

The Impact Parental Control on Emotional Regulation amongst Adolescents in Fako Division

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of parental control on emotional regulation amongst adolescents in Fako Division. Increasing parenting trends across the globe are taking new turns as it is becoming increasingly difficult for parents to bond with their folks and in turn build a rich social and emotional relationship amongst parents and children. Regulating emotions well is critical for promoting social and emotional health among children and adolescents. Parents play a prominent role in how children develop emotion regulation. The objects of the present research are to address the perception of parental control, emotional regulation and its challenges. In 2007, Morris et al. proposed a tripartite model suggesting that parents influence children's emotion regulation through three mechanisms: children's observation of parents' emotion regulation, emotion-related parenting practices, and the emotional climate of the family. The study comprise a web based survey, analyses of literature, involving an excellent review of relevant articles in addition to deductive content analysis of the data generated; and it equally examine some challenges of parental control on emotional regulation. In light of the data that have been collected there is a correlation between addressing parental control and adolescent's emotional regulation. Further, the findings show that parental control has an impact on the emotional regulation of adolescents; this thus influences their development and the quality of their emotional relationships.

KEYWORDS: Parental control, Solicitation, emotional regulation and adolescent

INTRODUCTION

Parental control has been identified as a salient dimension of parenting associated with youths' social, emotional, and psychological development (Maccoby and Martin 1983). In interpreting the research on parental control, most researchers have focused on parents, defining and delineating the effects of control as a function of parents' goals and intentions (Barber et al. 1994). In this study, we examine the role that youths' perspectives and agency play in these processes, treating youths as interpretive agents whose feelings about their parents are the mechanism by which parental control affects youth adjustment.

One of the most important aspects for adolescents' social functioning is emotional competence (Cicchetti, Ackerman & Izard, 1995). Emotion regulation can be defined as extrinsic and intrinsic processes that are responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features to accomplish one's goals (Thompson, 1994, pp. 27-28). In other words, emotion regulation represents the variety of strategies an individual may employ to manipulate or modify the physiological, subjective and behavioural aspects of an emotional response. Emotional self-regulatory abilities (intrinsic) and direct external control (extrinsic) are essential to adolescents developing emotional competence. Recent years have seen an increased interest in research on emotion regulation in

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adolescents (Fischer & Tangney, 1995). This study focused on the vulnerability of adolescents in managing their sexual behaviours, identity formation and other social behaviours due to continuous absence of parental monitoring. As children develop from infancy, through childhood and reach adolescence, parental attachment seems to be on the decrease and most of the time, adolescents are left on their own to manage the complex emotional issues that arise from their cognitive gains and maturity of primary and secondary sexual organs from the onset of puberty. It is therefore important that parents should monitor (through supervision, affection and modeling) the emotional development of early adolescents so as to provide the necessary care for effective emotional regulation.

Justification of the study

Adolescents who fail to regulate their emotions could be a danger to their own lives and the lives of others in the society, when they engage in antisocial behaviours. Previous studies focus more on parenting styles but parents tend to exhibit different typologies as situations arise, which makes it difficult to categorize parents in one typology to the exclusion of the other. Over the past decade in the parenting literature, there has been a debate about whether more or less parental monitoring can maximize emotional regulations in adolescents. The present study approaches

parenting by going beyond the typologies to examine specific parenting behaviours like control, soliciting, disclosure and parental self-emotional regulation that constitute parental monitoring. This approach captures the problem of emotional regulation and can help both parents and adolescents in their social interactions.

Literature

Emotional Regulation (ER)

Emotional Regulation (ER) is conceptually understood as a series of internal and external, processes responsible for evaluating and modifying emotional responses in their cognitive and behavioural components, always with the goal of achieving personal goals and fulfilling social acceptance (Cole et al., 2004; Compas et al., 2001; Eisenberg & Morris, 2002; Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Thompson, 1994, 2011; Waters & Thompson, 2014).

One of the first conceptualizations offered for the construct of Emotional Regulation (ER) defines it as "a series of processes intrinsic and extrinsic responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions, especially in its temporal elements and intensity for achieving personal goals" (Thompson, 1994, pp. 27-28). Currently, ER is understood as a series of internal and external, conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary processes, responsible for evaluating and modifying emotional responses in their physiological, cognitive and behavioural component processes, always with the goal of achieving personal goals and fulfilling social acceptance (Cole et al., 2004; Compas et al., 2001; Eisenberg & Morris, 2002; Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Thompson, 1994, 2011; Waters & Thompson, 2014).

