



The Particularities of Emotional Intelligence Development in Adolescents from Monoparental Families—Comparative Study

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Abstract

Emotional regulation is a key component of strong families. The ability to discern when and how to express emotions can assist individual family members in building and maintaining positive relationships. Family architecture and childhood attachments will be reflected in the flexibility and resilience of the adolescent, but especially of self-consciousness. Relationships initiated during childhood affect how adolescents see the availability of parents and form relationships with others. The success of these relationships depends on the level of development of emotional intelligence, considered by many to be essential for a life of success.

Subject Areas

Psychology

Keywords

Adolescence, Family Architecture, Attachment, Emotional Intelligence

1. Introduction

Seen by Piaget as a phase of life that begins in biology and ends in society, between the ages of 15 and 18 [1], adolescence is theorized by Erikson as a period of identity crisis characterized by the active search for a stable sense of self-awareness, through ego identity and its placement in reality [2]. According to Grotevant, the formation of identity during adolescence lays the foundation for the psychosocial and interpersonal development of the future adult [3]. Thus, during this period,

he seeks to be accepted by those around him, seeks his group of belonging and feels a certain need for valorization and independence, the satisfaction of these intrapsychic tensions can involve several types of behavior: rebellion, self-closure, or behavior of exaltation and affirmation [4]. The behavior adopted will be that represented by the internal working model. The internal working model is a set of conscious or unconscious rules, established as survival and adaptation rules from childhood, in which the attachment history is preserved, and which will become guidelines in the development of thinking, affectivity and behavior. The internal working model tends to match new experiences with previous expectations. The first reality, the home environment, is the initial social area. The importance of family participation in the entire process of raising and learning a child is fundamental. The family relationship, the availability and interest of parents in the educational orientation of their children are essential aspects in supporting the child. Childhood being under the influence of parents. The relational patterns (current experiences) of adolescents are reflections (relatively identical) of the affective experiences of childhood, the pattern of attachment behavior representing a predictor of the attitude of adolescents towards themselves and the quality of the relationships they will have with their peers [5]. Family architecture and childhood attachments, “of crucial importance in determining development,” are “the pivot around which a person’s life revolves, not only when they are infants or young children, but also throughout adolescence and then, in the years of maturity, until old age,” since “the experiences of the individual’s relationships with others become a feature of the individual’s relationships with himself” [6] and will be reflected in the adolescent’s capacity for flexibility and resilience, but especially in self-awareness. The relational pattern constitutes the initial source of setting in motion the cycle in which adolescents self-evaluate and interact with others. Relationships initiated during childhood affect the way adolescents see their parents’ availability and form relationships with others [7] [8]. The level of development of emotional intelligence, considered by Goleman to be essential for a successful life [9], depends on the success of the quality of these relationship. Mayer and Salovey define emotional intelligence as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor both one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate between them, and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions” [10].

1.1. Vision of Family Structure

The psychoanalytic view holds that the father plays the role of the Super-Ego in the family, that is, he brings into the family life, implicitly of the child, the rules and norms of social conduct, which are restrictive, but necessary for the development of healthy social relationships, and the mother has a role in the emotional development of the child. The nuclear family architecture facilitates a better environment for the well-being of young people compared to non-nuclear families [11]. This theory suggests that adolescents and children in single-parent homes experience the situation as a handicap. Adolescents who live with both parents

have higher overall satisfaction and self-esteem [12].

1.2. The Vision of Family Functioning

The family functioning model suggests that adolescents may function better in a non-nuclear home than in a conflicted family with both parents present [13].

2. Study on the Development of Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents in Single-Parent Families

2.1. Study Design and Procedure

This research is a cross-sectional study that aims at the dimensions of emotional intelligence by integrating the psychodynamic structures of the formation of the representation of the relationship with the Self and of object relations, considering that the emotional attitudes experienced through important objects, and especially the emotionally charged interactions between the child and the caregiver, color not only the image of these objects and the child's attitude towards them, but also the image and self-esteem. The following will be identified: self-perception and object perception, Self and object regulation, internal emotional communication and communication with the external world, internal attachment and external relationship.

Variables in the evaluation: family architecture (single-parent versus complete), attachment relationship (secure versus insecure).

Characteristics of research participants

- Adolescents with an average age of ≈ 17.4 years from single-parent families and complete families; a single-parent family is a family in which children live with only one parent. This can occur as a result of divorce, separation of parents, death of one parent, adoption of a minor by an adult, or as a result of a woman's decision to give birth to a child without being married or living with a man.

Research participant exclusion criteria

- Mental illness or adolescent retardation.

2.2. Research Methodology

Objectives:

O1. Identifying the particularities of the relationship between family architecture and the emotional constellation of the adolescent regarding the structure of the Self of the adolescent coming from a single-parent family versus the adolescent coming from a complete family.

