

Interpersonal Relationships and its Effects on Emotional Self-Regulation and Psychological Hardiness: Examination and Analysis – Case Study of Psychology Students of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen Branch

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of the current study was to examine the effect of the quality of interpersonal relationships on emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness using a case study of students of the Faculty of Psychology of Rudehen Islamic Azad University. The research employed a descriptive-correlational design, the statistical population of which consisted of the students of the Faculty of Psychology of Rudehen Islamic Azad University, during the academic year of 2021-2022. The research sample consisted of 200 people who were selected using simple random sampling. The participants then responded online to the Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI) by Pierce et al. (1991), the Affective Style Questionnaire (ASQ) by Hoffman and Kashdan (2010) and the Hardiness Questionnaire by Kobasa et al. (1982). Stepwise multiple regression analysis was implemented in SPSS-26 for data analysis. The findings showed that emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness were able to predict the quality of interpersonal relationships in the psychology students of the Rudehen Islamic Azad University. Ultimately, the findings of the current study advocate the idea of designing and implementing programs aimed at improving emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness in psychology students, the improvement of which are deemed to provide the very foundations for improving the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: *Quality of Interpersonal Relationships, Emotional Self-Regulation, Psychological Hardiness*

INTRODUCTION:

Interpersonal communication skills are often perceived as an intertwined and multifaceted set of capabilities that are essential for anyone who is seeking to acclimatize and compromise with different social situations, leading to healthier relationships and improved overall performance (Torbaty et al., 2020). The quality of relationships is, likewise, a multidimensional, independent yet interrelated concept that encompasses perceived social support, depth of relationships, and interpersonal conflicts, each of which can affect a person's physical and mental health in a highly distinctive manner (Hodnett, 2002). Bowlby's attachment theory establish that the reduction of interpersonal relationships can threaten a person's sense of security and cause problematic behaviors (Bowlby, 1973).

The manner by which emotions are expressed is of paramount importance to the formation and persistence of relationships. A concept highly relevant to this realm is emotional self-regulation, defined as all coping strategies and resolutions that individuals

employ when facing powerful emotions (Bayrami, 2013). The inability of teenagers to effectively regulate emotions is perceived to hinder their adaptation to stressful events in life, and can also be contributing factor to a wide range of psychological disorders (Mashirian Farahi et al., 2016). Moreover, evidence from literature indicates that emotional regulation is heavily featured in prompting mental health and positive social relationships. It is also shown to be involved in regulating emotions, cognition, behavior and physiology in stressful situations (Thompson, 1994). Emotional self-regulation attains a more important role in interpersonal relationships with increasing age, as older individuals often require more emotional self-regulation in order to remain capable of adapting to the newly-formed conditions of senior age (Strongman, 2006). Emotional self-regulation can be considered as a mechanism by which people – either consciously or unconsciously - alter their emotions to achieve their desired outcome (De France and Hollenstein, 2017). Emotional self-regulation lifts individuals in their attempt to weather difficult

situations and conditions previously presumed to be unbearable, as any weakness in emotional self-regulation can be a factor in depression, anxiety, eating disorders and personality disorders (Osvaldi et al., 2019; Chu et al., 2019). The level of emotional interdependencies at the interpersonal level is related to factors such as emotional self-regulation (Hodges, Denning and Lieber, 2018) and low resilience (Reza-Zadeh, Sadri-Damirchi and Ghamari Kivi, 2018). Research on couples reveals that the difficulty in self-regulation of emotions can oftentimes cause marital conflicts and reduced levels of satisfaction (van der Stouwe et al., 2018). Given the significant role of emotions in maintaining and nurturing close relations and its direct impact on the dynamics of individual and interpersonal emotions in married life (Schoebi and Randall, 2015), it is safe to argue that the quality of interpersonal relationships between couples is highly influenced by the very same self-regulation capacities owing to the role of cognitive evaluation and control and the way of expressing personal emotions in interpersonal interactions (Babaei Garmkhani et al., 2019).

