

EMOTIONAL BONDS IN PERCEIVING EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING IN PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS AND GENDER DIFFERENCES DURING ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract: Interactive relationships are necessary for personality formation in all stages of life, but adolescence is a period of finding a partner; and we are interested to find out how the emotional bond with a partner reflects emotional closeness in comparison with individuals without a current relationship. In this study, we will focus our attention on the relationships of adolescents in accordance with family and partners, as well as their personal well-being. We are interested to what extent there are differences in the subjective living and the need to start a relationship across both genders. The research sample consisted of university students of humanities and economic studies (N= 98, M=23, 97; 19- 24 years) in Trnava and in Galanta (UCM, BIVŠ, UJAK). A substantial proportion of the sample represents female adolescents who are in a romantic relationship for at least a year

Keywords: family, relationships, partner relationship, personal well-being, adolescent

1. Introduction

Everyday life situations show the importance of emotional relationships which are based on emotional closeness. A question of emotional closeness is therefore a question of accepting and giving social support, particularly in areas of understanding and trust.

Such relationships are the basis for offering social support. Krivohlavý (2003) states that the impact of social support on mental health is significant. The way an individual perceives social support speaks volumes about how subjectively a quality of the whole set of social relationships that are available to an individual is perceived.

Emotional contacts and emotional ties effect the development of personality in a stimulatory way and help an individual in search for life views. Emotional closeness brings confidence and happiness which represent a powerful source of experiencing mental and social well-being. Emotions such as joy and enthusiasm are a signal of our life satisfaction and a core of social relationships. Emotions associated with the presence of close people reflect on our positive psychological state. Their absence is one of the factors that can destabilise and have a negative influence on the psychological and social world of an individual. Whereas emotional expressions reflect in physiological and psychological aspects of our health, we can conclude that to the large extent the psychological and the social dimensions of personality are a significant factor that determinates the quality of life. Subjective feelings of positive emotions in relationships tend to be evident in life and have a stronger impact on psychological and social functioning as well as on ego strength (Arrive, 2004).

The quality of relationships in the family affects the intimate personal and social relationships. The main category of positive emotional relationships is a sense of security, on the basis of which the individual creates faith or distrust towards other people. Positive emotional ties are an important factor in maintaining a mental balance and forming a healthy emotional stability of an individual. These interactions are reflected in the overall quality of interpersonal relationships. The quality of mental health factors are reflected in the personal well-being. This is a dynamic process which affects our inner harmony and spiritual balance. Mental balance shows in our general mind well-being and in functional relationships which we consider valuable. Thanks to the influence of this interaction, the personal potential of an individual can develop further. The environment in which we feel comfortable is a source of a social well-being and this is reflected in our personal well-being. Interactive relations characterise a potential which effects the personality development of an individual. A relationship can then be considered as a positive psychological factor, affecting the

mental health and personal well-being of an individual (Kras, 2001), Nakonečný (2008).

In adolescence, the quality of relationships reflects in an ability and willingness to hold a companion, or a friend. The peer relationship is based on this principle. As Vágnerová (2000, 2010) states, the value of partnerships importance makes up a large potential of social support. Social support can then be seen as help to a "soul mate". Interaction here is then enriched by a partner's affection, or love. Spezzano (2009) adds that the relationship is the best device, thanks to which we can experience love and happiness. A relationship allows us to connect with others, even provoke us to do so. Interaction with others, giving and sharing deepens a meaning and direction of our lives. In addition, we can even say that an emotional support and understanding is responsible for a creation of personal well-being of an individual. Kondáš (2002) highlights mutual understanding as the core of social support. An emotional support of people close to us helps us to find comfort.

Social support is an important factor in the development of an individual's personality. In the early period of life, the main source of support is parents, who largely shape the future relationships towards him or herself or to other people. Positive emotional bond 'the parent – child' relationship is formed and gradually deepens; it is also a source of mental and physical well-being of a child. Social support and its manifestations in the form of security protection are the 'pillars' in the development of a personality. It forms the basis for emotional stability throughout life. A romantic relationship in the period of adolescence is an important factor for an emotional fulfilment. Emotional experiences from childhood interfere in the period of adolescence, and can significantly affect an individual's relationships.

