

Research Article

Emotional Regulation in Only Children : Understanding Behavioral Patterns, Parental Influence, and Social Adaptation

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Abstract: Emotional regulation includes efforts to accept emotions, control impulsive behavior, and the ability to use emotional regulation strategies appropriately and flexibly according to situational demands. It plays a significant role in maintaining mental well-being and fostering healthy interpersonal relationships. This study aims to explore and describe the emotional regulation strategies employed by only children, given the unique familial and social environment in which they are raised. The subjects in this study were three only children aged between 15 and 21 years, selected using purposive sampling techniques. The research employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to gain a deep understanding of their emotional experiences and regulation strategies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that all three subjects were generally able to regulate their emotions effectively. They demonstrated self-awareness of their emotional states and employed various coping strategies, such as engaging in enjoyable activities like listening to music, exercising, journaling, or spending time in nature. In moments of emotional distress, they tended to seek social interaction rather than withdrawing or isolating themselves. This proactive engagement helped them maintain emotional balance and gain support from their social environment. Additionally, the subjects showed an ability to reflect on their feelings and manage impulsive reactions in challenging situations. Family support, particularly from parents, was found to play a crucial role in shaping their emotional coping mechanisms. The study concludes that only children, despite not having siblings, are capable of developing healthy emotional regulation skills through supportive environments and adaptive personal strategies.

Keywords: Behavioral Patterns; Emotional Regulation; Only Children; Parental Influence; Social Adaptation.

1. Introduction

According to Sarwono (2006), adolescence is a period in which individuals develop from the first time they show their secondary sexual characteristics until they reach sexual maturity. Rapid adolescent growth has a significant impact on the attitudes, behavior, health, and personality of the adolescent. This period is also filled with various uncertain feelings, such as anxiety and doubt, where hopes, challenges, joys and sorrows must all be overcome with a very hard struggle, towards a better future and mature adulthood (Rahmawati., et al, 2022). The adolescent phase itself is a very important and crucial developmental phase for adolescents, starting with the maturation of physical organs or sexual conditions so that they are able to reproduce. Adolescents with an age range of 12 years to 21 years are one of the most crucial developmental stages in human life (Rahmawati., et al, 2022).

Gratz and Roemer (2004) state that emotional regulation includes efforts to accept emotions, control impulsive behavior, and the ability to use emotional regulation strategies flexibly according to the situation. Gratz and Roemer (2004) explain that there are four

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aspects used to determine an individual's emotional regulation ability, namely: (a) acceptance of emotional response (acceptance of emotions), (b) strategies to emotion regulation (emotional regulation strategies), (c) engaging in goal-directed behavior (involvement in purposeful behavior), and (d) control of emotional responses (control of emotional responses).

An only child is a child who has no brothers or sisters, whose mother only gives birth once and is the only child in the family (Laybourn, 1994). Most people consider only children to be spoiled, aggressive, and have difficulty adjusting. Only children mature more quickly than other children their age because, with the full attention of their parents, they grow more confident, speak more assertively and clearly, and always stand out (Mind, 2003). Only children tend to be critical critics or rebels who try to prove themselves good enough (Mind, 2003).

Emotional regulation refers to the formation of which emotions a person has, when they have them, and how they experience or express these emotions (Gross, 2014). Therefore, emotional regulation relates to how one's own emotions are regulated (emotion regulation), rather than how emotions regulate something else (regulation by emotions). Gratz and Roemer (2004) state that emotional regulation includes efforts to accept emotions, control impulsive behavior, and the ability to flexibly use emotional regulation strategies according to the situation. The five points of the emotion regulation process are, situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change and response modulation (Gross, 2014).

Gratz and Roemer (2004) explained that there are several aspects used to determine an individual's emotional regulation ability, namely, Acceptance of emotional response (emotional acceptance), namely the ability to accept an event that causes negative emotions and not be ashamed to feel those emotions when facing problems. Strategies to emotion regulation (emotional regulation strategies), namely the belief in being able to overcome a problem and having the ability to find a way to reduce negative emotions so that one can quickly calm down after feeling excessive emotions. Engaging in goal-directed behavior (purposeful behavioral engagement), namely the ability to not be affected by negative emotions felt so that one can continue to concentrate, think and do something well. Control emotional responses (emotional response control), namely the ability to be able to control the emotions felt and the emotional responses displayed (physiological responses, behavior and tone of voice), so that one will not feel excessive emotions and which are used to determine an individual's emotional regulation ability, namely: (a) acceptance of emotional response (emotional acceptance). (b) strategies to emotion regulation (emotional regulation strategies). (c) engaging in goal-directed behavior (purposeful behavioral engagement). (d) control emotional responses (control emotional responses).

