



The Impact of Family Communication Patterns on Emotional Regulation and Social Connectedness among Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students

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Abstract: The present study explored how family communication patterns influence emotional regulation strategies—specifically cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression—and their association with social connectedness among undergraduate and postgraduate students. A total of 121 participants (60 undergraduates and 61 postgraduates) completed standardized self-report instruments: the Family Communication Scale (Olson & Barnes, 2010), the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), and the Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (Robbins, 1995). Statistical techniques, including Pearson’s correlation, independent samples t-test, and multiple regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationships among variables, differences between groups, and predictive capacities. Findings revealed that cognitive reappraisal was a positive predictor of social connectedness, while expressive suppression was a negative predictor. For undergraduates, family communication patterns, cognitive reappraisal, and social connectedness were significant predictors of suppression. In contrast, among postgraduates, suppression was found to significantly predict reappraisal. Additionally, family communication emerged as a significant predictor of suppression in the undergraduate group. Gender-based differences were also observed, with male students reporting higher use of both reappraisal and suppression strategies compared to females. These results highlight the varying patterns of emotional regulation between undergraduate and postgraduate students and underscore the role of family communication in shaping emotional regulation strategies and social connectedness across educational levels.

Keywords: *Family Communication, Emotion Regulation, Social Connectedness, Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression, Undergraduate Students, Postgraduate Students*

1. Introduction

Family is the first and one of the most important place for a child to learn, grow and evolve around. Families are regarded as fundamental building blocks of society, serving as the foundation for social structures and institutions across all cultures. Family communication evolves around both processes i.e. intrapersonal and interpersonal. Thus, family communication is a very important aspect as it helps individuals to grow and communicate within their social circles be it in colleges, peer groups or corporate circles. Also helps to express one's needs, wants, expectations as well as concerns for each other. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001), stated that families are goal-directed, self-correcting, dynamic in nature, interconnected systems that both affect and thus get affected by their environment and qualities within the family itself. A nuclear family typically consists of a father, mother, and their children. In contrast, a joint family extends to include not only parents and children but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Family communication has been a focus of research for many decades. Some of the most foundational studies, conducted around the World War II era, continue to shape contemporary scholarly perspectives on family dynamics. Over the past 15 years, significant new advancements have emerged, fundamentally transforming how functional and dysfunctional family interactions are understood. Olson's Circumplex Model, created by David Olson, identifies three key dimensions of family behaviour: adaptability, cohesion, and communication. The first dimension, adaptability (referred to by Olson as *flexibility*), describes a family's capacity to modify its power dynamics, role relationships, and rules in response to developmental or situational stressors. The McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) was developed by researchers at McGill University, led by Nathan Epstein, as a comprehensive framework for understanding family dynamics. Unlike approaches that focus on individual psychology, this model examines families as interactive systems, emphasizing two primary applications: studying healthy family units without psychiatric history, and evaluating the effectiveness of family therapy interventions.

Emotion is a psychological state that arises spontaneously, rather than through intentional effort, and is often accompanied by noticeable physiological changes. Our emotions are our best guides (Ekman, 2003), which direct us and say what's right in a particular situation.

Einfühlung (emotion), which translates to "feeling into," was likely first used by the German philosopher Theodor Lipps in the nineteenth century to characterize the interaction between an artwork and the viewer in the psychology of aesthetic experience. According to Darwin (1872), human and animal emotions can include the "low spirits" of anxiety, grief, dejection, and despair; the "high spirits" of joy, love, tender feelings, and devotion; and the "low spirits" of suffering and weeping, which are unique human expressions. Ekman (1972) discovered a set of fundamental emotions that are biologically common to all people and are manifested by variations in facial muscles. The core emotional spectrum includes anger, disgust, fear, joy, sorrow, and astonishment. Emotional Regulation refers to the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions (Gross, 1998). Emotional regulation refers to a person's capacity to observe, assess, and adjust their emotional reactions in order to adapt effectively to different circumstances and pursue desired outcomes. One of the most widely recognized theories of emotional regulation is James Gross's process model. The model outlines five emotional regulation strategies that unfold at different stages of the emotional experience: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Difficulties in regulating emotions are often at the core of negative emotional experiences and are strongly associated with various psychological disorders. Notably, research on conditions such as social anxiety disorder, personality disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) highlights the link between challenges in emotion regulation and the duration, frequency, and nature of emotional experiences.

Social Influences on Emotional Regulation, the ability to regulate emotions is significantly shaped by interpersonal feedback. When others respond to our emotional expressions with empathy and validation, they provide crucial social support that reinforces adaptive regulation. Supportive responses communicate that one's feelings are legitimate, creating a secure foundation for effective emotional management.

