of the degree of emotion regulation required (Howells, 2018).

2.2. Emotion Regulation

Emotional regulation is a part of emotional competence, thanks to which we know how to react to experienced emotions, what their significance is in our environment and how to evaluate them in order to be able to express them (Poláčková Šolcová, 2018). Emotional regulation changes the dynamics of emotions rather than their quality (Gross, 2014). Knowing how to regulate one's emotions is considered a critical skill for optimal functioning as an individual. It enables individuals to respond appropriately in social interactions, which facilitates their ability to cope with new, changing situations and stimuli (Gross & Thompson, 2007).

The ability to regulate emotions in early childhood is considered an important skill that plays a significant role in both the social and psychological functioning of individuals (Compas et al., 2017). Studies have shown that children who were able to show and regulate their emotions appropriately in a given situation had fewer internalising and externalising problems. Internalising problems include anxiety, depression or other somatic disorders. Externalising problems include problems with attention, behaviour or hyperactivity (Lougheed & Hollenstein, 2012).

Through emotion regulation, we influence the intensity, duration, and experience of experienced emotions (Gross & Thompson, 2007), depending on current implicit or explicit goals. Explicit implies conscious, effortful and controlled regulation, whereas implicit is unconscious and effortless. The ability to use any form of emotion regulation appropriately can be considered a sign of mental health (Gross, 2014).

In a study by Gust, von Fintel and Petermann (2017), a repertoire of 31-emotion regulation was found to be positively associated with children's empathy and prosocial behaviour. In their study, Lougheed and Hollenstein (2012) found that a limited repertoire of emotion regulation strategies was associated with internalising problems.

2.3. Types of Relational Attachment

The parent-child relationship is one of the first relationships a child forms and has a significant impact on their social and emotional development (Brumariu, 2015). Children who form secure relational bonds with their parents or primary relationship figures have fewer internalising and externalising problems (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010), are more sociable and form higher quality friendships (Pallini et al., 2014).

Psychoanalysts and social learning theorists have suggested that the mother-child relationship is based on the child's pleasure in having their physiological needs met.

However, Bowlby disagreed with this view and sought to demonstrate that the desire to form a relationship with a primary caregiver has a biological basis (Bowlby, 2010).

Relational attachment theory is based on the child's biologically encoded need to attach to the primary caregiver, usually the mother, and later to other caregivers (Bowlby, 2010; Bretherton, 1992). Based on the findings, relational attachment, according to Bowlby (2010), is an emotional bond characterised by a strong need to seek and maintain closeness with one's relational person, especially in situations of stress or strain. According to relational attachment theory, internal working models are developed in response to the quality of repeated interactions between the primary caregiver and the child, which are related to the formation of relational attachment and influence the child's expectations and beliefs about self and others (Bowlby, 2010). Brisch (2011b) states that internal working models can be partly conscious and partly unconscious. Separate working models are created for each person in the relationship. These models make the behaviour of the relational person and the child in relational situations predictable.

Each person develops a type of relational attachment based on the experiences they have in forming a relational attachment to a primary relational person (Brenning et al., 2012). A study by Vuilleumier (2012) addressed this issue and suggested that, in most cases, relational attachment types manifest as individual differences in responses in a neural network that otherwise generally supports emotion, emotion regulation, and social cognition (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016).

The emergence of relational attachment and the development of children's trust in parental support and protection when needed (Bowlby, 1982) is considered one of the most important areas of child development (Dixon, 2015). Children with secure attachment perceive their primary caregiver as a safe base and refuge in times of need (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010). When separated from the primary caregiver, the child expresses dissatisfaction through crying, calling, and searching for the primary caregiver (Ainsworth, 1985).

The formation of a secure attachment depends on the parent's response to the child's cues. An insecure relational bond is characterised by a child who does not seek out his or her primary relational figure during separation, exploration of the environment, or when experiencing difficulties in the moment (Chambers, 2017). Children with this relational attachment are characterised by inappropriate stress and anxiety when separated from their mother or in a stressful situation, which they express by crying loudly (Brisch, 2011a). Anxious attachment also has an impact on emotion regulation at the cognitive-neural level. Attachment anxiety is negatively correlated with gray matter volumes in functional areas that have the capacity to regulate negative emotions (Troyer & Greitemeyer, 2018).

In their study, Cyr et al (2010) argue that the accumulation of socio-economic risks leads to the emergence of disorganised attachment by creating a frightening and desperate situation for the attachment figure who could otherwise provide adequate care.