Adolescence is the second phase of a relatively long period of growing-up. It takes about 15 to 20 years to stabilise some individual variability in psychological and social areas. Entrance to the stage of adolescence is biologically limited by a sexual maturity. It is a period of comprehensive psychosocial transition. The period of adolescence is influenced by two social milestones. The first is completion of compulsory schooling, and the second is preparing for a professional life. Preparation for a career is associated with an economic independence, which firstly occurs among pupils and later in undergraduates (Rican, 2010). The period of adolescence can be seen as a bridge to adulthood, where the transition is obvious due to an economic independence and need to be independent. In this regard, Vágnerová (2000) states that for many adolescents adulthood is not that attractive and they are trying to delay the process of growing-up. The author also sees this period as a "cult of immaturity", which affects adolescent behaviour.

With regard to immaturity, the data obtained from adolescents confirmed that men have short-term relationships in this period of life. Adulthood can be understood as a social milestone, when adolescents gain more life experiences. The duration of this period is described as a psychosocial moratorium by Erikson in Rican, 2010.

Economic and social conditions of the society as well as the current lifestyle of young people have resulted in a slower independence process and often cause a longer and stronger dependency on parents. Despite this fact, there is a strong need to find a soul mate, or a partner.

However, we can say that a partnership of adolescents has an effect on a lifestyle, developing identity and in search for personal satisfaction, happiness, success and so on.

As an adolescent gradually matures, the need for a fulfilling partnership grows. The need for such a relationship is becomes a

necessity for psychological, social and physical development (Vágnerová, 2000). "Some values are common to entire mankind" (Maslow, 2000). This value is called love and it occurs at the forefront of the value chain of adolescents. The need to develop emotional relationships is not only tied with parental love, but also with a partner love. Parts of the internal structure of human beings are not only physical needs but also psychological needs (Maslow, 2000). Such a need for love is involved in shaping the psychological health of an individual. As reported by several authors, eg. Vágnerová (2000), Langmeier, Krejčířová (2006), as an individual's personality matures; it results in identifying a range of values, which are important to an individual. Partnership and love belong to the most important values in the period of adolescence. According to Frankl (in Krivohlavý, 2003), a partnership can be considered as a significant factor for a meaningful life.

Partner relationship can be considered as a source of mental and physical well-being and can become the main purpose of life for many individuals. Grun (2011) notes, that romantic love plays a big part in searching for 'the meaning of life'.

A strong emotional relationship gives the direction of human existence, motivates to action, integrates and directs the existence of an individual and helps his well-being. It therefore distracts attention from itself and meaningfully fulfils the life of an individual. According to Grün (2011), one needs and desires relationship. However, we live in 'the era of individualisation' which is resulting in people not concentrating on forming a partner relationship, but their energy focuses more on the development of their own lives.

The current need for individualisation leads to the development of skills for self-improvement and pursuit of personal goals, which may also become the meaning of life for some. Spezzano (2009) in this regard, states that the need for individual excellence can stop us finding a mutual proximity in romantic relationships.

Individualisation can greatly develop the psychological dimension of an individual in terms of saturation over other values, such as partnership and love. Kofman (2010) states that some people limit their own spiritual activities over their work-related activities, which can define their personal and social identity. According to Grenberga (2001), adolescents may be affected by existing social politics, changes in the legal system and the mass media.

In a study devoted to the meaning of life (Mičková 2012, 2013), we found out that young people are capable of subjectively experience psychological well-being without being in a relationship. These findings support Kofman's (2010) argument about the individualisation of personality. To some extent, individualisation may be an obstacle in strengthening love.

According to Spezzano, relationships have healing power. In addition, the author thinks that in order to reach excellence, partners need to give and receive admiration and love at some level.

In 2012, we conducted research based on a sample of young adults. Our findings demonstrate the importance of emotional relationships and emotional closeness during a period of young adulthood. Perception of friendly, personal and sexual relationships is perceived stronger by individuals who have a romantic relationship, while the greater emphasis is on personal relationships rather than sexual relations. The quality of emotional support or emotional closeness is significantly influenced by existing partner relationships. We can then conclude that if an individual is in relationship, the perception of their social support is significantly higher when compared to individuals who are currently not in a relationship. We think that even if we build our personal happiness on certain values, which are to some extent shared by all of us, emotional relationships and positive emotional bonds give an individual a sense of joy and happiness. The quality of partner relationships is reflected in

the personal well-being of an individual who is then able to concentrate on work and rest, and also on working efficacy.

