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When Adolescent Love Turns into Resentment: Rights, Responsibilities and Emotional Regulation in the Changing Family and Social Environment

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterised by significant physical, emotional, cognitive and social changes. Romantic attraction, interpersonal relationships, peer acceptance and the need for emotional security become increasingly important during this stage. Although adolescent romantic relationships are a natural aspect of psychosocial development, certain relationships may develop into emotional dependency, possessiveness, jealousy, controlling behaviour and, in some circumstances, retaliatory aggression. Incidents of stalking, cyber harassment, intimidation and dating violence following romantic rejection raise important questions about the psychological and social conditions influencing adolescent behaviour. This conceptual paper examines the possible influence of childhood emotional neglect, family conflict, changing family structures, limited peer interaction, parenting practices, material gratification, digital culture, rejection sensitivity and inadequate emotional regulation on adolescent relationship behaviour. Drawing upon Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory, Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Parenting Styles Theory and Emotional Intelligence, the paper explores the interaction between

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individual, familial and social factors. A central argument of this paper is that children's rights and responsibilities should be understood as complementary dimensions of healthy development. While protecting children's rights remains essential, equal attention should be given to developing empathy, accountability, self-regulation, respect for personal boundaries and responsible decision-making. The paper proposes an original conceptual framework, the Rights–Responsibility–Emotional Regulation (RRE) Model, as a possible educational and preventive approach to promoting healthy adolescent relationships. The paper concludes that preventing harmful relationship behaviour requires coordinated efforts from families, educational institutions, mental health professionals and society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents one of the most significant stages of human development. It is a period characterised by changes in physical maturity, emotional experiences, cognitive development, social relationships and identity formation.

During this period, adolescents increasingly seek independence, recognition, acceptance and emotional intimacy. Friendships and romantic attractions may become important influences on their self-esteem and developing identity.

Romantic attraction during adolescence is not inherently problematic. It is a natural part of emotional and social development. However, difficulties may arise when affection becomes associated with emotional dependency, possessiveness, excessive expectations and the inability to accept rejection.

In certain circumstances, an adolescent may interpret romantic rejection not as another person's legitimate personal choice but as an insult, humiliation or threat to personal identity. Such interpretations may contribute to jealousy, repeated unwanted communication, stalking, cyber harassment, intimidation and other forms of controlling or aggressive behaviour.

Are adolescents being adequately prepared not only to experience love but also to accept rejection, respect personal boundaries and manage emotional disappointment?

Modern society increasingly recognises children's rights, freedom of expression and individual autonomy. These developments are important and necessary. Nevertheless, the development of responsibility, emotional maturity, self-regulation and respect for the rights of others must receive equal educational attention.

This paper therefore examines adolescent romantic relationships through a broader psychological and socio-educational perspective. Rather than attributing harmful behaviour to a single cause, it considers the interaction of childhood experiences, family relationships, parenting practices, peer experiences, emotional regulation and contemporary social influences.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the psychological dimensions of adolescent romantic relationships.
- To analyse the possible influence of childhood emotional neglect on adolescent attachment and relationship behaviour.
- To examine the relationship between family environment, parenting practices and adolescent emotional development.
- To explore the influence of peer relationships and social interaction on adolescent behaviour.
- To examine rejection sensitivity and its possible association with aggressive relationship behaviour.
- To distinguish healthy romantic attachment from possessiveness and controlling behaviour.
- To examine the relationship between children's rights awareness and the development of social responsibility.
- To analyse the influence of digital communication and social media on adolescent relationships.
- To explore the role of emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning in preventing harmful relationship behaviour.
- To propose an integrated conceptual framework for promoting healthy adolescent relationships.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Figure

1. Contextual influences on adolescent relationship development.

3.1 Attachment Theory – John Bowlby Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) emphasises the importance of early emotional relationships between children and their primary caregivers. Consistent emotional support, affection and security may contribute to the development of secure attachment patterns.

Conversely, inconsistent caregiving, neglect and emotional insecurity may contribute to difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships for some individuals. In adolescence, these experiences may influence emotional dependency, trust, relationship expectations and responses to perceived rejection.

However, early emotional difficulties do not determine an individual's future behaviour. Supportive relationships and positive developmental experiences can provide important protective influences.

