Correlation of Difficulty in Emotional Regulation with Behavioral Problems Among Young Children in Both Private and Public Sectors Educational Institutions of Swabi

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Abstract

Emotional regulation is the essential skill that enables people to effectively control their emotions and behaviors. It is crucial for young children, in particular, because they are still developing their capacity for passionate direction. The capacity to control one's emotions in a way that is both adaptive and acceptable in society is known as emotional regulation. This study used an analytical cross-sectional design to find the correlation between difficulty in emotional regulation and behavioral problems. It also used a purposive sampling technique to collect data from 400 children of both sexes at public and private schools. Most of the study participants were male, in the age range of 7-9. In regards to birth order, most of the study participants (38%) were firstborn, followed by second born (30%) and lastborn (26.5%); however, the only children accounted for merely 5%. The Pearson correlation test was run to find the correlation between difficulty in emotional regulation and behavioral problems in this study. The test value was 0.42, and the p-value was less than 0.05, indicating that emotional regulation difficulty has a positive correlation with behavioral problems. The current study's evidence strongly suggests that emotional regulation can assist in treating behavioral issues in young children. The study's findings show that emotional problems correlate negatively with emotional regulation, whereas behavioral problems correlate positively with emotional regulation difficulties. This suggests that enhancing emotional regulation may lessen behavioral problems in children.

Keywords: Difficulty, Emotional Regulation, Behavioral Problem, Children.

Introduction

Emotional regulation is a crucial developmental milestone in life and significantly affects children's academic, social, and behavioral outcomes (Thompson, 1994). Lack of direction is the main childhood problem. A broader range of therapeutic strategies designed for children in school can address the difficulties kids face in managing, comprehending, and expressing negative emotions. According to Chacko et al. (2024) four widely used treatments acknowledge the connection between behavior and emotion and aim to help children move in the direction of their feelings:

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- Child-centered play therapy
- Mentalization-based treatment for children
- Direction-centered treatment for children
- Argument-based behavior treatment for children

Many governments and decision-makers have not acknowledged the prevalence of behavioral problems in youngsters. These concerns include behavioral issues in kids growing up in nuclear families, kids trapped in prostitution and child labor, and kids who get lost or relocated because of unforeseen events (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007). Roughly one-third of the world's population is under the age of 15, and 5–15% of them have behavioral disorders that make them socially and emotionally incapable (NIPCCD, 1989). Malhotra (1992) asserts that 80% of children worldwide reside in developing countries with minimal support for mental health services.

According to a survey conducted by Prakash et al. (2008), the prevalence of mental health problems among school-age children in India has increased from 6.33% to 43.1%. Children often experience sadness, anxiety, agitation, and fear. They might exhibit difficulty focusing, be easily distracted, be careless, and have their emotions. They complain of various bodily ailments. These are a few typical indicators that suggest something is wrong and the child has to be considered. Most parents, educators, and other caregivers fail to recognize the more nuanced manifestations of behavioral issues. It is taken very seriously when the problem becomes severe and incapacitating (Doku & Minnis., 2016).

Emotional regulation is an essential skill that enables people to effectively control their emotions and behaviors. For young children, in particular, it is necessary because they are still developing their capacity for passionate direction. Young children's behavioral problems are frequently linked to a lack of enthusiastic control abilities, which can cause problems in their academic, social, and recreational domains. Thus, it is essential to implement interventions that help advance kids' eager self-control and lessen the severity of behavioral problems. Behavior problems in young children are a typical concern for parents, teachers, and mental health professionals. These problems can manifest in various ways, including aggression, hyperactivity, disobedience, and impulsivity, and they can be detrimental to children's development and well-being. It is estimated that 10% to 20% of the general population suffers from behavioral problems in young children (Leblanc et al., 2008).