Emotional saturation is a prerequisite for a good quality of being in all stages of life (Smith, 2001, (Krivohlavý 2009) and it is an important prerequisite for quality of life. Individual findings and search can be found for example in Harinekova's research in (2003, 2004), Matějček (2002), Sobotková (2007), A Keys Ryff (1995), Rhoades (2008), Ruiselovej (2006), Greenberger et al (2001) and others.

Cobb (in Hewstone, Stroebe, 2006) defines social support as a summary of information from people who love and show interest in themselves. The author sees individuals as part of a communication network with mutual obligations. Sobotková (2007) states that family relationships are the foundation of emotional saturation. According to the author, they are defined by the existing intensive and continuous psychological and emotional ties. Gecková, Pudelský, Tunistra (2001) conducted a research which showed that adolescents do not experience adequate social support in their social environment. This insufficiency was mostly missing from their mother. Končková (2002) states, if parents are unable to adapt to the needs of the individual adolescent, their relationship might be damaged.

2. Research objectives and the research sample

The research focuses on the period of adolescence in the context of interactive relationships of adolescents in the areas of emotional ties, social connections, and the perceived psychological and physical well-being. We want to determine the level of satisfaction and mental and physical well-being level of emotional stability while comparing the perception of a social support in partners and individuals who are currently not in a romantic relationship. We are interested in partner relationships as well as family relations of adolescents. The research sample consisted of university students of humanities and economic subjects (N = 98, M = 23.97; 19-24 years) in Trnava and Galanta (UCM, BIVŠ, UJAK). A substantial portion of the sample represents female adolescent who met the criteria of being at least one year in a romantic relationship.

3. Hypotheses

H1 We expect that individuals in a romantic relationship will experience greater emotional support compared to "single" individuals.

H2 We assume that the perception of emotional closeness will be more greater in adolescents with more positive relationships within the family.

H3 We assume that the perception of emotional closeness will be greater in adolescents with higher levels of trust in interpersonal relations.

H4 We assume that experiencing emotional closeness is reflected positively in experiencing physical and psychological well-being.

H5 Adolescents with higher levels of emotional weakness will not perceive emotional closeness as strongly as individuals with higher levels of emotional strength.

4. Research Methods

Research methods were chosen in accordance with studied variables. To obtain demographic data and information on their current parent relationship, we created our own questionnaire which also includes information such as age, relationship status and sex. This data is considered as important for creating a homogeneous sample.

For finding emotional closeness, we used the Social Support Questionnaire (MOS). This questionnaire was originally developed by a group called Rand Medical Outcomes Study under the name Social Support Survey (MOS). It is an indicator of social functioning in the general population. It focuses on the estimation of anticipated social support. It also reflects an individual's subjective interpretation of his social presence. The use of the questionnaire was regulated in 2002. The regulation

was implemented by Kozeny J. and Tišanská L. The shortened Czech version consists of 18 items involving three dimensions. These are: Practical intervention, Emotional closeness, and Understanding authority. Practical intervention corresponds with Tangible Support from the U.S. version which states that emotional closeness is an expression of the American factor, Affectionate Support; this authority includes the U.S. factors: Positive Social Interaction and Emotional Informational Support. In this amended form, respondents score points on the five-point Likert scale. Each component reflects one of five grades. With respect to the suggested hypothesis, we only used a scale which detects a level of emotional support or emotional closeness. From a choice of personality questionnaires, we used the multi-factor personality questionnaire for adolescents - Migliorini's personality questionnaire, which understands the personality profile as 'an open system'. We are interested in emotional willingness, emotional family relationships, relationships with other people and physical and mental well-being. These factors are examined in relation to their current experience of emotional perception within a partner relationship. Social domain aims to obtain data about a subjective satisfaction in social relationships and intimate partnerships. Findings (based on the theoretical resources) suggest that emotional closeness is a source of emotional saturation; we used the social support MOS questionnaire in this case (emotional closeness range). The answers provide information about the perception of emotional closeness, or about the quality of social support. Our own questionnaire helped us to split individuals into several research groups. We were mostly interested in the length of a partnership and the perceptions of individual adolescents (how they characterise their current relationship - either romantically or sexually).