An only child is a child who has no brothers or sisters, where their mother only gives birth once and is the only child in a family (Laybourn, 1994). Most people think that only children are spoiled, aggressive and have difficulty adjusting. Only children mature faster than other children their age because with the full attention of their parents, they will grow more confident, speak more firmly, clearly, and always stand out (Mind, 2003). Only children tend to be critical critics or rebels who try to prove that they are good enough (Mind, 2003).

Emotional regulation refers to the formation of which emotions a person has, when a person has them, and how a person experiences or expresses these emotions (Gross, 2014). So, emotional regulation is related to how one regulates one's own emotions (emotion regulation), rather than how emotions regulate something else (regulation by emotions). Gratz and Roemer (2004) said that emotional regulation includes efforts to accept emotions, control impulsive behavior and the ability to use emotional regulation strategies flexibly according to the situation. The five points of the emotional regulation process are, situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change and response modulation (Gross, 2014).

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Control emotional responses (emotional response control), namely the ability to be able to control the emotions that are felt and the emotional responses that are displayed (physiological responses, behavior and tone of voice), so that one will not feel excessive emotions and show appropriate emotional responses.

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. During this stage, many changes occur, both physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively (Hikmandayani et al., 2023). The adolescent phase itself is a very important and crucial developmental phase for adolescents, beginning with the maturation of physical organs or sexual conditions so that they are able to reproduce. Adolescence, aged 12-21 years, is one of the most crucial developmental stages in human life (Rahmawati et al., 2022). Rapid adolescent growth has a significant impact on the attitudes, behavior, health, and personality of adolescents themselves. This period is also filled with various uncertain feelings, such as anxiety and doubt, where hopes, challenges, joys and sorrows must all be overcome with a very hard struggle, towards a better future and mature adulthood (Rahmawati et al., 2022). The purpose of this study was to obtain an overview of the emotional regulation carried out by only children. Desmita (2017) classifies the phases of adolescent development into three, namely, physical development, physical changes are the primary symptoms in adolescent growth, which have an impact on psychological changes (Sarwono in Desmita, 2017). Cognitive development, adolescence is a period of life where the capacity to acquire and use knowledge efficiently reaches its peak (Mussen, Conger & Kagan in Desmita, 2017). This is because during the adolescent period, the brain growth process reaches perfection. Psychosocial development, identity development during adolescence is also very important because it provides a foundation for psychosocial development and interpersonal relationships in adulthood (Jones & Hartmann in Desmita, 2017). According to (Havighurst in Ali & Asrori, 2014), adolescents have developmental tasks that must be completed well by adolescents, namely, achieving new, more mature relationships with peers, both male and female, achieving male and female social roles, accepting their physical condition and using it effectively, seeking emotional independence from parents and other adults.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

This study used a qualitative method, Qualitative methods are used to obtain in-depth data, data that contains meaning. In this study, the research strategy used was phenomenology. The type of sample that will be used in this research is Incidental Sampling, which is a sampling technique based on chance, namely anyone who accidentally meets the researcher can be used as a sample.

The subjects in this study were three only children. The data collection method used in this study was a semi-structured interview method. The results of the study showed that all three subjects had regulated their emotions well. The difference between this study and previous studies is that the previous study conducted by Hasmarlin and Hirmaningsih used a quantitative method. The sample used was 398 high school students. The sampling technique used in the study conducted by Hasmarlin and Hirmaningsih was nonprobability sampling using quota sampling. Data collection carried out in previous studies used a scale.

The results of the research conducted by Hasmarlin and Hirmaningsih are Based on the results of the study, it was found that 146 teenagers aged 16 years (36.8%), 208 people aged 17 years (52.1%), and 44 people aged 18 years (11.1%). So it can be seen that most of the subjects were 17 years old. Based on the gender category, 138 male teenagers (52.1%), and 260 women (65.2%) were female. The research results revealed a difference in emotional regulation between male and female adolescents, with a significance level of $p = 0.000$, and a higher mean score for males ($M = 44.43$) than for females ($M = 41.88$). This indicates that males have better emotional regulation than females. These differences may be influenced by socialization, which is one of the factors that plays a role in producing emotional differences between women and men.