A central contributing element to young children's behavioral issues is their inability to regulate their emotions. The capacity to control one's emotions in a way that is both adaptive and acceptable in society is known as emotional regulation. Youngsters who have trouble controlling their feelings may also have difficulty expressing themselves correctly, controlling their impulses, and managing their emotions. These difficulties might result from anger, temper outbursts, and other behavioral issues. Various factors, including environment, temperament, and heredity, shape the complicated ability of emotional regulation, it evolves. While some kids spontaneously pick up the ability to regulate their emotions, others require more help and direction (Lavigne et al., 1998). Research has demonstrated that emotion regulation programs can successfully enhance young children's ability to regulate their emotions and lessen the impact of behavioral issues. Kids who participated in an ERP program could regulate their emotions better than kids who did not. Additional research has revealed that ERP can enhance young children's general well-being, academic success, and social skills. It is impossible to overstate how crucial emotional control is for early children. Children's social, cognitive, and emotional functioning is all based on the fundamental ability of emotional control. Youngsters who struggle with emotional regulation may encounter a range of

adverse outcomes, such as subpar academic achievement, social distancing, psychological issues, and so forth (De Barardis et al., 2020).

It can be particularly difficult for parents, educators, and mental health experts to deal with behavioral issues in young children. These issues may significantly affect a child's academic performance and result in several detrimental effects, such as behavioral issues related to mental health, social isolation, and school challenges. Few interventions specifically focus on enhancing emotion control abilities, despite the availability of numerous interventions to manage behavioral issues in early childhood. According to earlier studies, parent-child interactions with aggressive children are strict rather than flexible. These strict repertoires could put kids in circumstances where they do not learn how to control their emotions. Moreover, behavioral problems are increasing daily among students acquiring any education (Setia, 2016).

In Pakistan, emotional regulation and behavioral issues among children are widely studied; however, a significant gap exists between these variables across academic institutions. Past studies have emphasized the prevalence of emotional and behavioral issues among children and adolescents, focusing on various stressors affecting their psychological well-being. Like, studies have demonstrated a relationship between emotional dysregulation and behavioral problems, such as aggression, anxiety, and withdrawal, using tools like the Youth Self-Report and School Children Problem Scales, validated within Pakistani contexts (Khurshaid, 2018; Hussain, 2010).

However, previous literature often focuses on specific cohorts, such as bereaved children or youngsters, and tiny depictions of younger children across diverse academic institutions, particularly in public and private sectors (Khurshaid, 2018: UNICEF, 2022). Furthermore, while scales for emotional and behavioral problems have been developed and validated contextually, data on their use is scarce to assess how emotional regulation influences behavioral challenges in routine school environments. Hence, the lack of comprehensive data highlights the need to further explore how emotional regulation challenges contribute to behavioral problems in school children in mainstream schools. That could guide interventions tailored to the Pakistani educational context and provide regional-specific insight into addressing cultural and contextual issues.

Methodology

The research design of this study was analytical cross-sectional. Moreover, it is cost-effective, time-efficient, and suitable for many participants at a single point in time (Setia, 2016). A purposive sampling technique was used in this study to collect data from 400 children of both sexes at both public and private schools. According to Carragher et al. (2015) participants with rich experience of the phenomenon are suitable as a purposive sample, and we selected children exposed to both study variables.

The specific age group of 7-12 was included in this study, while children with suspected mental or developmental disorders and impaired physical conditions were excluded from the study. The study tool consists of three sections. The first section comprises demographic information, such as age, education, gender, socioeconomic status, and school status. The second section discusses difficulties in children with an emotional scale of 36, and the final section comprises 18 questions relevant to behavioral problems. After approval from the Ethical Review Committee, written informed consent was taken from participants before asking questions regarding emotional regulation and behavioral issues in kids, and if so, what kind and to what extent. Answers were provided by the participants on the scales outlined in the instrument section. After being input into SPSS, the collected data was tabulated and displayed. Various statistical analyses were conducted to verify the hypothesis.

The Cronbach's α (reliability) value for the problem behavior questionnaire and the difficulties in emotion regulation scale for children are 0.97 and 0.98, respectively, which indicates that PBQ and DERSC have excellent reliability, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Reliability of the tool

Scales	*M*	*SD*	*α*	Skewness	Kurtosis
PBQ	66.4	26.6	0.97	0.08	-1.35
DERS-C	91.1	34.5	0.98	0.36	-1.00

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, Cronbach α = Reliability Coefficient, PBQ = Problem Behavior Questionnaire, DERS-C = the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Children.

Results

Following tables show demographic characteristics and overall results of the participants.