O2. Identifying the particularities regarding the structural capacity of adolescents from single-parent families, to model the relationships developed by comparing them with those of the adolescent coming from a complete family.

O3. The importance of understanding the differential emotional and behavioral regulatory mechanisms of adolescents

Sample selection—The sample was made up of 26 families from Olt County,

with 38 adolescents aged between 16 and 18. The total sample of single-parent families included 9 adolescents from 6 single-parent families as a result of the separation of the parents, 6 adolescents from 4 single-parent families as a result of the death of one of the parents, 4 adolescents from 4 single-parent families by choosing not to formalize the relationship and 19 adolescents from 12 complete families.

2.2.1. Description of the Research Instruments Used as Well as the Coding Procedures

The investigation of emotional intelligence was carried out by applying the Emotional Intelligence Test, developed by Daniel Goleman, adapted by Mihaela Rocco and consists of 10 questions that present some situations in which a person may find themselves. Completing the test aims, on the one hand, to ensure, as much as possible, the transposition of the individual into the respective situation, and on the other hand, to choose one of the four possible answer options, which represent some concrete ways of reacting in the situations indicated by the questions. The answer options concern the ability to be aware of personal emotions, to know the situation from an emotional point of view and to respond adequately, balancedly, to unusual, critical or stressful situations (item 1); identifying the origin of the negative emotional state (anger) and the alternatives that can be tried to find appropriate solutions (item 2); own, intrinsic motivation, the ability to develop a plan to overcome obstacles, frustrations and the ability to pursue a goal, targeting “hope” as a dimension of emotional intelligence (item 3); persevering without self-blame or demoralization (item 4); perception of the situation, changing prejudices by acting on them, the person’s empathic capacity, ways to control anger (items 4-7); expressing personal ideas in a natural, relaxed and creative way (item 8); progressively involving in interpersonal relationships (item 9); managerial style (item 10).

OPERATIONALIZED PSYCHODYNAMIC DIAGNOSTICS OPD-2 Diagnostic and therapy planning manual-system for creating the psychodynamic profile of individual development.

SZONDI TEST. Experimental diagnosis of drives.

The items evaluated are:

- identity and self-esteem;
- locus of control: internal versus external;
- perception and object relationship;
- regulating emotions.

2.2.2. Research Hypotheses

Adolescents from single-parent families experience deficits in the development of emotional intelligence, with particularities in structural integration:

- conflict related to Self-identity and valorization,
- introjective mechanism,
- external locus of control.

3. Figures and Tables

3.1. The Results Obtained in the Research Experiment and Their Interpretation

The analysis of the results following the application of the Emotional Intelligence Test according to Daniel Goleman, translated by Mihaela Rocco, confirmed that the vast majority of adolescents from single-parent families—73.68%—demonstrate a low level of emotional intelligence, 21.05% of them demonstrate a moderate level, and 5.26% register a high level of emotion (**Figure 1**).

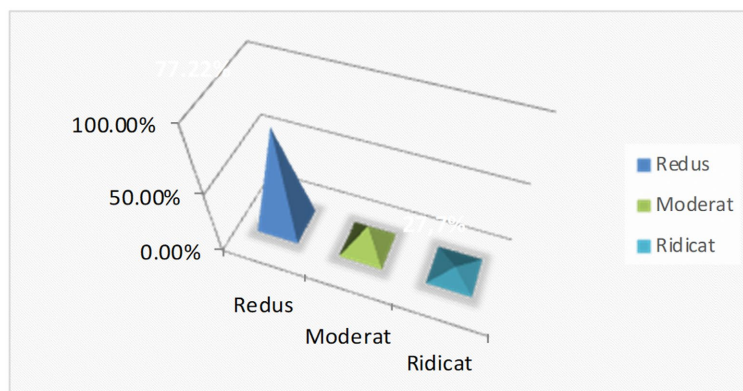


Figure 1. Level of emotional intelligence in adolescents from single-parent families.

The percentage of 73.68% regarding the low level of emotional intelligence in adolescents from single-parent families is characterized by inadequate response in stressful situations, low level of hope, demoralization, low resistance to frustration, difficulties in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Only 5.26% of them possess an average level of emotional intelligence, being represented by adolescents who have brothers/sisters or extended family involved in their upbringing and education.

The results obtained in the psychodynamic profile of adolescents in the experimental group identify higher levels of structural integration in the areas of self-perception and communication in adolescents from single-parent families (36.84%, respectively 31.58%) and adolescents from complete families with insecure attachment types (15.79%, respectively 10.53%), an idea supported by the vision of family functioning. The predominant self-esteem conflict is the active mode, characterized by a “forced” self-confidence in the way of relating to others, as an attempt to manage a crisis of self-esteem, preserving the narcissistic “nuance” and the appearance of security (“pseudosecurity”). However, it is noteworthy that in the areas of object relations and attachment skills, adolescents from single-parent families have lower levels of integration than those from complete families with insecure attachment types, the explanation being that, although parental conflict can be associated with problematic behaviors during childhood and adolescence [14], the family constitutes a social resource, this resource proving to be the strongest factor associated with reducing emotional problems, depressive symptoms and

decreasing social isolation [15] (Table 1).