From these results, it can be concluded that there are differences in the level of emotional regulation between female and male teenagers. Emotional regulation of male teenagers is higher than that of female teenagers. This difference is due to differences in expressive suppression and socio-cultural demands on them.

3. Proposed Method

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods are based on the philosophy of postpositivism, used to examine natural object conditions (Sugiyono, 2013). Qualitative methods are used to obtain in-depth data, data that contains meaning. Meaning is actual data, definite data that constitutes a value in the visible data (Sugiyono, 2013). In this study, the investigative strategy used is phenomenology. The phenomenological approach emphasizes various subjective aspects of human behavior. Researchers then seek to understand how subjects give meaning to events that occur around them (Salim and Syahrums, 2012). Phenomenology seeks to uncover, study, and understand a phenomenon and its unique context experienced by individuals (Fiantika et al., 2022).

3.2. Research Subjects

The type of sample used in this study is incidental sampling. This sampling technique is a sampling technique (Sugiyono, 2013). Incidental sampling is a sampling technique based on chance, meaning anyone who happens to meet the researcher can be used as a sample if they are deemed suitable as a data source (Sugiyono, 2013).

The number of subjects in this study was three. The informants were female. The subjects used in this study were aged 15 to 21. The research was conducted using structured interviews and observation during the interviews.

3.3. Data Collection Method

The data collection method used in this research is semi-structured interviews. Interviews are used as a data collection technique when researchers want to conduct a preliminary study to identify research problems, and also when researchers want to learn more in-depth information from respondents and the number of respondents is small (Sugiyono, 2013). This type of semi-structured interview falls into the in-depth interview category, and is more flexible in its implementation compared to structured interviews (Sugiyono, 2013). Therefore, when conducting the interviews, the data collector prepared a research instrument in the form of written questions (Sugiyono, 2013).

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

This research uses a content analysis approach. Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for and compiling data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documentation. This involves organizing the data into categories, breaking it down into units, synthesizing it, arranging it into patterns, selecting what is important and what will be studied, and drawing conclusions that are easily understood by both oneself and others (Sugiyono, 2013)..

4. Results and Discussion

The emotional response displayed by the three subjects when facing problems was a change in facial expression, becoming unusual. The first subject, when experiencing a problem, felt stressed and depressed. When stressed and depressed, the subject became confused about what to do. When experiencing a problem, the subject did not constantly think about it. The second subject, when experiencing a problem, responded calmly and tried to quickly resolve the problem and find a solution. The third subject, when experiencing a problem, responded emotionally with sadness. The subject became less cheerful.

The emotional regulation strategies displayed by the three subjects when facing problems included engaging in enjoyable activities or activities they enjoyed. The first subject engaged in activities such as playing with friends and calming themselves with positive thoughts to reduce the negative emotions they felt when facing the problem. The second subject engaged in enjoyable activities such as playing with friends or going for walks to reduce the negative

emotions they were experiencing. The third subject sought out enjoyable activities to reduce the negative emotions they were experiencing.

The three subjects engaged in purposeful behavior when facing problems, engaging in activities that could alleviate the negative emotions they were experiencing. The first subject calmed themselves, trying to remain calm, so they could concentrate and do things well. They also enjoyed playing games to relieve negative emotions when experiencing problems. The second subject remained focused on completing their tasks or work when experiencing a problem. They put aside their problems and focused on completing their tasks. Then, after the task was completed, the subject resolved the problem.

5. Conclusions

The three subjects demonstrated emotional acceptance, with their emotional responses changing to unusual facial expressions when facing problems. The emotional regulation strategies demonstrated by the three subjects when facing problems included engaging in enjoyable or preferred activities. Engaging in goal-directed behaviors demonstrated by the three subjects when facing problems involved engaging in activities that could alleviate the negative emotions they were experiencing. Controlling emotional responses was demonstrated by displaying facial expressions. When experiencing a problem, the three subjects had different facial expressions and did not display their usual cheerful expressions.

Researchers interested in conducting research with the same title are encouraged to conduct research with subjects of different ages and genders. The reference sources used in this study were incomplete; therefore, future researchers are encouraged to expand their sources of reference related to the chosen research title.

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