

Sibling, Peer Relationships of Adolescents and Emotional Regulation: A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence involves significant physical, cognitive, and social changes that lead to intense emotions requiring regulation. Sibling and peer relationships during this time provide support and opportunities for self-identity exploration and social development. This study explored the link between sibling and peer relationships and emotional regulation in 64 adolescents (32 males, 32 females) aged 14-17, using established questionnaires for emotional regulation, peer, and sibling relationships. Findings showed a significant positive correlation between sibling relationships and emotional regulation, suggesting that positive sibling bonds help adolescents manage emotions better. No significant correlation was found between peer relationships and emotional regulation, although it was positively related.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Sibling Relationships, Peer Relationships, Emotional Regulation*

Adolescence marks a unique and critical phase of human development, bridging the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is characterized by profound physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes that collectively shape the individual's evolving identity. The term 'adolescent' originates from the Latin *adolescere*, meaning 'to grow up' or 'to mature,' aptly capturing the essence of this period. Although adolescence as a distinct developmental stage gained recognition only in the 20th century, it is now widely acknowledged as a phase of significant transformation influenced not only by biological processes but also by social, economic, political, and cultural factors.

During adolescence, emotional experiences often outpace rational thought. The individual struggles to differentiate feelings from cognition, leading to mood swings and heightened emotional sensitivity. Hormonal fluctuations exacerbate this emotional volatility, causing adolescents to experience exaggerated and sometimes uncontrollable feelings. This heightened emotionality can contribute to irritability, moodiness, and internal conflict, as adolescents negotiate changes in their bodies alongside evolving social expectations. A key developmental task in this period is the pursuit of autonomy, as adolescents seek to establish independence from parents and siblings while simultaneously forging meaningful peer connections. This phase is marked by intense curiosity, experimentation, and energy, all essential to navigating the complex path toward adult functioning. As Hall (1904) famously

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described, adolescence is a period of ‘storm and stress,’ highlighting the normative challenges inherent in this stage.

Central to adolescent development is the need for belonging and social integration. Adolescents strive to find their place in society by forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships. These relationships include family members, peers, and other social contacts and are critical for emotional and social development. Among familial relationships, sibling bonds hold particular importance during adolescence. In many cases, adolescents report closer and stronger connections with siblings than with parents, as siblings often provide a unique environment for learning social skills such as emotional regulation and empathy. These relationships are characterized by warmth, support, and opportunities for cognitive and socio-emotional growth.

Sibling relationships are dynamic and evolve during adolescence. Although teenagers increasingly seek autonomy and spend more time with peers and romantic partners, reducing joint activities and companionship with siblings, the emotional bonds often remain strong. Positive sibling relationships established in childhood tend to persist, offering ongoing affection and care that contribute to better adolescent adjustment. Research suggests that girls, particularly sisters, tend to place a higher value on emotional closeness within sibling relationships than boys, with sister-sister pairs typically exhibiting the strongest bonds (Feinberg, Solmeyer, & McHale, 2012; Berk, 2007). Moreover, sibling interactions are influenced by and influence other interpersonal relationships, especially friendships. Warm sibling bonds can facilitate more gratifying peer friendships by providing adolescents with models for social behavior and emotional understanding.

Sibling relationships are also characterized by a complex mixture of emotions, including rivalry, teasing, pride, love, and laughter. As adolescents mature, their interactions tend to become less intense both in companionship and conflict compared to childhood, yet emotional attachment remains moderately strong. This balance enables siblings to act as emotional supporters and communication partners, adapting their relationship in response to developmental changes. Older siblings often serve as mentors and caregivers, offering guidance on challenges such as schoolwork, romantic relationships, and future planning. This mentorship is particularly valuable to younger siblings, who benefit from the comfort and stability provided during family stress or transitions (Feinberg et al., 2011). However, sibling relationships are not without difficulties; conflicts including physical violence such as hitting or punching can occur, although such negative interactions typically decrease as younger siblings gain independence.

Alongside sibling influences, peer relationships gain prominence during adolescence as youth spend more time outside the family and seek social validation from their peer groups. Peer relationships teach adolescents symmetrical reciprocity—mutual give-and-take—and play an integral role in socialization and identity formation. Positive peer interactions are known to foster interpersonal and intrapersonal protective factors, such as increased self-esteem and social support, which help adolescents manage stress and emotional challenges. Peer groups significantly shape attitudes, learning, and aspirations during adolescence, with acceptance within these groups critically affecting social functioning and emotional well-being.