Social Connectedness indicates a sense of belongingness and closeness that an individual feels around others who are close enough to that individual. It is an important aspect of emotional well-being, mental health and overall life satisfaction. An individual with strong social connections has better coping mechanisms, resilience and social adjustment in different areas of life. also, strong connections are quite important to succeed in life, enhancing emotional regulation, psychological well-being and personal growth and development. Humans are social creatures by nature, their capacity to form and maintain meaningful bonds with other people plays a crucial role in personal development and psychological adjustment

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978) explains how early relationships in life specifically with caregivers, parents and family, shape one's ability to form social bonds throughout one's life. Various styles include: secure, avoidant, anxious and disorganized. Social Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), focuses on human motivation which is driven by psychological needs namely Autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to a sense of control, competence refers to a sense of effectiveness and relatedness refers to a sense of social connection.

2. Review of Literature

Birrell et al. (2025) explored a research on social connection as a key target for youth mental health. A sum of 497 students of age 13 to 14 years were selected for the study. The results showed that social connection plays a crucial role in youth mental health, with strong peer relationships and school connectedness reducing the risk for stress, anxiety and depression among adolescents. Individuals with meaningful social bonds experience better mental health issues. School belonging is a crucial protective factor and interventions that encourage school climate and peer support can enhance individuals mental health.

LaFreniere and Cui (2025) investigated the emotional labor of college students in relation to their parents, challenges with managing emotions, and family communication styles. A sum of 649 college students, from protective family environments, demonstrated more challenges in recognizing emotional responses, self-awareness, availability of regulation strategies, and emotional clarity when compared to their peers from pluralistic families. There were challenges in regulating emotions were connected to the emotional labor performed with both parents.

Abbas (2024) examined the role of family communication in relation to depression, focusing on how social connectedness impacts depression. A sample size of 200 children were selected. The results indicated that loneliness serves as a significant mediating factor between family communication, social connectedness, and depression. This research indicates the pivotal role of family members and societal interactions while comprehending as well as tackling depression, providing insights that could enhance mental health interventions and foster improved family and social well-being.

Krizan et al. (2024) investigate whether there are differences in satisfaction with family life and family communication in families with different family structures. A total of 4821 individuals participated. The findings of this study indicated that in families with adolescents,

family communication is closely linked to family satisfaction, regardless of the parents' marital status.

Miller and Racine (2022) examined emotion regulation difficulties as common and unique predictors of impulsive behaviours in university students. The participants were 238 undergraduate students. Findings suggested that both by itself and after adjusting for other types of emotion dysregulation, the greatest number of impulsive behaviours were predicted by emotional clarity deficit.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

To study the impact of family communication patterns on emotional regulation and social connectedness among undergraduate and postgraduate students.

3.2 Research Objectives

- a) To explore the relationship between family communication patterns, emotional regulation and social connectedness among undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- b) To determine the extent to which emotional regulation strategies and family communication patterns influence the sense of social connectedness among undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- c) To assess the gender based differences in effects of family communication patterns, emotional regulation strategies and social connectedness levels between female and male students.

3.3 Hypotheses

1. A significant relationship is anticipated between family communication patterns, emotional regulation and levels of social connectedness experienced by undergraduate and postgraduate students.
2. There would be a significant difference in emotion regulation strategies and social connectedness among undergraduate and postgraduate students, based upon the family communication patterns.
3. Both emotion regulation strategies (reappraisal and suppression) and family communication patterns are expected to significantly predict degree of social connectedness among students.
4. A significant gender based difference is expected in the impact of family communication patterns, emotional regulation strategies and level of social connectedness between female and male students.

3.4 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the impact of family communication patterns on emotional regulation and social connectedness. Data were collected from 121 participants, including 61 postgraduate and 60 undergraduate students.

3.5 Sample

- a) **Sample Size:** A total of 121 participants- 60 undergraduates and 61 postgraduates, ranging in age from 18 to 21 years and 22 to 25 years.
- b) **Sampling Method:** the current study used convenience and snowball sampling methods.

3.6 Measures

3.6.1 Family Communication Scale (FCS): The Family Communication Scale (FCS), developed by Olson and Barnes (2010), is a reliable 10-item assessment tool adapted from the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PAC) that measures the quality of family interactions which consists of 20 items. Using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), the FCS produces total scores between 10-50, where higher scores indicate more open, effective communication characterized by active listening, honest expression, and mutual understanding while low score indicates difficulties in communication. Strong psychometric properties, high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.90$) and test-retest reliability ($r=0.86$), as established through a national sample of 2,465 individuals.