In general, all the phenomenon conceptualizations incorporate multiple levels of processes that are synchronized to handle an emotion, including physiological components (shifts in duration and intensity of emotional states), cognitive components (attentional, mental processes to evaluate situations) and changes in behaviour through which emotions are expressed. Similarly, every conceptualization of ER establishes a functional role in the dynamic of the modulation of emotions. These processes are designated as functional since they always respond to specific ambitions of a person and their ultimate goal is to facilitate the achievement of her purposes but in a culturally appropriate manner (for example, Campos et al., 2004; Cole, 2014; Compas et al., 2001; Eisenberg & Morris, 2002; Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Goldsmith & Davidson, 2004; Gross & Thompson, 2007; Lewis & Stieben, 2004; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007; Ochsner & Gross, 2005; Thompson, 1994, 2011; Waters & Thompson 2014; Zeman et al., 2006).

Emotion regulation refers to the myriad of automatic or controlled physiological, cognitive, and behavioural processes one takes for the purpose of maintaining, enhancing, or mitigating the occurrence, form, intensity, or duration of emotional arousal (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Gross, 1998; Izard et al., 2011; Phillips & Power, 2007; Thompson, 1994). The broad construct of ER has been studied on multiple levels of analysis including neurophysiological, social, attentional, cognitive, and behavioural levels (Garnefski et al. 2002; Zamen et al., 2010). ER research has burgeoned within each of these levels of

analyses over the last decade, and has yet to be assimilated into a cohesive body of literature (Eisenberg, 2000; Garnefski et al., 2002; Gross, 1999). Given the myriad of angles from which one can study ER, it is proposed that empirical researchers demonstrate a clear focus on narrowly defined aspects of the construct at a time (Garnefski et al., 2002). As such, the current study will focus only on specific and conscious ER strategies adolescents report to employ in response to negative, stressful events. Such specific and conscious strategies have been primarily categorized in the literature and within this study according to two dimensions: adaptive-maladaptive, and cognitive-behavioural. These dimensions will also be interchangeably referred to as functional-dysfunctional and internal-external

Development of Regulatory Processes

Human beings learn to regulate their emotions in a gradual and continuous progress that starts at birth with a total dependence on caregivers for emotional management until adulthood when the individuals gain independence and responsibility in their own processes of emotional management (for example, Cole et al., 2004; Eisenberg & Morris, 2002; Gross & Thompson, 2007; Kopp & Neufeld, 2003; Thompson & Goodman, 2010; Zeman et al., 2006). During childhood (ages 1-10) and adolescence (ages 11-19) there are several milestones at certain ages that are relevant to be discussed.

Behavioural Emotion Regulation

Behavioural emotional regulation is in relation to enhancing positive affect, perspective taking, soothing and social modeling. While significant research exists investigating cognitive ER strategies, less research has focused on behavioural ER strategies and furthermore, little research has investigated gender differences in adolescent behavioural ER. This lack of research is surprising given that researchers investigating the development of ER have generally described a gradual shift from the use of external and behavioural strategies towards internal and cognitive strategies (Phillips & Power, 2007; Zeman et al., 2010). Adolescence thus represents a developmental period in which the relative importance of behavioural and cognitive strategies remains dubious and warrants further study to improve adolescent ER strategies during this critical period (Eisenberg, 2005). Furthermore, while females tend to use cognitive ER strategies more than males, gender differences in adaptive and maladaptive behavioural ER has yet to be explored.

Behavioural ER refers to a subset of conscious, specific, and behavioural coping strategies one employs in response to stressful events for the purpose of managing emotional arousal (Phillips & Power, 2007). Importantly, behavioural ER strategies are executed external to the self, and are assessed by asking people what they actually do immediately following an experience of negative emotion. The Regulation of Emotions Questionnaire (REQ) developed by Phillips and Power (2007) is the only questionnaire for adolescents that investigates both cognitive and behavioural adaptive and maladaptive ER. While the internal-functional and internal-dysfunctional categories correspond to cognitive-adaptive and cognitive-maladaptive strategies already described, external-functional and external-dysfunctional strategies are interchangeable with behavioural-adaptive and behavioural-maladaptive strategies and will be described below.