3.2 Social Learning Theory – Albert Bandura Bandura (1977) explains that individuals acquire many behavioural patterns through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Family interactions provide some of the earliest models of interpersonal behaviour.

When children repeatedly observe aggression, intimidation, disrespect or controlling behaviour within their immediate environment, they may learn to perceive such behaviour as acceptable ways of managing interpersonal conflicts. This theory highlights the importance of parental behaviour as a model for children's future relationships.

3.3 Psychosocial Development Theory – Erik Erikson Erikson (1968) identified adolescence as a significant period of identity development, particularly through the conflict between identity and role confusion. During this stage, individuals attempt to understand their identity, values, social roles and personal aspirations.

Peer acceptance and romantic relationships may influence this process. When an adolescent's sense of personal worth becomes excessively dependent on another person's approval, romantic rejection may be experienced as a threat to self-esteem.

3.4 Parenting Styles – Diana Baumrind Baumrind's work on parenting styles provides an important framework for understanding parental influence on child development. The commonly discussed parenting approaches include:

- Authoritative Parenting.
- Authoritarian Parenting.
- Permissive Parenting.
- Neglectful Parenting.

Authoritative parenting combines emotional support with appropriate expectations, boundaries and age-appropriate responsibility. This approach offers a useful framework for understanding the balance between freedom and accountability in adolescent development. Neither excessive control nor complete parental disengagement provides an ideal developmental environment.

3.5 Emotional Intelligence – Daniel Goleman Goleman (1995) popularised the concept of Emotional Intelligence, emphasising the importance of understanding and managing emotions and recognising the emotions of others. Important dimensions include:

- Self-awareness.
- Self-regulation.
- Motivation.
- Empathy.
- Social skills.

These competencies are particularly relevant to adolescent romantic relationships. An adolescent who can identify feelings of jealousy, anger, disappointment and rejection may be better equipped to respond constructively rather than impulsively.

4. CHILDHOOD EMOTIONAL NEGLECT AND ADOLESCENT

RELATIONSHIPS Childhood development requires more than physical care and material security. Children also require affection, emotional availability, recognition, communication and a sense of belonging.

In certain family environments, children may receive adequate material support but limited emotional attention. Parental work pressures, family conflict, inadequate communication and emotional distance may contribute to feelings of isolation.

For some adolescents, romantic relationships may subsequently become an important source of emotional validation. When such relationships end, the individual may experience intense disappointment or insecurity.

Attachment theory offers a useful perspective for understanding these experiences. However, childhood emotional neglect should be considered a potential risk factor rather than a direct or inevitable cause of aggression. Protective relationships with parents, teachers, relatives and peers can contribute positively to emotional development.

5. CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURES AND SOCIALISATION

Contemporary family structures have undergone considerable changes. Nuclear families and smaller household arrangements are increasingly common in many societies.

Such family structures may provide children with individual attention, economic resources and opportunities for personal development. However, in certain circumstances, limited interaction with siblings, relatives and extended family members may reduce opportunities for everyday social learning.

Interactions with siblings and peers can provide opportunities to learn:

- Sharing and cooperation.
- Patience and tolerance.
- Acceptance of disagreement.
- Emotional understanding.
- Negotiation and compromise.
- Respect for personal boundaries.

The absence of siblings does not automatically produce social difficulties. The more relevant consideration is whether children have sufficient opportunities to develop meaningful social relationships and interpersonal skills.

6. FREEDOM, PARENTING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Freedom is an essential component of healthy child development. However, freedom without appropriate guidance may create difficulties in learning accountability and self-management.

Children should be encouraged to make age-appropriate decisions while also understanding the consequences of those decisions. The distinction between authoritative and permissive parenting becomes particularly relevant in this context.

Providing children with everything they request may unintentionally limit opportunities to develop patience, frustration tolerance and delayed gratification. The objective of parenting should not be to control every aspect of a child's life but to prepare the child to exercise freedom responsibly.

Freedom and responsibility should develop together.

7. MATERIAL GRATIFICATION AND CONSUMER CULTURE

Economic resources can improve children's opportunities, education and quality of life. However, material availability and emotional maturity are different dimensions of development.

When every demand is immediately fulfilled, some children may have fewer opportunities to develop patience and understand the difference between needs and wants. A related concern is the possibility of interpreting gifts, money and material expenditure as ways of securing affection.