Table 2: Socio-demographic Information

Demographic		Total sample (n=400)	Percentage
Sex	Girls	206	51.5%
	Boys	194	48.5%
Birth Order	First born	152	38.10%
	Middle born	122	21.2%
	Last born	106	25.5%
	Only child	20	5%
Age group	7-9	217	54.3%
	10-12	183	45.7%
SES	Upper Class	150	37.5%
	Middle Class	143	35.8%
	Lower Class	107	26.8%
Educational level	Primary	218	54.5%
	Secondary	182	45.5%
School Type	Private	182	45.5%
	Government	218	54.5%

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of demographic variables (gender, education, age, birth order, school type, and SES). More than half of the study participants were male, in the age range of 7-9. In regards to birth order, most of the study participants (38%) were firstborn, followed by second born (30%) and lastborn (26.5%); however, the only children were accounted for merely 5%. More than half of the participants were studying at primary institutions in the public sector.

Correlation of Emotional Regulations with Behavioral Problems

The Pearson correlation test was run to find the correlation between difficulty in emotional regulation and behavioral problems in this study. The test value was 0.42, and the p-value was less than 0.05, which indicates that difficulty in emotional regulation has a positive correlation with behavioral problems.

Table 3: Correlation of Study Variables (N= 400)

Variables	1	2
Difficulty in emotional regulation	-	0.42***
Behavioral Problems	-	-

*Note: p*** = 0.00*

Behavioral Problems among Public and Private Institutions

The mean standard deviation of the private and government schools was measured, and a t-test was run to find the difference of behavioral problems among them. The results showed that there is a significant difference in behavioral problems, t (2, 398) = 2.01, p < 0.05. Students at government schools significantly scored higher on behavioral problems (M = 69.2,*5*) as compared to private school students (M = 63, p < 0.05).

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Government and Private Schools on Behavioral, Educational Institution and Behavioral Problem

Logistic Parameter	Private school (N=206)	Govt. School (N=195)	*t*(398)	*p*	*Cohen's*
	M(SD)	*M(SD)*			
PBQ	63.8 (25.9)	69.2 (25.9)	2.01	0.04	0.26

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; p = level of significance.

Emotional Regulation is Difficult among Genders

The mean standard deviation was measured for the emotional regulation among genders, and a t-test was run to find the difference among genders in facing issues in emotional regulations. The mean score of girls was 94.3 as compared to boys 87.6, and p-values are less than 0.05, indicating that there is a significant difference in emotional regulation. Females face more difficulty in emotional control compared to males.

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-value of Boy and Girl Students on Emotional Regulation Difficulty (N=400)

Logistic Parameters	Girls (N=206)	Boys (N=194)	t (398)	*p*	*Cohen's d*
	M(SD)	*M(SD)*			
DERS	94.3 (35.7)	87.6 (32.9)	1.94	0.05	0.19

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; p = level of significance.

Birth Order and Behavioral Problems

In this section, the mean and standard deviation of the birth order in regard to behavioral problems were measured, and an ANOVA test was run to find the differences in various levels of birth order in regard to behavioral problems. There is no significant difference found between them, as the p-value is more than 0.05; however, the mean score of only children is 72.1, which is greater than first-born 65.4, middle-born 66.6, and last-born 66.6.

Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation, and F-value of Birth Order on Behavioral Problems (N=400)

Logistic Parameter	1st Born (N=152)	Middle Born (N=122)	Last Born (N=106)	Only Child (N=20)	*F* (399)	*p*	*CI* 95%
	M(SD)	*M(SD)*	*M(SD)*	*M(SD)*			*LL-UL*
PBQ	65.4 (27)	66.6 (26)	66.6 (26)	72.1 (22)	0.36	0.77	63.6-68

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; p = level of significance; LL = lower limits; UL = upper limits; CI = confidence interval.

Socioeconomic Status and Behavioral Problems

The mean and standard deviation of socioeconomic status and behavioral problems were measured, and to find the significance among classes, an ANOVA test was run. The mean score for lower class was 71.3, followed by middle 68.3 and upper 61.1. The p-value was less than 0.05, indicating the significant differences among socio-economic classes in terms of behavioral problems. Students from lower classes score significantly higher on behavioral problems as compared to upper and middle classes.

