

## Problem solving, emotional regulation, alexithymia in relation to parental bonding: Study of emerging adults

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Parental bonding is an important predictor that gives a lot of insight into parent-child relationship. It is the intense attachment that develops between parents and their baby. They know that the strong ties between parents and their child provide the baby's first model for intimate relationships and foster a sense of security and positive self-esteem. Several psychological factors associated to parental bonding are problem solving, alexithymia, and emotional regulation when emotional and cognitive development is considered. This research investigates the relationship between problem solving, alexithymia, and emotional regulation in the emerging adults with respect to parental bonding. The sample consisted of 60 college going students (both male & female) from Jaipur city. The tool used were-Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 2003); Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Bagby et al., 1994); Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross et al., 2003); Social Problem Solving Inventory-Revised (D'zurilla et al., 2002). A correlation analysis was done which revealed significant relationship among the variables contributing towards making parental bond an important psychological construct affecting emotional and cognitive development of a child.

*Keywords:* parental bonding, alexithymia, emotional regulation, problem solving

Parental bonding helps in understanding the parent-child relationship; of the many different relationships people formed over the years of their life, the relationship between parent and child is among the most important. The Parent-Child Relationship is one that helps in growth of the physical, emotional and social development of the child. It is a special bond that every child and parent will enjoy and cherish. This relationship lays the basic grounds for the child's personality, life options and on the whole behavior.

Since we are saying parental bond affects mental, social and emotional health, we have taken Alexithymia, problem solving and emotional regulation as indicators of them respectively.

In today's world mental health has become one of the most talked topic, as the world keeps evolving we see new things emerging, a individuals life in today's world is far more stressful than it was before, if we establish and understand what alexithymia is we can also understand that Alexithymia is considered a risk factor for the development of several mental disorders, such as major depression, panic disorder, eating disorders and substance use disorders. Several models have been discussing the etiology of alexithymia, with some theorists theorizing that childhood events such as disturbing experiences or a dysfunctional parent-infant relationship contribute

to alexithymia.

When talking about social aspect of a child social problem-solving skills come as an important part of it. Problem solving is the most important cognitive part of our functioning; it helps us understand what our problems are, and how we should solve them. The goal of problem-solving is to overcome problems and find a solution that best resolves the issue. good problem-solving skills can take a person a long way in life, it can help them in their career, personal life and socially. How a person perceives a problem tells a lot about their cognitive behavior and emotional strength.

When we talk about emotional health of a person the first thing that strikes is emotional regulation of that person. There has been a lot of conjecture that emotional health is more important than physical health and if a person is emotionally healthy, they can fight off the deadliest of diseases. So, we can see how an individual's emotional health is by seeing how well he regulates his emotions so hence Emotion regulation is very important part of who we are as a person. It can be used to make people well and to achieve a variety of both personal and interpersonal goals. Indeed, it is important to know not only when to regulate, but also when not to regulate and instead take the emotional encounters as they are. Children develop emotional regulation styles by seeing their parents. These techniques of dealing with emotions in different relationships are thought to take a broad view to other context, such as relationships with contemporaries and therefore effect the quality of children's relationships outside the family.

### *Rationale of the study*

Parenting can be a fulfilling job that one can ever have but it's not without its problems. Modern family life can be demanding and with various difficulties on parents. A strong parent child relationship can help lead to better result and it nurtures the physical emotional and social development of a child. Emotional regulation a skill which ables an individual to regulate their own emotions and function properly in their social environment is considered important in

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today's modern life. The parental bonding is related to the emotional development of the child with his/her possibility to learn functional ways for regulating emotions (Tasca et al., 2009). A deficit in Emotional regulation, alexithymia is considered a processing disorder of affect interferes with self-regulation problem. So, a study to explore the relationship between parental bonding, emotional regulation and alexithymia would help us understand the role of parental bonding specifically in emotional regulation also when alexithymia is a deficit in emotional regulation does parental bonding play any role in that. Further when talking about social aspects is seen problem solving is considered as parental bonding also affects the social and cognitive development of a child. It is reported by many studies that parenting and parental bonding plays a significant role in problem solving skill. Based on the above discussion the aim of the present research was formulated.

### AIMS of the study

To explore parental bonding in relation to alexithymia, problem solving, and emotional regulation in college going students.

### Hypotheses of the study

There will be a significant relationship between Parental bonding and

- H<sup>1a</sup> alexithymia
- H<sup>1b</sup> problem solving
- H<sup>1c</sup> emotional regulation

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 60 college-going students including both males and females from Jaipur city.

### Inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria

- Subjects with working knowledge of English Language
- Subjects between the age group of 18-25 years (Jeffrey, 2000.)
- Participants staying with their parents
- The subjects with any chronic physical illness and psychiatric illness will be excluded
- Subjects with single parents or divorced parents Will be excluded

### Instruments

*Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 2003)*: It is a 25-item scale (12 item care & 13 item overprotection). Measurements of reliability and validity the for the total scale and the subscales appear to be acceptable and are independent of the parent's sex.