This misconception can become particularly problematic in romantic relationships. Love is not a financial transaction. Giving gifts or providing financial assistance does not create an entitlement to another person's affection, attention or commitment.

8. REJECTION SENSITIVITY AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

Figure

2. A constructive pathway for responding to romantic rejection.

Rejection sensitivity refers broadly to the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive and strongly react to interpersonal rejection. Romantic rejection can produce disappointment, sadness, embarrassment, anger and threats to self-esteem.

Leary, Twenge and Quinlivan (2006) reviewed research examining the relationship between interpersonal rejection, anger and aggression. Their analysis identified several possible psychological mechanisms, including frustration, threats to self-esteem, perceived loss of control and retaliatory motivation.

Research also demonstrates the relevance of rejection sensitivity to romantic relationships. A 2023 systematic review and meta-analysis examining 60 studies and 16,955 participants found associations

between higher rejection sensitivity and relationship conflict, jealousy, lower relationship satisfaction and intimate partner violence.

These findings support the importance of examining rejection sensitivity in relationship research. However, rejection does not inevitably produce aggression. Individual differences, social support, emotional regulation and situational factors remain important.

3. Distinguishing healthy affection from controlling behaviour.

One of the important concerns in adolescent relationships is the confusion between affection and ownership. Possessive behaviour may include:

- Requiring constant communication.
- Monitoring a partner's phone.
- Demanding social media passwords.
- Restricting friendships.
- Questioning ordinary social interactions.
- Repeated unwanted messaging.
- Threatening behaviour following rejection.

Such behaviours should not be normalised as expressions of love. Healthy relationships require mutual respect, consent, privacy, trust and recognition of individual autonomy. An individual has the right to express affection, but the other person has an equal right to decline a relationship.

Love cannot create ownership over another human being.

10. DIGITAL CULTURE AND ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS

Digital communication has transformed the way adolescents establish and maintain relationships. Social networking platforms provide opportunities for communication, friendship and self-expression.

However, digital environments may also facilitate excessive monitoring, cyber harassment, public humiliation and violations of privacy. Online stalking, repeated unwanted messages, unauthorised sharing of private photographs and threats through digital platforms are serious concerns.

Digital literacy must therefore extend beyond technical competence. Adolescents should understand digital consent, privacy, respectful communication and the consequences of online behaviour. Families and educational institutions should develop age-appropriate digital citizenship programmes.

11. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The recognition and protection of children's rights are essential elements of a democratic and humane society. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises children's rights to protection, participation, education, privacy and development.

Articles 5, 12, 16, 18 and 29 are particularly relevant to the present discussion. Article 5 recognises parental guidance in accordance with children's evolving capacities. Article 12 recognises children's right to express their views. Article 16 protects children's privacy. Article 18 recognises parental responsibilities for upbringing and development. Article 29 emphasises the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These provisions demonstrate that children's rights and parental responsibilities are complementary rather than contradictory. The educational challenge is to develop children who understand both their own rights and the rights of others.

Responsibility should not be used as a justification for suppressing children's legitimate rights. Similarly, rights awareness should be accompanied by respect for other individuals, social boundaries and lawful conduct.

12. TEACHER–STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL

AUTHORITY Educational institutions play a major role in shaping interpersonal values and social behaviour. Students should have opportunities to express opinions about teaching methods, classroom experiences and institutional practices.

They must also have appropriate mechanisms to report discrimination, humiliation, abuse or professional misconduct. However, student participation should not be confused with unrestricted authority to reject teachers solely on the basis of personal preference.

Teachers have professional responsibilities, academic qualifications and institutional roles that must be respected. At the same time, professional authority must be exercised ethically and accountably.

A balanced educational environment should protect students' rights while maintaining professional standards, institutional discipline and mutual respect. Respect for teachers should not mean unquestioning obedience. Student participation should not mean the absence of accountability.

13. EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

LEARNING Emotional regulation is a fundamental aspect of adolescent development. The ability to identify, understand and manage emotions can influence how individuals respond to disappointment, conflict and interpersonal rejection.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provides an educational framework for developing these competencies. The CASEL framework identifies five interconnected competency areas:

- Self-awareness.
- Self-management.
- Social awareness.
- Relationship skills.
- Responsible decision-making.