One such component is personality hardiness. As defined by Kobasa, it evaluates the intensity and extent of a correct life (Kobasa, 1988). Psychological hardiness includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects that describe an individual's capacity to sustain healthy settings in critical times (Judkins et al., 2020). It can be described as a set of beliefs and perceptions of a person about himself, the world and events, and the accompanying personality traits that protects its holder in the face of stressful events and environmental pressures (Sarani et al., 2014). Psychological hardness can be thought of as a structure in one's personality that enables him/her to solve stressful conditions, problems and interpersonal conflicts (Nordmo et al., 2017). Evidence from the literature established that psychological hardiness improves one's ability to produce adaptive and active responses to tensions and hence can alleviate stress (Xu et al., 2019). That is, psychological hardiness is a reflection of a person's inner beliefs about the ability to face different situations, giving a sense of independence and autonomy, which is why psychological hardiness can alleviate stress (Aghayousofi and Shahandeh, 2012). Psychological hardness can be considered as one of the rather significant factors that determine the extent of one's vulnerability in facing conflicts and family problems. Research indicates the effect of psychological hardness of couples in predicting emotional divorce (Azimi et al., 2020), marital satisfaction (Seyfi and Taghavi, 2019), and marital apathy (Zali, Ahmadi, and Sarami, 2018). Other studies have also established the relationship between psychological hardiness and couples' compatibility (Roshannejad et al., 2019) and the relationship between the former and coping styles with marital intimacy (Taghavi, Tayarpour, and Hashemizadeh, 2018).

Interpersonal relationships play an imperative part in the mental health and psychopathology of humans. It is of particular influence on enduring emotional failures as well as intragroup functions. That is, people with better communication skills and communication networks can cope with their own failures and also have better intra-group and intra-organizational performance. Interpersonal relationships is also pivotal in regulating emotions and enhancing flexibility. Emotional self-regulation is a skill that manages the control of emotions and the manner through which people respond emotionally, weakness in which renders people unable in controlling their negative emotions and performing well in psychological hardiness. Optimal levels of interpersonal relationships leads to high social acceptance. Given that most people are active in different social and virtual networks, interpersonal relationships becomes even more significant. Social and virtual shifts can alter and reduce self-regulation and psychological hardiness in young people, in particular students with similar thoughts and goals. Furthermore, the desire for conducting the current study was further fueled by the effects of interpersonal communication and academic performance in individuals, its utility for students, and the inconclusiveness of the previous studies regarding the presence of emotional self-regulation variables and psychological hardiness.

Research Methodology

The current research was a basic study that employed a descriptive-correlation design for its purposes. The statistical population of this research was all psychology students of the Faculty of Psychology of the Islamic Azad University, Rudehen branch, amassing to a total of 1634 people. The simple random sampling was used for selecting the research sample, where members of the target population (students of psychology faculty) were randomly selected from the research population. The sample size for the study was determined to be 180 people using Cramer's formula, and considering the possibility of outlier data, 200 people were ultimately sampled for the study.

Research tool

Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI) was developed by Pierce et al. (1991). It initially included 29 items, but 4 items were removed in later revision, leaving 25 items in the revised editions. It employs a 4-point Likert scale for scoring. Moreover, it is consisted of three subscales: perceived social support (7 items), interpersonal conflicts (12 items) and depth of relationships (6 items). Also, in each of the 25 items, a person must evaluate the quality of his relationships with parents, friends and spouse. Furthermore, items 8 to 19 are reverse-scored.

the Affective Style Questionnaire (ASQ) by Hoffman and Kashdan (2010) is an emotional self-regulation questionnaire that includes 20 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale. After translation and re-translation, the said questionnaire was presented to relevant psychology experts to confirm its content validity. The questionnaire has three components or subscales of

concealment, adaptation and tolerance, which include 8, 7 and 5 items respectively. The items are scored as following: 1 for “I completely disagree”, 2 for “I disagree”, 3 for “I have no opinion”, 4 for “I agree”, and 5 for “I completely agree” (5). The translated version has a reliability coefficient of 0.80.