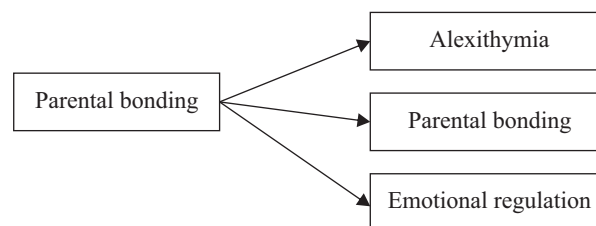
*Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Bagby et al., 1994)*: The TAS-20 is a self-report scale that is encompassed of 20 items. Reliability:- Demonstrates good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .81) and test-retest reliability (.77, p<.01). Validity: Research using the TAS-20 demonstrates adequate levels of convergent and concurrent validity

*Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross et al., 2003)*: Emotional regulation questionnaire is a 10-item scale, teste answers each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale varying from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability-excellent levels of internal consistency reliability

*Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised (D'zurilla et al., 2002)*: The Social Problem-Solving Inventory- Revised (SPSI-R) measures individual's strong points and weaknesses in their problem-solving abilities. The SPSI-R had good reliability measured by internal consistency and test-retest reliability, and adequate validity.

### Research design

Correlation research design was employed.



### Procedure

Firstly, the college going students were approached, those who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified and informed consent was obtained for data collection. Those who agreed to be part of the study were administered with Parental bonding, alexithymia, emotional regulation and problem-solving questionnaires. After which the scoring and the statistical analysis were performed.

## Results

**Table 1**

*Mean, SDs and correlation between parental bonding and alexithymia, problem solving and emotional regulation*

Variable	Mean	SDs	C	OP	DD	DI	EO	TA	PPOF	NPOF	RPSF	IF	ASF	ER
Care	25.758	5.55	1	-.457**	-.224	-.248	-.031	-.219	.365**	.026	.229	-.067	.147	.165
Over Protection	14.738	6.87	-.457**	1	.124	.236	.060	.192	-.274**	-.462**	-.008	-.048	-.235	-.008

\*=significant at 0.01 level, \*\*= significant at 0.05 level, (C=care, OP = overprotection, DD = difficult describing, DI=difficulty identifying, EO=externally oriented, TA=total alexithymia, PPOF=Positive problem orientation, NPOF = negative problem orientation, RPSF = rational problem solving, IF=impulsivity,ASF=avoidant style, ER=emotional regulation)

The above table indicates that there is a negative correlation between care and overprotection ( $r=-.457^{**}$   $p<0.05$ ) and a positive correlation

between care and positive problem orientation ( $r=.365^{**}$   $p<0.05$ ) The above table also shows a negative correlation between

overprotection with positive problem orientation ( $r=-.274^*p<0.01$ ) and negative problem orientation ( $r=-.462^{**}p<0.05$ )

Further to understand the relationship between the variables of the

study correlation analysis was also computed on Alexithymia, problem solving and emotional regulation. Results of this analysis are as follows in table 2 and table 3.

**Table 2**

*Mean, SDs and correlation between alexithymia and problem solving and emotional regulation*

Variable	Mean	Sds	DD	DI	EO	TA	PPOF	NPOF	RPSF	IF	ASF	ER
DD	15.613	4.4477	1	.918**	.383**	.928**	-.060	-.138	-.162	-.527**	-.467**	.167
DI	32.952	9.54	.918**	1	.433**	.968**	-.135	-.189	-.203	-.641**	-.557**	.139
EO	19.694	4.09	.383**	.433**	1	.624**	-.297*	-.085	-.394**	-.423*	-.410**	-.116
TA	68.258	15.91	.928**	.968**	.624**	1	-.174	-.174	-.268*	-.541**	-.570**	.100

\*=significant at 0.01 level, \*\*= significant at 0.05 level, (DD=difficult describing, DI=difficulty identifying, EO=externally oriented, TA=total alexithymia, PPOF=Positive problem orientation, NPOF= negative problem orientation, RPSF= rational problem solving, IF= impulsivity, ASF= avoidant style, ER=emotional regulation)

The above table shows a positive correlation between difficulty describing feelings with difficulty identifying emotion ( $r=.918^{**}p<0.05$ ), externally oriented ( $r=.383^{**}p<0.05$ ) and total alexithymia ( $r=.928^{**}p<0.05$ ). A negative correlation between difficulty describing feelings with impulsivity ( $r=-.527^{**}p<0.05$ ) and avoidance style ( $r=-.467^{**}p<0.05$ ). A positive correlation between difficulty identifying emotion with difficulty describing feelings ( $r=.918^{**}p<0.05$ ), externally oriented ( $r=.433^{**}p<0.05$ ), and total alexithymia ( $r=.968^{**}p<0.05$ ) We can see a negative correlation between difficulty identifying emotion with impulsivity

and avoidance style ( $r=-.557^{**}p<0.05$ ). a positive correlation between externally oriented with difficulty describing feelings ( $r=.383^{**}p<0.05$ ) difficulty identifying emotion ( $r=.433^{**}p<0.05$ ) and total alexithymia ( $r=.624^{**}p<0.05$ ). a negative correlation between externally oriented with rational problem solving ( $r=-.394^{**}p<0.05$ ), impulsivity ( $r=-.423^*p<0.01$ ) and avoidance style ( $r=-.410^{**}p<0.05$ ). We can see a negative correlation between alexithymia with rational problem solving ( $r=-.268^*p<0.01$ ), impulsivity ( $r=-.541^{**}p<0.05$ ) and avoidance style ( $r=-.570^{**}p<0.05$ )