We consider emotional stability as a very important component of the psychological profile of every personality. The complex factor contains the following measurements: dimension of calm - restless, dimension of reassurance - inferiority feelings, dimension of personal balance - mental weakness, dimension of mental stress - mental looseness, and dimension of optimism - pessimism and dimension of mental and physical freshness - various neurotic symptoms.

To achieve our objectives, from the personality questionnaire, we also chose family relationships as we generally consider them to be the major factor in shaping the personality traits of an individual. The questionnaire provides answers based on the dimensions of negative - positive family relationships. Assumption for the personality balance is physical and mental well-being, which is examined by the dimension of health - health problems.

5. Interpretation of Results

Table 1 includes descriptive characteristics of basic variables that were included in the research. Characteristics are calculated on a sample of 98 respondents. The average value obtained in social support is 75.19 ($\bar{S}O = 13.83$), the values are in the range of 10 to 90 points, the median (79) and modus (86) have a higher value than average.

Values of emotional stability varied from 8 to 55 points, with an average of 31, 57 ($\bar{S}O = 9, 62$). The median is close to the average (30), modus as the most common value is higher from the average of 8 points (38). The average variable in family relationships was 10, 77 ($\bar{S}O = 4.68$), median (10) and modus (9) are slightly lower than average. The value range varies from 2-25 points. The variable for Welfare and Relationships with other people, respondents could score from 0-10 points. The variable Well-being, respondents achieved the full range of values; the variable Relationship with people, the minimum value was 1. Average Variables: Welfare = 4 ($\bar{S}O = 2.44$), relationship with other people = 5.55 ($\bar{S}O = 2, 20$). Median of the variable Well-being was equal to the average; the variable Relationship with other people was slightly higher than average (6) and equal to the most common value - the modus, while the variable Well-being is the most common value 1, which is significantly lower value than the average or median.

Table 1 - Descriptive characteristics of variables -social support, emoti. stability, family relationships, physical and mental well-being, relationships with r people (N 98)

N 98	1	2	3	4	5
Average	75,19	31,57	10,77	4,00	5,55
Median	79	30	10	4	6
Modus	86	38	9	1	6
Deviation	13,83	9,62	4,68	2,44	2,20
Variance	191,19	92,64	21,91	5,94	4,85
Minimum	10	8	2	0	1
Maximum	90	55	25	10	10

Legend: 1 social support, 2. emotional stability, 3.Family relationship, 4.well Being, 5. relationship with other people

Table 2 shows the result of testing H1: *We expect that individuals in a romantic relationship will experience greater emotional support compared with "single" individuals.* The variable Social Support was not distributed equally, we decided to use a non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. The result demonstrates a statistically significant difference (Sig. <0.001) in social support among individuals without a relationship, while higher levels of social support are obvious in a group of individuals who currently have a romantic relationship. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Table 2 - Social support in relation with romantic relationships (N 98)

	Relationship	N	Average Order
Social Support	Yes	55	59,01
	No	43	37,34
Mann-Whitney Test			
	Social Support		
U	659,5		
Z	-3,748		
Sig	0,000		

In Table 3 we can see calculations of the Mann Whitney U test which helped us to detect differences in social support among a group of women without a relationship, and women in a relationship. According to our results, women who are currently in a relationship show a greater closeness than women who are not in a relationship. The statistical significance is at the level of Sig. ≤ 0.001).

Table 3 - Social support in relation with romantic relationship in women N (87)

	Relationship	N	Average Order
Social Support	Yes	51	51,38
	No	36	33,54
Mann-Whitney Test			
	Social Support		
U	541,5		
Z	-3,248		
Sig	0,001		

Table 4 shows a sample of men. Due to a low number of men, we decided not to interpret the result.