The Hardiness Questionnaire was prepared by Kobasa et al. (1982) to measure hardiness. The inventory consists of 20 items, scored on a 4-point Likert scale (“Never”, “Rarely”, “Sometimes” and “Most of the time”). This test was standardized by Zare and Aminpour (2011) on a sample of students from Payam Noor University. The hardiness questionnaire has 20 statements and its purpose is to evaluate the level of hardiness and its factors in people. Zare (2021) reported the appropriate internal consistency of this questionnaire. The results of Cronbach's alpha are presented below. Based on principal components analysis and Varimax rotation, 3 factors were extracted after 7 iterations. These three factors explain 50.16% of the total variance of the test and confirm the validity of the questionnaire. The validity and reliability of the questionnaires will be checked again by the professors of the Faculty of Psychology of Rudehen Azad University

Pearson’s correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression were employed in SPSS v.26 to estimate the correlation between the predictor variables and the criterion variables. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered significant for the purposes of the research.

Research hypotheses

Main hypothesis: The quality of interpersonal relationships can be predicted using emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness in the students of psychology faculty of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen branch.

Sub-hypotheses:

The quality of interpersonal relationships can be predicted using emotional self-regulation in psychology students of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen Branch.

The quality of interpersonal relationships can be predicted using psychological hardiness in psychology students of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen branch.

Findings

According to the results, 30 percent (n=60) of the sample were male, while 70 percent (n=140) were female. The youngest participant was 20 years old, while the oldest was 36 years old. Also, the average age of the participants and the standard deviation were 25.61 and 4.949, respectively. The frequency of single and married people was 94 (47%) and 99 (49.5%), respectively, while 7 (3.5%) people had a history of divorce. The frequency (percentage) of people participating in the research at the undergraduate and graduate level were 108 (54%) people and 92 (46%) people, respectively. Descriptive statistics of research variables were presented in Table 1.

	Skewness	Kurtosis	Median	Mean	SD
Quality of interpersonal relationships	-0.011	-0.77	187.98	187.86	12.74
Emotional self-regulation	0	-0.78	60.21	59.63	8.873
Mental hardiness	0.341	-0.511	51.50	51.73	14.061

Results from Table 1 reveal that the mean for the quality of interpersonal relationships is 187.86, while the median is 187.98, the skewness is -0.011, and the kurtosis was determined to be -0.77. Moreover, the standard deviation is 12.74. The mean for emotional self-regulation is 59.63, the median was determined to be 60.21, the skewness is 0, and the kurtosis was calculated to be -0.78. Also, the standard deviation was shown to be 8.873. The mean for the variable of psychological hardiness is 51.73, the mean is 51.50, the skewness is 0.341, the kurtosis is equal to -0.511, and the standard deviation was calculated to be 14.061.

Regarding the main research hypothesis, emotional self-regulation has three subscales (adaptability, concealment, and tolerance), while psychological hardiness has three subscales (commitment, control, and challenge). Stepwise multiple regression was used to investigate the main hypothesis of the research, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of interpersonal relationship quality model based on emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness

Model	R	R ₂	Adjusted coefficient of determination	Standard error of estimate
1	0.819	0.671	0.669	7.308

Data from Table 2 indicates that among the subscales related to emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness, only the challenge subscale from psychological hardiness is significant in the proposed model. In the stepwise regression model, variables are entered into the model one by one and continue until the significance of the variable reaches 95%, that is, the desired error level is 5%, following which the process comes to a halt.

Table 3: ANOVA of the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness

Model 1	Sum of squares	DoF	Mean square	F	Sig. level
Regression	20871.361	1	20871.361	390.802	0.000
Residual	10254.045	192	53.406		
Total	31125.406	193			

Table 3 shows whether the regression model can predict changes in the dependent variable. The data of the last column of (Sig) illustrates that the proposed model is a good predictor for the dependent variable, i.e., the quality of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the data shows that the F-value for the challenge variable is 390.802.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of research variables

Table 4: Coefficients of Quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness

Model	B	Coefficient standard error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	224.674	1.92		116.991	0.000
Challenge	-3.632	0.184	-0.819	-19.769	0.000