Adaptive Behavioural Regulation Strategies: The adaptive behavioural ER strategies described by Phillips and Power (2007) include use of social resources such as seeking physical contact from friends or family, talking to others about feelings, or actively seeking advice. Social support is a common behavioural regulation strategy employed by adolescents and provides an important source of control for ER development (Bell & McBride, 2010). Adolescents may also use leisure as a behavioural strategy to manage emotion, such as doing something energetic like playing a sport, or going out to do something nice (Phillips & Power, 2007).

Maladaptive Behavioural Regulation Strategies: The maladaptive behavioural ER strategies described by Phillips and Power (2007) include the deliberate act of taking out feelings on others either verbally or physically, taking out feelings on objects, or harming or punishing oneself in some way. These behavioural strategies are investigated by explicitly asking adolescents the extent to which they use this particular strategy in response to a negative emotion and thus represent ER strategy rather than risky behaviour.

There is widespread recognition in the literature that competent emotion regulation is a developmental achievement. It is continuously influenced by the immediate social environment of the child (Sroufe 1979, 1997), and emerges through reciprocal interaction with this environment (Saarni, 1999). The child's ability to regulate his or her emotions is thought to be influenced by the experience of previous interactions with his/her social environment, such as the relationship with parents and in later life with peers (Sroufe, Egeland & Carlson, 1996). Therefore, caregivers play a central role in the development of emotion regulation capacities, especially in the first years of life (Thompson, 2008). In the course of development children become more competent and confident in emotional self-control and gradually develop a widening variety of self-initiated emotion regulation strategies, which they then use in order to meet an increasingly complex set of social and personal goals (Thompson, Lewis, & Calkins, 2008).

Statement of problem

Adolescence (approximately spanning the ages 11–19; Sawyer et al., 2012) is of considerable interest from an emotion regulation perspective for several reasons. Developmentally, this period is associated with significant biological and physical changes, a growing need for independence, academic and employment pressures and fluctuating social relationships (Casey et al., 2010).

These challenges are often accompanied by increased emotional reactivity and stress. Adolescence is a time when risk taking begins to emerge due to the cognitive gains and maturity of primary and secondary sexual organs. Adolescents engage in youth risk behaviours that may lead to sexual disorientation, identity role confusion and antisocial behaviours. Notably, the early onset of these behaviours has been associated with a greater number of pregnancies, likelihood of contracting sexually transmitted infections, ambiguous personality exhibitions, substance abuse, drug and alcohol addictions.

Emotion regulation of adolescents via self-regulatory abilities and direct external control is therefore crucial in

addressing their sexual behaviours, identity formation and other social behaviours. Emotional regulation has been conceptualized as the set of processes used to manage feelings and their expression in order to achieve positive goals. Adolescents (11-19 years) face problems in regulating their emotions. The onset of puberty with cognitive and sexual maturity leaves them with little or no knowledge as to the emotional implications of the changes they are experiencing. In the absence of parental care giving, adolescents are left on their own with their peers and are exposed to the risks of sexual experimentation, antisocial behaviours and poor identity formation.

Caregivers, especially parents are therefore thought to play a major role in adolescent emotional regulation through other parenting behaviours. Among adolescents parental monitoring through supervision, affection and modeling has been found to play a key role in the self-regulatory and direct external control of early adolescents' emotional behaviours. Hence the need for this study on the effects of parental monitoring on emotional regulation during adolescence.

Theoretical framework

This conceptual paper integrates parental control and solicitation and emotional regulation, which makes it necessary to give a theoretical framework on appreciating the emotional regulation of adolescents. The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the literature on parental control and the literature on solicitation.

Methodology

The method used is literature review. The author has in this research made an effort to describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify literatures that are relevant for this study. According to the University of Australia library guide, in writing literature review, the reviewer aims to pass to the readers the knowledge and ideas previously established on a specific topic. He also tries to identify the challenges there are on the established knowledge. The literature review must be defined by a guiding concept like research objective, the problem or issue been discussed or an argumentative thesis. Based on this knowledge, the author critically analysed selected literatures that are relevant to the subject under study, extracting the important information therein and highlight our areas of dissent. Articles were identified that focused specifically on parental control and emotional regulation. The following search engines were used to identify relevant articles: Research gate, Academia, JESTOR, Medline, Embase, ERIC, BEI and Google Scholar.