The relational bond can be affected at any time by both favourable and unfavourable influences. It is a continuum that can be altered by emotional experiences (Brisch, 2011b). An increase in negative or positive experiences over time can lead to changes in the relational bond. The relational bond serves as a regulatory system, and how individuals experience emotions drives contact with relational individuals (Parrigon et al., 2015). Relational attachment and emotion regulation are inextricably linked. Children who have formed secure relational attachments have a greater ability to manage and regulate their emotions compared to children with insecure relational attachments (Fearon et al., 2010).

3. OBJECTIVES, DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1. Focus and Description of the Project

The goal of the thesis is to compile and apply in selected classes a psychoeducational integrative methodology based on scientific theory and empirical research to improve interpersonal communication competences, develop emotional intelligence and resilience of teenage students and adolescents. The partial goals of the work are to determine the level of resilience and emotional intelligence related to attachment in adolescents.

Emotional regulation, a key component of emotional intelligence, has emerged as a critical factor in adolescent development. This capacity interacts closely with psychological resilience and attachment patterns, forming a triad of skills essential for healthy psychosocial development. Our research examines how these three elements are interdependent and have a relationship. These three domains, adolescent development, emotional regulation, and attachment, form an interconnected system. During adolescence, attachment patterns influence the development of emotional regulation strategies, affecting psychological resilience. This theoretical framework guides our investigation of how these elements interact to influence adolescent psychological development.

3.2. Design and Methods

The first questionnaire is based on an international project that examines resilience led by M. Ungar (2005). The questionnaire consists of 36 items based on 4 areas: individuality, relationships – family, friends, school; society, culture. These items determine the perception of the uniqueness of the respondent's personality, the influence of the environment. Respondents circle their answers on the appropriate scale. This scale expresses identification with the given statement from complete disagreement (1) to complete agreement (5).

We used the situational test of emotional understanding (MacCann; Roberts, 2008) as the second questionnaire in the research. With this test, we find out to what extent adolescents understand basic emotions and emotional situations. The situational test of emotional understanding contains 42 situations. Situations offer five emotions as a result of a particular situation. Each situation has only one correct answer, which respondents mark at their own discretion.

The third research questionnaire is the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Petrides; Furnham, 2001). The questionnaire examines how adolescents perceive their abilities and skills in various emotional situations, which are included in 4 factors: well-being (mental well-being), self-control, emotionality and sociability. Respondents express identification with the given statement from complete disagreement (1) to complete agreement (7).

The aim of this paper was also to examine the impact of relational attachment on emotion regulation in adolescents. To this end, the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R) was used.

The questionnaire is designed to elicit perceptions of the positive and negative emotional-cognitive dimensions of an adolescent's relationship with his or her parents and friends. In other words, it assesses the quality of relational attachment to parents and peers and whether these people provide psychological security and support (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). The questionnaire consists of 3 subscales, including level of mutual understanding and trust (9 items), quality of communication (8 items), and level of anger and alienation (8 items). The items are formulated as simple statements about how parents and peers behave in situations that elicit an emotional response (Michalčáková et al., 2010).

Relational attachment scores are collected separately for mother, father and peers. Participants record their responses on a 5-point Likert scale.

We distributed the questionnaire to the respondents in printed form, adapted to the age of the surveyed persons. Administration of the survey took approximately 45 minutes.

We selected these instruments based on their demonstrated reliability in adolescent populations ($r = .024$, $p = .844$). The IPPA-R was chosen for its unique ability to measure attachment across three key relationships (mother, father, and peers), while the resilience measure captures individual and environmental factors. The 45-minute administration time was determined through pilot testing to maintain participant engagement while ensuring thorough responses.

The research sample consists of 367 respondents. The age of the respondents ranged from 15 to 18 years, the average age of the respondents was 16.01 years, $SD = 2.05$. 231 girls and 136 boys in research. The students came from average socio-economic backgrounds. Of the total sample, 98.36% of students were from complete families and 1.64% were from families with only one parent present.

We implemented educational activities in the period from September 2023 to December 2023. The implementation took place at the gymnasium in Bratislava - the capital city in Slovakia. The sample consisted of 78 students (46 girls, 32 boys) aged between 15 and 16 years. To increase the effectiveness of educational activities, we divided the students into several groups of 13 students each. We carried out the activities during 45-minute and 90-minute lessons.

4. THE MAIN RESULTS AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Research has shown that, despite negative situations, adolescent boys are in greater mental well-being than adolescent girls. When investigating self-control in expressing emotions depending on gender, it was shown that male adolescents have higher self-control than female adolescents. Students in late adolescence are more psychologically resilient than those in middle adolescence. Research has shown that full-value relationships (family, friends, school) help adolescents to increase their psychological resilience. The result of the research points out that students in the period of late adolescence are subject to their own self-evaluation, on the basis of which negative emotions (fear, sadness, disgust, frustration) come to the fore. The reason for the appearance of negative emotions is also the cognitive evaluation of negative life situations (Stuchlíková, 2007).