Table 7: Mean, Standard Deviation, and F-value of SES on Behavioral Problems (N=400)

Logistic Parameters	Upper class (150)	Middle Class (143)	Lower class (107)	F(399)	p	CI 95%
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)			LL-UL
PBQ	61.1 (25.8)	68.3 (27.3)	71.3 (25.8)	5.21	0.00	63.8-69

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; p = level of significance; LL = lower limits; UL = upper limits; CI = confidence interval.

Discussion

The current study investigated the "relationship between emotional regulation and behavioral issues among young children." It is a fact of life in our society that we take children's bodily complaints and illnesses seriously. However, they disregard their well-being and mental health. Most parents initially disregard their child's behavioral problems because they believe that since they are still young, the problems will eventually go away as the child grows older. Emotional regulation is the essential skill that enables people to effectively control their emotions and behaviors. For young children, it is essential because they are still developing their capacity for passionate direction. Young children's behavioral problems are frequently linked to a lack of enthusiastic control abilities, which can cause problems in their academic, social, and recreational domains. Behavior problems in young children are a typical concern for parents, teachers, and mental health professionals. These problems can manifest in various ways, including aggression, hyperactivity, disobedience, and impulsivity, and they can be detrimental to children's development and well-being. A central contributing element to young children's behavioral issues is their inability to regulate their emotions. The capacity to control one's emotions in a way that is both adaptive and acceptable in society is known as emotional regulation (Chandola & Tiwari, 2015).

The findings of this study indicated that difficulty in emotional regulation has a significant positive correlation with behavioral problems. If emotional regulation is complex, behavioral problems can

increase; if students' emotional regulation is good, they can deal with behavioral problems. There is an indirect pathway from the emotional regulation of children to behavioral problems Braet et al. (2014). Bonanno et al. (2004) study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Tuning Your Temper, a quick cognitive behavioral therapy designed for kids with disruptive behavior issues. The treatment condition demonstrated that behavioral issues can be resolved by managing emotional regulation. ER strategies, problem-oriented action, and acceptance are trans diagnostically related to internalizing and externalizing problems. Examining ER techniques may have therapeutic value, particularly for kids with affective, somatic, behavioral, and ADHD issues (Braet et al., 2014).

Individuals with higher scores on poor behavioral and emotional regulation had longer pathways to impaired control and behavior issues (Calkins, 2012). Worse child emotion regulation and increased caregiver negativity independently predicted more internalizing behavior issues in children. Furthermore, as reported by caregivers, positive emotional expressiveness was found to be a negative predictor of externalizing behavior difficulties in children (Barlow et al., 2004).

The behavioral problems were different across the SES of children. The results of this study revealed a significant difference in behavioral problems. Lower-class students score high on behavioral problems and low on emotional regulations. Similarly, based on the findings of their study, Ahmed (2014) concluded that social ties acted as a mediating factor in the relationship between childhood behavioral issues and SES. Low SES children show more behavioral problems. A study on the impact of socioeconomic status on behavioral issues from preschool to early elementary school was carried out by Baqutayan et al. (2017). The findings showed that lower family income reliably predicted all behavioral issue domains. A 2023 study by Lin et al. examined the relationship between young Chinese children's negative behaviors and socioeconomic class. Low socioeconomic status and having only children can result in severe behavioral issues. Although there is a complex relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and behavioral outcomes in children, it is crucial to acknowledge this association. Lower socioeconomic background children may experience more pressure and have less access to services, which can exacerbate behavioral issues. Family structure, parental education, and community support play important roles.

This study indicated that there was a non-significant difference in behavioral problems. The only child scores higher on behavioral problems than the firstborn, middleborn, and lastborn. Only children had more problematic behavior than non-only children. According to Abd-Rahim et al. (2023), the youngest kids showed the lowest rates of mental health issues, such as emotional, behavioral, and attention issues. The pro-social conduct and resilience scores of the youngest children were also higher. Of every group, middle children scored the lowest on happiness. However, compared to later-born children, firstborn children had a higher likelihood of emotional instability (Chandola & Tiwari, 2015). There is no correlation between birth order and mental health, according to Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1978).