The capacity to regulate emotions—defined as the processes by which individuals influence their emotional experiences and expressions—is closely linked to successful peer relations.

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Emotional regulation is crucial for adaptive functioning, enabling adolescents to respond appropriately to environmental demands. When adolescents face rejection or exclusion from peer groups, they may experience loneliness, depression, anxiety, or even suicidal ideation. Prolonged peer rejection can impair emotional awareness and regulation, potentially leading to maladaptive behaviors such as aggression or antisocial conduct. Conversely, supportive peer relationships contribute to emotional stability and resilience.

Emotion regulation itself is a multifaceted construct encompassing behaviors like reappraising challenging situations to reduce negative feelings, suppressing visible signs of distress, or focusing attention on positive aspects to maintain calmness. Research distinguishes between maladaptive strategies such as expressive suppression, which are linked to poorer social support and well-being, and adaptive strategies like cognitive reappraisal, which promote better interpersonal relations and psychological health (Gross, 2015; Selvam, 2017).

Empirical studies emphasize the significance of sibling and peer relationships for emotional regulation and overall adolescent adjustment. Oliva and Arranz (2005) found that positive sibling relationships are associated with improved social-emotional adjustment, particularly in girls who also reported enhanced relationships with parents and peers. In contrast, for boys, sibling relationships appeared less connected to other family and personal variables. Other studies report that siblings provide emotional nurturance and empathy, which correlate with better emotional regulation in adolescents (Alkema, 2013). Additionally, the presence of multiple siblings has been linked to greater personal adequacy and social maturity among adolescents (Pant & Singh, 2016).

Research also highlights the complex interaction between peer influence and emotional development. Selvam (2017) noted that adolescents experiencing negative emotions and peer rejection demonstrate difficulties modulating emotional expression, leading to intensified reactions to social stimuli. Caroline et al. (2018) reported a positive correlation between peer relationships and happiness among early adolescents, underscoring the importance of peer acceptance for emotional well-being.

In sum, adolescence is a period of rapid development marked by emotional upheaval and social challenges. Sibling and peer relationships play pivotal roles in shaping adolescents' emotional regulation and social competence. Positive sibling bonds offer a foundation for learning interpersonal skills and coping with family stressors, while peer relationships provide critical opportunities for social support and identity formation. Understanding how these relationships influence emotional regulation is essential for promoting healthy adolescent development and psychological resilience.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives:

To examine whether sibling and peer relationships have an impact on emotional regulation in adolescents.

Sample:

The sample consists of 64 adolescents (32 males and 32 females) aged between 14 to 17 years. All participants had either younger or elder siblings and peers.

Instruments:

- The **Peer Relationship Scale**, developed by Faith Aydogdu, is a 29-item questionnaire designed to assess adolescents’ quality of peer interactions using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties with a **Cronbach’s alpha of .93, split-half reliability of .85, and test-retest reliability of .82**, indicating high internal consistency and stability over time.
- The **Sibling Relationship Questionnaire** (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) consists of 48 self-report items that assess various dimensions of sibling relationships. Respondents rate items on a **5-point Likert scale**, ranging from “*Hardly at all*” to “*Extremely much*”. The tool has demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a **Cronbach’s alpha of .63** and a **test-retest reliability of .71**.
- The **Emotional Regulation Questionnaire** (Gross & John, 2003) is a 10-item scale that evaluates two key emotion regulation strategies: **cognitive reappraisal** and **emotional suppression**, rated on a **7-point Likert scale**. The subscales have shown good internal consistency, with **alpha reliabilities of .79** for cognitive reappraisal and **.73** for emotional suppression, along with a **test-retest reliability of .69**.

Procedure:

The data for this study were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms. Using purposive sampling, 64 adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years, each having either younger or elder siblings and peers, were recruited to participate. The survey was divided into four sections. The first section provided instructions about the study and obtained informed consent, along with demographic details such as age, gender, and sibling information. The second section consisted of the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003), which measures cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression. The third section included the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire by Furman and Buhrmester (1985), assessing adolescents’ perceptions of their sibling relationships. The final section contained the Peer Relationship Scale constructed by Faith Aydogdu, which evaluates peer relationship quality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. After submitting their responses, participants received a debriefing explaining the study’s purpose. In total, 64 completed questionnaires were collected and included in the analysis.