Table 4 - Social support in relation with romantic relationship in men N(11)

	Relationship	N	Average Order
Social Support	Yes	4	7,50
	No	7	5,14
Mann-Whitney Test			
	Social Support		
U	8		
Z	-1,136		
Sig	0,256		

H2 : We assume that the perception of emotional closeness will be greater in adolescents with more positive relationships within the family. We expect that higher adolescents perceive positive relationships within the family, the higher they perceive emotional closeness.

To verify this hypothesis, we used the calculation of Spearman rank coefficient (variables are not equally distributed). As shown in Table 5, there is statistically no significant difference between social support and their family relationships (Sig. > 0,05). The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

H3 : We assume that the perceived emotional closeness will be noticeably higher in adolescents with higher levels of trust in interpersonal relationships – we assume that the higher the level of trust they have, the stronger they perceive emotional closeness.

This hypothesis was verified by calculating the same as in H2 (Table 5). The result does not show a statistically significant relationship between variables (Sig. > 0, 05). The Hypothesis is therefore rejected.

H4: We assume that experiencing emotional closeness is reflected positively in experiencing physical and psychological well-being - We expect that the perception of emotional closeness relates to the perception of experiencing physical and mental well-being.

This assumption was verified in the same statistical criteria as the previous assumptions and results can be seen in Table 5. As we can see, there is no statistically significant relationship between social support and well-being in the whole group (Sig. > 0.05). The Hypothesis is therefore rejected.

H5: We assume that between perceived emotional closeness, and emotional stability, there is some form of relationship. Test Results - Spearman correlation coefficient are shown in the Table 5. As we can see, there is a weak negative relationship between social support and emotional stability, which is slightly statistically higher than the acceptable value (Sig. < 0.065). We therefore reject the hypothesis, but the relationship can be still discussed, especially if it is negative - more stable individuals can experience social support more significantly.

Table 5 - Spearman correlation coefficient contains the following variables - Relationships in the family and towards other people, well-being, and emotional stability. (N 98)

	Family	People	Well-being	Emotional Stability
Spearman's social support	-0.135	-0.150	0.018	-0.188
Sig.	0.184	0.142	0.863	0.063

In Table 6, we present results for the relation between social support, family relationships and relationships toward other people, well-being and emotional stability separately for men and for women. Due to a low number of men, we cannot generalise the results. In the table below, we see a statistically significant relationship (Sig. <0.05), and this is between social support and family relationships in men (N = 11!). It is a very strong negative relationship ($\rho = -0.734$), which means that perceived social support is stronger among men with a more positive family relationship. In women, we found no statistically significant relationships.

Table 6 - Spearman correlation coefficient contains the following variables - Relationships in the family and toward other people, well-being, and emotional stability divided by gender. Men (N 11), Women (N 87)

Men	Family Relationships	Relationships towards other people	Well-being	Emotional stability
Spearman's social support	-0,734	-0,230	0,500	0,263
Sig.	0,010	0,496	0,117	0,434
Women	Family Relationships	Relationships towards other people	Well-being	Emotional stability
Spearman's social support	-0,051	-0,123	-0,001	0,195
Sig.	0,636	0,258	0,990	0,070

In table 7, we can see specific calculations between social support variables which have been observed above, particularly in individuals without a relationship, and individuals in a relationship. As we can see, a statistically significant relationship is detected between social support and emotional stability in a

group of individuals who are in a relationship (Sig. <0005). This relationship is a weak negative ($\rho = -0.269$), which is interpreted thusly; the more stable relationship a respondent is in, the greater emotional closeness is perceived. Here we also discuss the relationship between social support and the relationships with other people. This relationship is a weak negative ($\rho = -0.260$), which is just on the edge of the acceptable statistical significance (it slightly exceeds the Sig. ≤ 0.055).

There were no statistically significant relationships shown between the variables in the group of respondents without a partner relationship. (without relationship N 43, relationship N 55)

Table 7 - Spearman correlation coefficients – Emotional stability, relationships, well-being in relations with partner relationships

Without Relationship	Emotional Stability	Family Relationships	Relationships toward other people	Well-being
Spearman's social support	-0,270	-0,171	-0,160	0,021
Sig.	0,079	0,274	0,307	0,893
In Relationship	Emotional Stability	Family Relationships	Relationships toward other people	Well-being
Spearman's social support	-0,269	-0,114	-0,260	0,050
Sig.	0,047	0,409	0,055	0,716

6. Discussion

Adolescence is considered as a period of forming relationships. We think that these social relationships help to ease this period and assist in the creation of a mental balance. Although we have not studied who is inducing this emotional saturation, the significant positive relationship between emotional support and partnership was determined in the whole group. Gender differences are interesting in women who perceive social support significant stronger if they have a partner.