**Table 3**

*Mean, SDs, correlation between problem solving and emotional regulation*

Variable	Mean	Sds	PPOF	NPOF	RPSF	IF	ASF	ER
PPOF	2.39	.84	1	.315*	.608**	-.034	.169	.585**
NPOF	2.53	.279	.315*	1	.142	.030	.082	.300**
RPSF	2.26	.895	.608**	.142	1	.142	.129	.464**
IF	2.55	.883	-.034	.030	.142	1	.662**	-.177
ASF	2.48	.9532	.169	.082	.129	.662**	1	-.058

\*=significant at 0.01 level, \*\*= significant at 0.05 level, (PPOF= Positive problem orientation, NPOF= negative problem orientation, RPSF= rational problem solving, IF= impulsivity, ASF= avoidant style, ER=emotional regulation)

The above table shows a positive correlation between positive problem orientation negative problem orientation ( $r=.315^*p<0.01$ ), Rational problem orientation ( $r=.608^{**}p<0.05$ ) and emotional regulation ( $r=-.585^{**}p<0.05$ ). The above table shows positive correlation between negative problem orientation with emotional regulation ( $r=.300^{**}p<0.05$ ). In the above table we can see a positive correlation between rational problem solving with emotional regulation ( $r=.464^{**}p<0.05$ ). The above table also sees a positive correlation between impulsivity and avoidance style ( $r=.662^{**}p<0.05$ ).

## Discussion

*Your children will become what you are, so be what you want them to be*

*David Bly*

A child's future physical, emotional and psychological being is a lot affected by how they bond with their parents. In today's world parent-child relationship has changed dynamically, keeping this in view the goal of the present study was to explore parental bonding in relation to alexithymia, emotional regulation and problem solving in college going students.

Parental bonding refers to the exceptional and lasting bond between a care giver and his or her child. In the present study it was observed that there is no significant correlation between parental bonding and alexithymia. As students were high on the variable of care and low in overprotection which means maybe these students were given proper care during early years which in turn caused no such correlation between parental bonding and alexithymia in the present study. one can say that individuals who received good amount of care in their early childhood years found it less difficult to express their feelings whereas individuals who were brought up with excessive care tend to keep their feelings more to themselves.

The findings after the data analysis revealed that there is a significant correlation between parental bonding and problem solving in the college students. The results show a positive correlation between care and positive problem orientation. Parental care is any behavioral design in which a parent spends time or energy in nourishing and protecting its child. Whereas positive problem orientation is being able to perceive problems as 'tests', or chances to advance something, rather than impossible difficulties at which it is only possible to fail. So, it can be observed students who are conducted with proper care in their early years are more effective in handling and managing their problems. The analysis further showed a negative correlation between overprotection, positive problem orientation and negative problem orientation. Overprotective means undue or extreme protection or guarding specifically, and negative problem orientation is the affinity to view problems as frightening or as a problem rather than chance for learning. This could mean that individuals who are overly protected by their parents often face difficulty in navigating their problems as an adult whether it is positively or negatively. They tend run away from the problem rather than facing them as throughout their early years they were protected from every problem. Evidence links parent-child interactions with children's ability to solve interpersonal problems and research suggests a relationship between children's ability to solve interpersonal problems and behavioral adjustment (Dover, 2000).

The research further shows no significant relationship between parental bonding and Emotion regulation. Even though this study did not show any significant relations many articles have shown that ill-treated youth may lack suitable role models for learning emotion regulation; thus, they tend to show shortfalls in many facets of emotion processing and regulating,

The results further showed that there was a negative correlation between alexithymia and problem solving as all the variables of alexithymia had negative correlation with impulsivity and avoidance style. It was noted in the results that individuals who were high on alexithymia score tended to have a very low scores in impulsivity and avoidant style of coping. This can be because individuals with alexithymia are normally seen with maladaptive defensive style of coping.

The analysis also showed a positive correlation between problem solving and emotion regulation as positive negative and rational problem solving showed a positive correlation with emotional regulation. This could because individuals who are good at problem solving and take it up positively, rationally normally tend to have a high emotional regulation as when one tends to solve problems having good emotion regulation helps them tackle their more confidently and keep calm through crisis. In the practice of solitary problem solving, emotions have a major role in self-regulation, directing attention and biasing cognitive processes

## Conclusion

Parental bonding is an essential part of an individual's life the present study was able to accomplish interesting and significant results the results of the present study indicate significant results indicating the importance of the parental bonding which can be used for helping parents to understand the importance of parental bonding and the effect of it on other psychological variables

## Limitations and future directions

- Small sample size
- Difference between male and female children can be studied

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