3.6.2 Emotional Regulation Scale (ERQ): The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), created by Gross and John (2003), serves as a validated psychometric instrument for evaluating habitual approaches to emotional management. This 10-item measure specifically examines two fundamental regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal (reinterpreting emotional situations to alter their psychological impact) and expressive suppression (consciously restraining emotional expressions). Rated using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = complete disagreement to 7 = full agreement). The Cognitive Reappraisal includes (1,3,5,7,8 and 10) and Expressive Suppression includes (2,4,6 and 9). ERQ scale demonstrate good psychometric properties with studies showing high internal consistency for both subscales. Cronbach's alpha values around 0.75-0.82 and 0.68-0.76.

3.6.3 Social Connectedness Scale- Revised (SCS-R): The Social Connectedness Scale-SCS-R was developed by Lee Robbins (1995), a self-report measure used to evaluate how emotionally linked individuals feel to others within their social circle. It comprises of 20 items, each rated on a 6- point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree). This tool

included both positively and negatively worded items, with the latter needing reverse scoring to calculate overall score. Highly scored degree of social connectedness indicates stronger feelings of connection towards others. SCS-R demonstrates amazing psychometric properties which includes higher internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha $>.92$ and strong evidence of construct, convergent and concurrent validity.

4. Statistical Analysis

Table1. *Pearson's correlation of family communication, emotion regulation and social connectedness*

		Family Comm	Reappraisal	Suppression	Social Connectedness
Family Comm	Pearson Correlation	1	.172	.176	.109
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.060	.053	.235
	N	121	121	121	121
Reappraisal	Pearson Correlation	.172	1	.386**	.150
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.060		.000	.099
	N	121	121	121	121
Suppression	Pearson Correlation	.176	.386**	1	-.271**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.053	.000		.003
	N	121	121	121	121
Social Connectedness	Pearson Correlation	.109	.150	-.271**	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.235	.099	.003	
	N	121	121	121	121

Table 1: reveals significant relationships between emotion regulation strategies and social connectedness. Analysis demonstrated a moderate positive association between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression ($r = .386$, $p < .01$).

Table 2. *Independent samples t-test comparing females and males*

Variable	t	Df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	95% CI of the Diff.
Family Communication	-1.152	119	.252	-1.584	[-4.31, 1.14]
Reappraisal	-2.744	119	.007	-3.433	[-5.91, -0.96]
Suppression	-2.221	119	.028	-2.384	[-4.51, -0.26]

Social Connectedness	-0.035	119	.972	-0.103	[-5.91, 5.70]
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Table 2: indicates significant gender-based variations in emotion regulation patterns. Male participants demonstrated significantly greater use of cognitive reappraisal ($M = 31.42$, $SD = 5.91$) compared to female participants ($M = 27.99$, $SD = 6.59$), $t(119) = -2.744$, $p = .007$, Cohen's $d = 0.54$, representing a medium effect size. A parallel pattern emerged for expressive suppression, with males reporting higher mean scores ($M = 20.26$, $SD = 5.67$) than females ($M = 17.88$, $SD = 5.39$), $t(119) = -2.221$, $p = .028$, $d = 0.43$.

Table 3. *Regression predicting social connectedness*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.271 ^a	.073	.066	14.408	.073	9.416	1	119	.003
2	.387 ^b	.150	.135	13.860	.076	10.591	1	118	.001

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	90.800	4.591		19.777	.000
	SUPPRESSION	-.725	.236	-.271	-3.069	.003
2	(Constant)	76.782	6.169		12.446	.000
	SUPPRESSION	-1.034	.246	-.386	-4.198	.000
	REAPPRAISAL	.680	.209	.299	3.254	.001

Table 3: indicates that emotion regulation strategies significantly influence social connectedness, $f(2,118) = 10.38$, $p < 0.001$, accounting approximately 15% variance in social connectedness (adjusted $R^2 = 0.135$). While reappraisal was a positive predictor ($\beta = 0.299$, $p = .001$), suppression significantly predicted social connectedness negatively ($\beta = -0.386$, $p < .001$). According to these findings, people who regularly repress their emotions exhibit higher levels of social connectedness, while people who employ cognitive reappraisal report feeling less socially connected.