According to a study by Ahmed (2014) internalized symptoms are more common in firstborn children than second-born children. Although one's birth order might influence personality and conduct, it is crucial to remember that individual characteristics also play a big part and that not everyone fits the stereotypes associated with birth order. According to specific research, birth order may have a minor influence on behavior and personality traits. The varied roles that first-borns, middle-borns, and last-borns play within the family may cause them to develop distinct features.

The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant difference in behavioral problems. Government-run institutions, compared to pupils in private schools, have a higher rate of behavioral issues among students. The study was carried out in both private and public schools,

and the findings showed that public school teachers dealt with more student behavior issues than private school teachers (Thompson et al., 2009). It is usual for private schools to expel troublesome students. This indicates a significant decrease in behavioral problems and distractions. Everyone must have access to public education. That is why they do it. Additionally, because private schools frequently have a higher staff-to-student ratio, each pupil can receive more attention.

The findings of Sanders et al. (2012) imply that children's social-emotional development is not much enhanced by private education. The study also revealed a noteworthy distinction between public and private school student's academic achievement and emotional and behavioral issues. The study also looked at how well academically performing private school students were compared to students in government schools and how many more emotional and behavioral issues private school students had than students in government schools. Regarding internalizing and total behavior problems for Dharwad and internalizing, externalizing, and total behavior problems for the Wokha region, government school students scored significantly higher than students in private schools. There was also a significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups (Abikoff et al., 2015).

According to the study, tension, anxiety, and depression were more common in private schools than in government schools and among female students as well as male students (Hossain, 2029). A highly substantial correlation (p-value < .001) was discovered between teacher outcome and gender and school type. Students from poorer socioeconomic origins are among the numerous student populations that government schools frequently serve. More significant class numbers and scarce resources could make giving each student individualized attention complex. Private educational institutions might possess more significant resources, lower class sizes, and more stringent disciplinary policies. Nonetheless, behavioral problems could still occur given the pupils' wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

The male and female children scored differently on burdensome emotional regulations. Results from table 7 indicated a significant difference in emotional regulations. Male students score higher on emotional regulation difficulty than female students. It revealed that females' emotional regulation skills are more than males'. In comparison to boys, girls scored higher on the overall average of regulation according to these emotions as well as on the use of emotional regulation strategies when experiencing melancholy, anxiety, and anger.

A highly substantial correlation (p-value < .001) was discovered between teacher outcome and gender and school type. More women than males report employing most emotion management techniques. Compared to male medical students, female medical students employ a more expressive suppression emotion control method, per the study results by Matos et al. (2009). According to research, there may be variations in how people manage their emotions, but these variations are not exclusively related to a person's gender. Understanding and practicing effective emotional control techniques can help both men and women, improving interpersonal connections and general well-being. Focusing on personal characteristics instead of gender norms encourages a more truthful and comprehensive understanding of emotional control.

Conclusion

The evidence of the current study strongly suggests that emotional regulation can assist in treating behavioral issues in young children. The current study's findings indicated that behavioral problems have a negative correlation with emotional regulation, whereas behavioral problems have a positive correlation with emotional regulation difficulties. Enhancing emotional regulation may lessen behavioral problems in children. Students in government schools exhibited higher

behavioral problems than those in private institutions. Addressing the root causes of behavioral issues in government schools and providing solutions to eradicate them is vital. The results also show how SES affects behavioral difficulties. Enacting legislation that ensures all families have access to a reasonable living wage and the resources to support their children is one of the best methods to reduce the incidence of behavioral disorders, especially in low-SES households. The results show that men are more likely than women to have difficulty controlling their emotions. Therefore, courses and training are required to help male students learn how to control their emotions and avoid numerous complications constructively. Furthermore, studies show that compared to children of different birth orders, only children display more behavioral problems. As a result, additional investigation is required to identify the fundamental causes.

The results of the study indicated that children's behavioral and mental health problems should be taken into consideration in addition to parents, teachers, and instructors. A deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind these correlations may help enhance interventions meant to stop maladjustment in children. According to these conclusions, it is important to teach children the best methods for handling their emotions. It is important to teach children the best methods for handling their emotions. School-based workshops and seminars can assist with that. A school counselor should oversee and maintain the children's emotional well-being. Future research must use longitudinal study designs to assess more social relations characteristics. Based on these results, we discuss relevant theoretical and practical implications.

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