For men, this result was not interpreted due to a low number of respondents.

It can be concluded that women have a higher tendency to bond with a partner. Partner relationship is not however the only interactive bond, which saturates emotional closeness, it can be also provided by parents and friends. This fact is also supported by our results where we investigated the relationship between social support and family relationships. In this context, there is a significant relationship between social support and emotional stability. This result is not linked to the current partnership of adolescents. We also confirmed that perception of emotional closeness at a higher emotional stability is linked to a partnership. It also confirmed that people in partnerships have a greater confidence in people.

Social support is also related to emotional relationships within the family. It can be stated that experiencing emotional support is not near as important as the adolescent evaluates the relationship of parents and their actions but what emotional ties he/she has with their parents. The emotional attachment toward parents can be seen as an important factor for social support among adolescents, despite the fact that interpersonal interactive relationships are beginning to strongly stimulate in the adolescent's life. This emotional environment represents itself as a safe territory.

Another important finding is that emotional stability is related to the experience of social support. It can be discussed that individuals with a sense of certain safety without any neurotic symptoms, are able to experience positive emotional presence of close people. Since the perception of relationships in the closest family and a sense of well-being in relation to social support weren't confirmed, we can conclude that emotional stability is saturated by many other factors. An interesting result of the examination of gender dimension was found, where especially men perceive social support in relation to a positive perception of family relations, while in women, we didn't confirm a statistically significant relationship to the family and social support. Due to a low number of men, we would recommend this interesting result for further exploration. Based on the theoretical and practical knowledge, a long-term observation and research support a

theory that despite positive family relationships, everybody's development is different.

We focused on the period of adolescence and its definition in the context of interactive relations, respectively in the definition of current partner relations. We were interested in experiencing emotional closeness in relation to love, and in connection with the personal feature of emotional stability, as well as in relation with experiencing a state of mental and physical well-being in relationships towards people and the family. A perception of emotional closeness is higher among adolescents in a relationship. The adolescent period is dominated mainly by passion, which can be seen particularly in close contact with a partner. Due to the length of the partnership and a quality of a relationship (eros) it is possible, that this can be considered the most important factor for emotional well-being. This conclusion can be picked up especially in women who belong to a longer partnership, in comparison with men.

Another finding claims that emotionally stable individuals are experiencing significant social support. In this context it would be interesting to conduct a regression analysis and find out in which direction this is affected. Given that the sample is not representative, a regression analysis cannot be done.

Another finding showed the negative relationship between social support and emotional stability of adolescents in a relationship. Experiencing emotional closeness is associated with higher rates of experiencing social support. The findings also point at the importance of social support in relation to emotional relationships within the family. This finding underlines the importance of emotional bonds, particularly in relationships with parents. Even though adolescence form new relationships, parents continue to occupy an important place in their lives.

A significant relationship was found between social support and the emotional attachment to the family in men, while it was not in women. The number of men was low, and therefore it is not possible to generalise the results. Nonetheless, this is a strong negative relationship regardless of the low number, and can be interpreted for the whole group.

For significant factors in relation to our research, we consider emotional ties to parents, trusting other people, and emotional stability. The state of physical and mental well-being was shown in connection with social support. This could be discussed further, that another important factor in relation to personality as a mental and spiritual dimension of the personality.

An interesting finding is that men urgently need positive relationships for experiencing emotional closeness in comparison with women during adolescence. This conclusion, however, should be interpreted with caution due to the low number of women included in the research. We could argue about whether it is one of the major factors why men have more behavioural problems. Our findings confirm the importance of positive family relationships, which were also mentioned in the previous research; however it was conducted on boys at primary school. Gender difference was also seen while obtaining demographic data on the length and quality of a relationship. In this context, it can be concluded that only a small number of men were in a relationship for more than one year. We can therefore discuss different ideas about partner relationships.

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