The Parent-Child Relationship and Emotion Regulation

The emotional climate of the family is reflected in family relationships, the parent-child relationship, parenting styles, the attachment relationship, and emotionality in the home. A secure parent-child relationship helps children feel supported and emotionally safe (e.g., free to express emotions) and is a prerequisite for regulating emotions effectively. Emotional climates in which children feel closeness and warmth help them express their emotions more comfortably. Furthermore, maternal emotion and cognitive regulation are associated with involved and responsive parents, who are more likely to recognize their children's emotional cues and respond supportively. In addition to warmth and support, positive parenting is often accompanied by clear rules and limits that help children

know what to expect regarding emotional expression in the home (authoritative parenting; This helps children express emotions in socially acceptable ways (e.g., “anger is okay, but hitting is not”), and increases emotional security because children know what to expect. Across many studies, our work has demonstrated consistently that emotional support is associated with more effective emotion regulation. For example, in a study of children from military families, youth’s perceptions of both mothers’ and fathers’ support were associated with more effective self-regulation (examined as effortful control), and maternal support was associated with fewer conduct problems and emotional symptoms (e.g., internalizing or symptoms of depression and anxiety). Similarly, in another study, the quality of the relationship between parent and child (e.g., acceptance, warmth) was positively related to emotion regulation. And in a study of adolescents exposed to frequent neighborhood violence, adolescents’ perceptions of family adaptability and cohesion were associated with anger regulation through parental support, suggesting that cohesive and supportive families promote more effective emotion regulation in high-risk environments. Research also suggests that children may have difficulty regulating their emotions when parents are overly harsh, controlling, or permissive. Overly harsh parents often use psychological control (i.e., intrusive control in which parents attempt to manipulate children’s behavior and psychological development) to encourage children to conform to their own desires, which compromises children’s need for autonomy. For example, in a study of adolescents from primarily low-income families, parents’ psychological control was associated with greater internalizing and externalizing problems through its effects on adolescents’ anger regulation. These findings are consistent with a study in which adolescent anger mediated the link between discipline that was harsh and inconsistent and adolescents’ health.

Studies such as these suggest that one way negative parenting affects children is through its effects on children’s emotion regulation. Research also suggests that parenting can have a greater effect on emotion regulation and adjustment for some children. In a study of preschool children, psychological control was more strongly related to internalizing and externalizing problems among children who had high levels of negative emotionality, suggesting that negative parenting may be more harmful for children who have difficulty regulating emotions. Children’s emotion regulation is also affected by how emotions are expressed in the home and in dyadic relationships. Specifically, we have explored the link between parents’ negative and positive affect, and children’s emotion and physiological regulation. For example, using observers’ ratings of young children’s emotions during free play and teaching tasks, parents’ high levels of positive affect (i.e., warmth, smiling) and low levels of negative affect (i.e., anger) were related to positive affect in children. Moreover, parents’ anger was positively and significantly related to children’s expression of anger.

These findings are consistent with those of a study that examined respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA), an indicator of parasympathetic functioning and cardiac vagal regulation. Parents’ anger (assessed during a discussion between parents and their teenagers that was related to conflict) was associated with lower RSA in their adolescents. Parents’ positive affect was also associated with greater RSA in their

adolescents. In other words, adolescents had more optimal cardiac vagal regulation when their parents had high levels of positive affect and low levels of anger during a discussion on conflict. Moreover, in studies using EMA to assess emotion, adolescents generally rated their emotions as more positive and less negative when they interacted with their parents than when they were alone.