Table 4. *Regression predicting suppression of Undergraduate students*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
	Education UG (Selected)				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.381 ^a	.145	.130	4.934	.145	9.850	1	58	.003
2	.543 ^b	.295	.271	4.519	.150	12.151	1	57	.001
3	.607 ^c	.369	.335	4.316	.073	6.488	1	56	.014

Coefficients ^{a,b}						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.324	2.723		3.791	.000
	REAPPRAISAL	.289	.092	.381	3.138	.003
2	(Constant)	18.414	3.407		5.405	.000
	REAPPRAISAL	.396	.090	.522	4.411	.000
	SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS	-.148	.043	-.412	-3.486	.001
3	(Constant)	12.712	3.950		3.219	.002
	REAPPRAISAL	.362	.087	.476	4.163	.000
	SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS	-.161	.041	-.449	-3.939	.000
	FAMILY COMM	.212	.083	.279	2.547	.014

Table 4: indicates that reappraisal, social connectedness and family communication significantly predicted suppression, $f(3,56)=10.89, p<.001$, adjusted $R^2=.335$; 36.9% of variance in suppression. Reappraisal – positively associate with suppression and so was family communication and social connectedness negatively. These findings imply that social connectedness may act as a buffer against emotional suppression and that undergraduates who use reappraisal more frequently may also suppress their emotions

5. Discussion

The current study aimed to study the impact of family communication patterns on emotional regulation and social connectedness among undergraduates and postgraduates. The research comprised of three variables that are family communication patterns, emotion

regulation and social connectedness. The findings of the research indicated that the two subscales or categories of emotion regulation that are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were correlated differently with levels of social connectedness. Pearson's correlation was used to assess the relationship between the family communication and emotion regulation among undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as social connectedness. independent samples t test was used to assess the gender difference in the impact of family communication, emotion regulation and social connectedness among females and males. Regression analysis was used to predict the extent to which family communication and emotion regulation including reappraisal and suppression can predict social connectedness among undergraduate. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether suppression and reappraisal predict social connectedness which depicted that individuals who suppress emotions tend to feel less connected from the society whereas who use reappraisal report greater level of social connectedness. Gender analysis revealed that male students reported higher levels of both reappraisal and suppression, indicating differing emotional coping patterns by gender. These findings underscore how developmental stage and gender shape emotional behaviors within the framework of familial and social contexts. The results of the study revealed that emotion regulation categories significantly influenced social connectedness. Thus, cognitive reappraisal positively predicted social connectedness whereas expressive suppression negatively predicted it. This suggests that both the undergraduates and postgraduates who frequently reframe or modify their thoughts tend to feel more socially connected, while those who suppress emotions often feel disconnected towards society. The findings revealed that there are gender differences in family communication, emotion regulation, specifically reappraisal and suppression and social connectedness using independent samples t test which revealed that male participants reported significantly greater use of both cognitive reappraisal and suppression strategies as compared to females. The observed results align with several psychological frameworks. Gross's Emotion Regulation Theory distinguishes between adaptive strategies like reappraisal and less effective ones like suppression, which explains why reappraisal strengthens social connections while suppression weakens them. According to the McMaster Model, effective family communication encourages emotional expression and flexibility, which supports the findings linking family dynamics to emotion regulation. Attachment Theory further explains that secure early relationships promote healthy emotional processing, while insecure attachments may lead to suppression. Gender differences in emotion regulation may stem from social and cultural norms about emotional expression.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how family communication patterns shape emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) and social connectedness in students. Findings showed that cognitive reappraisal enhances social bonds, while suppression weakens them. Notably, postgraduates often used both strategies, suggesting nuanced emotional processing. Family communication significantly predicted suppression in undergraduates, and gender differences emerged, with males using both strategies more than females. Though family communication didn't directly affect social connectedness, it influenced emotional regulation, which then impacted social relationships. This highlights emotional regulation as a key link between family dynamics and social integration. The study underscores the need for family-focused interventions to foster healthy communication and emotional coping skills. Future research should examine these relationships over time and across cultures to improve support systems for young adults.

6.1 Limitations

While the current study offers meaningful insights into the relationship between family communication patterns, emotional regulation, and social connectedness, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relied solely on self-report questionnaires, which may introduce social desirability bias or inaccuracies in participants' responses due to personal perceptions or lack of self-awareness. Secondly, the use of convenience and snowball sampling limits the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population of undergraduate and postgraduate students across diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the research restricts the ability to draw causal inferences between variables. It is unclear whether family communication directly shapes emotional regulation and social connectedness or whether these relationships may be reciprocal over time.

6.2 Suggestions for future research

This study offers a basis for understanding how family communication influences students' emotional regulation and social connectedness. Future research could investigate whether emotional regulation acts as a mediator between family communication and social ties, as direct links were not found. Since emotional suppression was linked to lower social connectedness, its long-term effects—especially in academic or high-stress environments—deserve further exploration. Cognitive reappraisal, being a positive predictor of social connectedness, could be studied for its potential benefits when taught as a strategy. Gender-

based differences in emotional regulation also suggest a need to examine the impact of social and familial norms. Research could further explore variations across educational levels and family types, including those with non-traditional or high-conflict dynamics, to better understand their role in emotional and social development.

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