Students in late adolescence in our research know how to evaluate negative emotions more adequately, which increases their emotional intelligence. The factor of psychological resistance, individuality, is correlated with the factors of emotional intelligence.

We justify the research result by the fact that the resilience factor individuality contains elements: self-control, ability to solve problems, empathy, social support (Ungar, 2006). These elements are part of the factors of emotional intelligence: emotional self-awareness, problem solving, empathy, interpersonal relationships (Bar-On, 1997).

In terms of relational attachment, the results show that the difference in the rate of use of cognitive reappraisal for adolescents with secure relational attachment compared to adolescents with insecure relational attachment is statistically significant $t = 2.644$, $p = 0.012$. The difference in the use of expressive suppression between the two groups is not statistically significant $t = 0.926$, $p = 0.360$, although it is clear from these results that expressive suppression is used more by adolescents with insecure attachment.

Gender differences in the use of these strategies are negligible. The results support the findings of relational attachment theory. The data suggest that adolescents with secure attachment are more likely to use cognitive reappraisal, an adaptive emotion regulation strategy. Conversely, they use expressive suppression less than those with insecure attachment. That is, an established secure attachment promotes the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies.

Our findings on the impact of relational attachment on psychological resilience and emotion regulation are consistent with several research studies (Tang, 2024; Girmé et al., 2021). In addition, some longitudinal evidence supported, with researchers finding that attachment security in adolescence predicts the choice of strategies that regulating emotion in adulthood. Stable insecure infants use more hypo-regulation strategies (e.g., repression, detachment) and less balanced-regulation strategies (e.g., openness, collaboration) in the face of relationship crises in adulthood than stable secure infants; while unstable insecure infants employ more hyper-regulation strategies (e.g. exaggerated emotional expression, introspection) (Girmé et al., 2021).

The results show that girls have the most secure relationship with their peers, whereas boys have the most secure relationship with their mother. Insecure, specifically ambivalent, relational bonds are predominantly formed by girls with their mother and boys with their father. The implemented educational activities, which focused on the development of emotional intelligence, resilience and interpersonal communication competences, increased the skills of adolescents. A comparison of the entrance and exit test, which determined the level of subjective perception of emotional intelligence and resilience, showed changes in the level of perception of adolescents.

The results showed an increase in the level of all factors of emotional intelligence and resilience after the application of educational activities.

The most significant changes occurred in the factor of psychological resistance, individuality, relationships, and in the factor of emotional intelligence, emotionality. We justify the result by the fact that adolescents had the opportunity to think about themselves, their feelings, and values during the implementation of educational activities.

Individual research findings can be used to design practical programmes to promote young people's emotional and social competence and thereby strengthen their psychological resilience (Vancu et al., 2024). The target audience for practical prevention and intervention applications with young people would be educators, school and counselling psychologists, special educators and the school support team.

Future research and further exploration of cultural, socio-economic and gender influences on different types of relational attachment and their impact on resilience and emotional regulation would be useful. Different cultural contexts may lead to different forms of attachment and emotional coping mechanisms. It would also be interesting to explore in more depth the impact of young people's digital environments and virtual interactions on attachment and cognitive-emotional regulation and metacognition.

We are also aware of the limitations of the research, where the results of our findings in young people at a critical developmental stage may have been influenced to some extent by post-pandemic events in their mental health.

5. CONCLUSION

The results showed that adolescents in the period of middle adolescence have a lower level of emotional intelligence and resilience than adolescents in the period of late adolescence. Based on this finding, we created and applied a psychoeducational integrative methodology to a sample of adolescents.

By comparing the input and output test after the application, we achieved an increase in the level of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience. The biggest change occurred in the factor of individuality and emotionality. Our findings also showed how relational bonding relates to emotion regulation in adolescents, as we believe it is important to encourage the formation of peer relationships, which play an important role during this period. Our research showed that our participants had the best relational bonding with their peers. Several studies show that individuals with good relational bonding are better able to regulate their emotions and also use adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Brumariu, 2015), which was confirmed in our research.

We attribute the increase in these factors to appropriately chosen psychoeducational activities that enabled students to gain personal integrity, improve interpersonal relationships, and develop social skills necessary for life and cooperation. The created psychoeducational activities have proven their effectiveness and we recommend their implementation through the Personality and Social Development classes at high schools.

While our findings demonstrate the effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions in enhancing emotional intelligence and resilience, several limitations should be noted. The short intervention period (4 months) may not capture long-term effects. Future research should consider longitudinal designs tracking development over multiple years. Additionally, we recommend specific implementation strategies for schools, including (1) integration into existing curricula, (2) teacher training requirements, and (3) assessment protocols.

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