Table 1. The level of integration of adolescents from single-parent families, complete families with a secure relational pattern, complete families with insecure attachment types.

The level of integration of adolescents	Family architecture					
	Single-parent families		Complete families with a secure relational pattern,		Complete families with insecure attachment types	
	No. of adolescents	%	No. of adolescents	%	No. of adolescents	%
Self-perception	7	36.84	9	47.37	3	15.79
Self-adjustment	2	10.53	10	52.63	7	36.84
Internal-external communication	6	31.58	11	57.89	2	10.53
Enable attachment.	4	21.05	10	52.63	5	26.32

Moderate and low levels of structural integration mainly describe the overall level of the adolescent's functions and capacities as accessible but reduced, with central themes ranging from object loss or separation, combined with fear of the intensity of one's own impulses, to reduced regulation functions and vulnerability.

The predominant configuration—78.94% of adolescents, represented by 15 subjects, coming from single-parent families—of the ego functions (Szondi Test) is indicated by the constellation k+p0 which indicates that the object libido is successfully transformed into narcissistic libido, making maximum use of the introjection mechanism, detaching oneself from the relationship object, but at the same time “thinking” about the object, incorporating it at a conceptual level, the ego itself becoming the object of love, the narcissistic “nuance” of self-sufficiency.

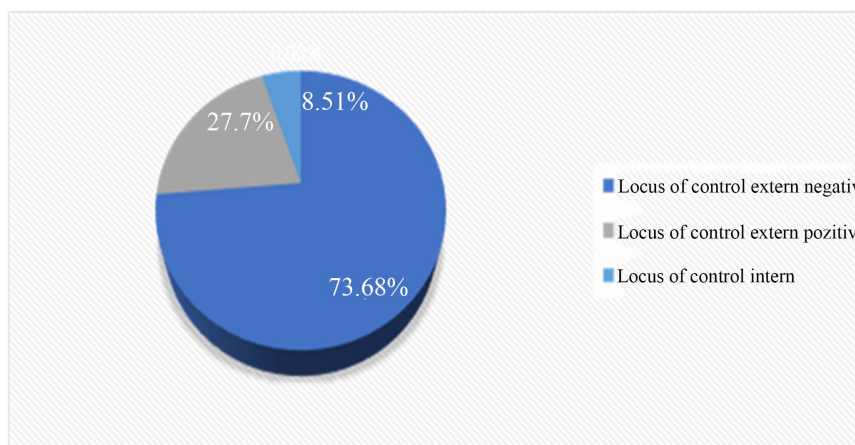


Figure 2. Locus of control in adolescents with single-parent families.

Locus of control

A convenient definition of the dimension of emotional intelligence is given by Lef [16]: As a general principle, internal control refers to the positive and/or negative perception of events as a consequence of one's own actions and therefore under personal control; external control refers to the positive and/or negative per-

ception of positive events as independent of one's behavior in certain situations and therefore beyond personal control. Thus, the dimension of emotional intelligence is a construct that attempts to determine whether a person considers himself a "victim" of the environment or whether he is in control of what happens to him. Until Rotter's formulation of the EI Scale in 1966, research had demonstrated the importance of locus of control in areas such as self-esteem, perception of failure, and recovery from traumatic experiences.

3.2. Interpretation of Study Results

Studies have proven the correlation of locus of control with emotional intelligence. The Rotter test reveals that in the case of adolescents from single-parent families, the external locus of control predominates, in a percentage of 73.68%, represented by 14 subjects) as a factor of anguish, frustration given by determinism and helplessness, and in a percentage of 21.05%, represented by 4 subjects used as a coping strategy for adapting to stress, noted in single-parent families with religious concerns,

the internal locus of control defining a percentage of 5.27% of adolescents from single-parent families (**Figure 2**).

4. Conclusions and Discussions

Family architecture is a strong predictor of emotional abilities and regulatory mechanisms, being a good predictor of psychological and behavioral problems. One explanation for the increased incidence of dysfunctional relationships bears the imprint of insecure attachment types.

In conclusion, adolescents from single-parent families may present deficits in the development of emotional intelligence as result of disturbed/insufficient relationships with the family.

By conducting multiaxial assessments, this research was able to capture the psychodynamic characteristics of emotional intelligence in relation to family architecture, targeting the structure of the self and the structure of object relations, which mature in closely related ways. The results of this research contribute to a better understanding of the quality of attachment, its security influencing the development of autonomy and, implicitly, the strengthening of the Self.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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