Parenting Practices and Emotion Regulation

In addition to examining the parent–child relationship, many studies have focused on emotion-related parenting practices, specific parenting behaviors that teach children about emotions and emotion regulation in response to children’s emotional expressions. Our research has been influenced by the work of Gottman, Katz, and Hooven, who proposed that parents who coach their children on emotions—by solving problems, labeling emotions, and comforting children—facilitate successful emotion regulation. This contrasts with parents who dismiss emotions—by ignoring, denigrating, and punishing children for expressing emotions. Children and adolescents of parents who coach their children on emotions regulate their emotions more successfully than parents who do not. In a study of adolescents, youth who said their parents coached them on dealing with anger and sadness were more successful at regulating their own anger and sadness. These findings are consistent with another study in which parents’ emotion coaching was significantly and positively related to children’s emotion regulation and vagal tone. Moreover, in other research, negative parenting practices such as invalidating feelings are related to low levels of emotion regulation.

Another study asked adolescents to report on negative events or problems they experienced and to indicate whether any individuals (parents, peers) helped them deal with their emotions related to the negative event or problem. Both depressed and healthy adolescents reported that their parents helped them manage their emotions in about half the negative events they encountered. This suggests that adolescents rely on their parents for guidance and assistance in regulating emotions through the teenage years. In contrast to the emotion-coaching factors measured in studies of adolescents, research with younger children (i.e., preschool, early elementary) often focuses on specific strategies of emotion socialization. For example, during a task that elicited disappointment (e.g., a child gets a broken toy when expecting a prize), coders rated three emotion-regulation strategies: attention focusing (e.g., shifting attention away from what is causing the negative emotion), comforting (e.g., physical affection, positive verbalizations), and cognitive reframing (e.g., changing how a situation is interpreted so it is no longer perceived negatively). In cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses using this paradigm, parents’ attention refocusing was associated with less sadness and anger and less externalizing behavior in children. Emotion-regulation strategies in which both child and parent participate actively can also be helpful. For example, joint attention refocusing and joint cognitive reframing were significantly related to less expression of sadness and anger during current and subsequent intervals of the disappointment task. Children’s ability to internalize emotion-regulation strategies may be more successful in the context of active learning with a parent. This is consistent with the concept of joint regulation, the idea that children (especially those adolescent years) often depend on their

primary caregiver to assist them in regulating emotions and behavior.

Conclusion

Our work and the research of others document the influence of parenting on children's and adolescents' emotion regulation. Specifically, research indicates that parents' emotional support, positive affect, emotion coaching, and use of joint strategies are all associated with more effective emotion regulation in children. In contrast, parents' psychological control, permissiveness, expressed anger, and criticism are associated with difficulties in emotion regulation in children. Moreover, emotion regulation is one way parenting affects children's adjustment, and parenting may be particularly influential among children who are emotionally reactive. In addition, adolescents report more positive affect when they are with their parents than when they are alone, and adolescents report that their parents help them regulate emotions, indicating that parents maintain their influence on emotion regulation throughout adolescence. Our work goes further by demonstrating that parenting is related to children's physiological and neural responses to emotional stimuli. These findings begin to suggest possible neurobiological mechanisms through which parenting influences children's emotional reactivity and regulation. These results converge with evidence from studies of animals that document the influence of maternal care giving on the developing brain early in life through processes such as experience dependent synaptogenesis and later pruning of synapses. Other research in animals and humans shows that early care giving influences the development of the stress-response systems, such as the hypothalamic pituitary axis, which play an important role in helping children mount responses to emotional challenges. Recent theory also suggests that children may differ in their susceptibility to the influences of parenting (and other environmental influences) as a function of genetic risk and other endophenotypic factors. However, researchers need to demonstrate specific effects of parenting on emotional reactivity and regulation using designs that provide for more effective causal inference, such as parenting interventions that measure children's emotional reactivity and regulation before and after intervention and that use multi method approaches.

The delineation of different forms of control has been an important advance in theory and research on parenting. At the same time, however, distinguishing among multiple forms of control has its drawbacks. The distinction we have introduced between parental control and structure is one way to move the field forward to more advanced theory and research that can potentially yield a clearer set of conclusions to not only investigators but also the public. This is a particularly important endeavor as scholars attempt to understand the role of parents in the socialization process among families of diverse cultural backgrounds for whom parenting may not only take different forms than among families of European backgrounds but also be experienced differently by children. The aim of this article is to encourage construction of a parsimonious approach to conceptualizing and operationalizing parenting along the two dimensions at the article's center. Such innovation will serve to significantly organize the field, thereby setting important directions for future theory and research and allowing sound applications of the findings.

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