RESULTS

Table No. 1: Descriptive Statistics of Sibling and Peer Relationships with emotional regulation

	Emotional Regulation	Peer Relationship	Sibling Relationship
Mean	50	114.20	148.97
SD	7.29	17.68	19.86
Confidence level	1.81	4.42	4.96
Total	64	64	64

Table No. 2: Correlation of sibling and peer relationships and emotional regulation

	Total (N)	Sibling Relationship and Emotional Regulation	Peer Relationship and Emotional Regulation
Participants	64	.33	.10
Males	32	.32	.25
Females	32	.35	-.01

Table No. 3: Correlation based on gender of participants and their type of sibling

Sibling relationship and emotional regulation	
Male and elder sibling	.39
Male and younger sibling	.20
Female and elder	.40
Female and younger	.80

Table No. 4: Correlation based on gender of peers

Peer relationship and emotional regulation	
Male peers	.33
Female peers	-.04

DISCUSSION

Adolescence is a period marked by significant changes and challenges, including physical development, cognitive growth, and evolving social interactions, often described as a phase of "stress and storm." These transitions bring heightened emotional experiences, making emotional regulation a critical developmental task. Interpersonal relationships, particularly those with siblings and peers, play an important role in shaping adolescents' emotional regulation (Stormshak et al., 1996). Siblings, whether younger or older, provide care, warmth, guidance, and support, while peer relationships expand as adolescents seek autonomy from their parents.

The present study aimed to examine whether sibling and peer relationships impact emotional regulation in adolescents. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between sibling relationships and emotional regulation, indicating that positive sibling interactions enhance adolescents' ability to regulate their emotions effectively. Conversely, although peer relationships were positively correlated with emotional regulation, this association was not statistically significant.

Descriptive statistics showed the means and standard deviations for emotional regulation ($M = 50$, $SD = 7.29$), peer relationship ($M = 114.20$, $SD = 17.68$), and sibling relationship ($M = 148.97$, $SD = 19.86$) across the 64 participants. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between sibling relationship and emotional regulation ($r = 0.33$), while the correlation between peer relationship and emotional regulation was weaker and not statistically significant ($r = 0.10$).

The significant relationship with siblings aligns with previous research suggesting that siblings provide emotional support, nurture independence, and boost self-esteem, which collectively contribute to better emotional regulation (Gautam, 2015). Although peer relationships did not show a significant correlation, their positive trend suggests that good peer relations may still support emotional regulation. However, peer rejection or negative peer interactions may lead to maladaptive behaviors stemming from poor emotional regulation. Notably, males showed significant positive correlations between both sibling relationships ($r = .32$) and peer relationships ($r = .25$) with emotional regulation, whereas females showed a significant positive correlation with siblings ($r = .35$) but a non-significant negative correlation with peer relationships ($r = -0.1$).

Further analysis revealed that male adolescents with older siblings had a significant positive correlation with emotional regulation ($r = .39$), supporting the role of older siblings as

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mentors and role models who aid in emotional development. In contrast, the relationship between males with younger siblings and emotional regulation was not significant ($r = .20$), suggesting younger siblings may be less involved or less mature in providing emotional support.

For females, emotional regulation was positively associated with sibling relationships regardless of sibling age, consistent with findings that girls generally value emotional closeness and intimacy with siblings more than boys do (Feinberg, Solmeyer, & McHale, 2012). Sisters tend to maintain closer and more supportive relationships than brothers, which may explain the stronger influence of sibling bonds on females' emotional regulation. The observed negative but non-significant correlation between peer relationships and emotional regulation among females may suggest complexities in female peer interactions that warrant further investigation.

Interestingly, participants with male peers showed a significant positive correlation with emotional regulation ($r = .33$). This may indicate that male peer groups provide a space for emotional expression and regulation, possibly reflecting males' higher engagement with peers in emotional exchanges. However, the relatively low correlation could reflect the challenges adolescents face within peer groups, including pressures and emotional demands, which can complicate emotional regulation (Caroline et al., 2018).

To fully understand the negative correlation between female peer relationships and emotional regulation, factors such as the duration and quality of friendships should be considered, as these may influence the emotional support available through peer connections.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of sibling relationships in enhancing adolescents' emotional regulation. Both males and females tend to share close bonds with their siblings, who provide a secure, nurturing environment that fosters emotional growth and development. While the influence of peer relationships on emotional regulation was found to be less definitive, the findings suggest that peers also contribute, at least partially, to adolescents' emotional management. Therefore, for the healthy emotional development of adolescents, attention to both sibling and peer relationships is essential.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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