Data from Table 4 suggests that the regression coefficients are significant at a less-than-0.05 level. that is, a=224.674 is a constant with significance less than 0.00 while b=-3.632 is the challenge coefficient with a significance less than 0.00. Therefore, the formula for predicting the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness in the students of psychology faculty of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen branch is as follows:

$$Y=224.674+(-3.632)x$$

Table 5: Summary of the model for predicting the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation

Model	R	R ₂	Adjusted coefficient of determination	Standard error of estimate
1	0.172	0.03	0.025	7.308

Emotional self-regulation has three subscales (adaptability, concealment and tolerance). According to Table (5) among the subscales related to emotional self-regulation, only the concealment subscale is relevant in this model. In the stepwise regression model, variables are entered into the model one by one and continue until the significance of the variable reaches 95%, that is, the desired error level is 5%, following which the process comes to a halt.

Table 6: ANOVA of the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation

Model 1	Sum squares	DoF	Mean square	F	Sig. level
Regression	922.343	1	922.343	5.874	0.01
Residual	303306.071	193	157.026		
Total	31228.413	194			

Table 6 shows whether the regression model can predict changes in the dependent variable. The data of the last column of (Sig) illustrates that the proposed model is a good predictor for the dependent variable, i.e., the quality of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the data shows that the F-value for the concealment variable is 5.874.

Table 7: coefficients of the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation

Model	B	Coefficient standard error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	224.787	1.908		117.802	0.000
Concealment	-0.428	0.177	-0.172	-2.424	0.01

Data from Table 7 suggests that the regression coefficients are significant at a less-than-0.05 level. that is, a=197.082 is a constant with significance less than 0.00 while b=0.428 is the concealment coefficient with a significance less than 0.01. Therefore, the formula for predicting the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation and concealment in the students of psychology faculty of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen branch is as follows:

$$Y=197.082+(-0.428)x$$

Table 8: Summary of the model for predicting the quality of interpersonal relationships based on psychological hardiness

Model	R	R ₂	Adjusted coefficient of determination	Standard error of estimate
1	0.821	0.674	0.673	7.288

Data from Table 8 suggests that among the subscales related to psychological hardiness, only the challenge subscale is relevant in the proposed model. In the stepwise regression model, variables are entered into the model one by one and continue until the significance of the variable reaches 95%, that is, the desired error level is 5%, following which the process comes to a halt.

Table 9: ANOVA of predicting the quality of interpersonal relationships based on psychological hardiness

Model 1	Sum squares	DoF	Mean square	F	Sig. level
Regression	21342.695	1	21342.695	401.784	0.000
Residual	10305.252	194	53.12		
Total	31647.947	195			

Table 9 indicates whether the regression model can predict changes in the dependent variable. The data of the last column of (Sig) illustrates that the proposed model is a good predictor for the dependent variable, i.e., the quality of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the data shows that the F-value for the challenge variable is 401.784.

Table 10: Prediction coefficients of the quality of interpersonal relationships based on psychological hardiness

Model	B	Coefficient standard error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	224.787	1.908		117.802	0.000
Challenge	-3.648	0.182	-0.821	-20.045	0.000

Data from Table 10 indicates that the regression coefficients are significant at a less-than-0.05 level. that is, a=224.787 is a constant with significance less than 0.00 while b=-3.648 is the challenge coefficient with a significance less than 0.00. Therefore, the formula for predicting the quality of interpersonal relationships based on emotional self-regulation and

psychological hardiness in the students of psychology faculty of Islamic Azad University, Rudehen branch is as follows:

$$Y=224.787+(-3.648)x$$

CONCLUSION

The results showed that among the subscales of emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness, only the challenge subscale from psychological hardiness can predict the quality of interpersonal relationships, and other subscales fail to predict the quality of interpersonal relationships despite the. The results are in line with those of Asadi et al. (2022), Sadeghi and Moradi (2021), Azandriani, et al. (2021), Shokri et al. (2021), Alarcon et al. (2022), Huang et al. (2022). The results are, however, inconsistent with those of those of Sanii Manesh et al. (2022), Nekordan et al. (2021), and Fung et al. (2022). Owing to the fact that emotional self-regulation becomes more important with increasing age and the low average age of the sample group in this research, the variable of emotional self-regulation, despite its significant correlation with the quality of interpersonal relationships, is unable to simultaneously predict the hardiness. The similar role of emotional self-regulation and psychological hardiness in can be a cause for emotional self-regulation not being able to simultaneously predict the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Another finding is the high predictability of psychological hardiness from the quality of interpersonal relationships. It can be argued in this regard individual with higher levels of hardiness have a better understanding of the conditions and are thus able to face various problems and challenges in life with ease and solve them more competently through problem-focused coping styles. This makes them exhibit better mental health, control environmental pressures more ably and be more successful in their social relationships. As a result of their greater commitment and sense of worth, such people feel more responsibility towards others. According to the theory of Maslow and Rogers, persevering people have a special desire for perfectionism and prosperity, which can manifest in initiating and maintaining social relationships. Maddi (1994) suggested that tough people have a great desire for growth and self-improvement, thus experiencing healthier interpersonal relationships.

The results showed that emotional self-regulation (subscale of concealment) can predict the quality of interpersonal relationships. The results of the research are consistent with those of Alarcon et al. (2022), Huang, et al. (2022). It can be argued in this regard that emotional self-regulation can be described as a way to control and correctly express feelings and emotions, hence attaining prominence in expressing emotions and mutual dependencies. That is, people employ emotional self-regulation in their efforts to cope with the psycho-social environment and to pursue evolutionary goals and mental well-being (Van Lisa et

al., 2019). According to Vygotsky's theory of self-regulation, people need interpersonal and high-quality communication for their growth and development in order to improve themselves by gaining experiences. Emotional self-regulation is a sub-notion of self-regulation that causes people to experience more prosperous relationships. Also, according to the theory of autonomy or individual independence, one of the main needs of humans is to have a sense of belonging and to establish a network of social communication. As mentioned above, people who have higher levels of self-regulation can better control themselves and cope with the environment with higher efficiency.

The results further showed that psychological hardiness can predict the quality of interpersonal relationships. The results are consistent with those of Sanii Menesh, Asadpour and Zahrakar (2021), and Fung et al. (2022). That is, given that psychological hardiness encompasses a wide range of human-related concepts such as cognition, emotion and behavior and further involves important notions such as commitment, control and struggle, all of which play a significant role in one's understanding of the environment, problem-solving capacities, integral expression of emotions, adherence to goals and resistance to environmental changes. Also, tenacious people with highly combative attitude often regard challenges of life as an opportunity for change and growth, and hence behave more flexibly and adaptively in relation to the environment and people around them (Kowalski and Schermer, 2019). Interpersonal conflicts are associated with challenging interpersonal relationships, in many cases rooted in of stressful conditions and triggers. People who have high levels of hardiness have the necessary internal resources to deal with these stressful conditions, face them and resolve intra-personal and interpersonal conflicts, which as a result improves the quality of interpersonal relationships (Nordmo et al., 2017). The findings on psychological hardiness (commitment and challenge) and coping styles (problem-focused, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-focused) establish that some people who have more hardiness and use more problem-oriented approaches in instance of heightened pressure and threat. Such findings gain more prominence when considering that interpersonal conflicts in people often starts from expressing unhealthy emotions or not addressing problems. According to the theory of self-actualization (Rogers and Maslow), there is a direct relationship between psychological hardiness and self-actualization. The desire for perfectionism in some individuals and their higher levels of efforts make them always have more support in interpersonal communication and thus establish deeper relationships with others.

One of the limitations of the current research is that it fails to account for moderating variables such as gender, economic and cultural issues, mainly owing to the purpose of the research. The findings from the study indicated yet that the development of emotional self-regulation skills is able to enhance the quality of

students' interpersonal relationships. That is, more research on the subject can benefit students and psychologists alike. Moreover, the capacity to address psychological strains is of utmost significance in improving the quality of relationships.

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