These competencies are relevant to healthy adolescent relationships. Self-awareness helps adolescents identify jealousy, insecurity and emotional distress. Self-management supports impulse control and constructive responses to frustration. Social awareness encourages empathy and recognition of other people's perspectives. Relationship skills support respectful communication and conflict resolution. Responsible decision-making promotes consideration of the consequences of personal actions.

SEL can therefore contribute to a preventive educational approach when implemented through coordinated family, school and community practices.

14. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

14.1 Leary, Twenge and Quinlivan (2006) Their review examined interpersonal rejection as a possible determinant of anger and aggression.

The authors discussed several psychological mechanisms through which rejection may influence aggressive responses. This study provides a theoretical foundation for examining rejection-related emotional reactions.

14.2 Hébert et al. (2019) Their meta-analysis included 87 studies involving 278,712 adolescents and young adults. The study examined family and peer risk and protective factors associated with dating violence victimisation. Findings indicated significant, although generally small, associations involving family and peer factors. The study highlights the importance of considering both family and social environments in prevention efforts.

14.3 Schacter, Lessard and Juvonen (2019) Their longitudinal study followed 1,987 young people over six years. The researchers examined whether peer rejection during middle school predicted maladaptive behaviours in later romantic relationships. Increasing peer rejection was associated with greater aggressive behaviour towards romantic partners in high school. The study also identified supportive friendships as a potential protective factor.

14.4 Rejection Sensitivity and Romantic Relationships (2023) A systematic review and meta-analysis published in Personality and Individual Differences examined 60 studies involving 16,955 participants. The findings associated higher rejection sensitivity with several negative relationship outcomes, including jealousy, conflict and intimate partner violence. These findings support further investigation of rejection sensitivity as a relevant psychological variable.

15. IDENTIFIED RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature has examined several dimensions of adolescent relationship behaviour, including attachment security, childhood adversity, family conflict, peer rejection, dating violence, emotional regulation, digital relationship behaviour and social-emotional competencies.

However, an integrated conceptual examination of rights awareness, personal responsibility, emotional regulation and family socialisation offers an important area for further investigation.

The present paper proposes that these dimensions should be examined together rather than treated as entirely separate aspects of adolescent development. The Indian and Kerala contexts offer particularly relevant settings for future empirical research because family structures, educational expectations, digital exposure and social norms may interact in context-specific ways.

A systematic review of Indian and Kerala-based studies would be necessary before claiming that this research gap is entirely unexplored.

16. THE PROPOSED RRE MODEL

Rights–Responsibility–Emotional Regulation Model

The principal conceptual contribution of this paper is the proposed RRE Model. The model is based on the proposition that healthy adolescent relationship development requires the integration of three interconnected dimensions.

Dimension 1: Rights Awareness

- Adolescents should understand their own rights and personal boundaries.
- They should recognise the rights and autonomy of others.
- They should understand the importance of consent.
- They should respect privacy and freedom of expression.
- They should recognise the right to accept or reject a relationship.

Dimension 2: Responsibility Awareness

- Accountability for personal behaviour.
- Respect for others.
- Awareness of the consequences of decisions.
- Responsible digital behaviour.
- Constructive conflict-resolution skills.

Dimension 3: Emotional Regulation

- Recognise emotional experiences.
- Manage jealousy and anger.
- Accept disappointment.
- Tolerate rejection.
- Avoid impulsive reactions.
- Seek appropriate support during emotional distress.

The Proposed Relationship

Family Environment and Childhood Experiences ↓ Socialisation and Emotional Development ↓ Rights Awareness + Responsibility Awareness + Emotional Regulation ↓ Empathy, Self-Control and Respect for

Boundaries ↓ Healthy Interpersonal Relationships The model also recognises the influence of contextual factors such as peer support, digital environments, parenting practices and educational institutions.

The RRE Model is a proposed conceptual contribution, not an empirically validated psychological scale or established clinical theory. Its components and proposed relationships require future empirical testing.

17. PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

- P1: Childhood emotional neglect may be associated with increased rejection sensitivity among adolescents.
- P2: Supportive parenting practices may be positively associated with adolescent emotional regulation.
- P3: Peer rejection may be associated with maladaptive relationship behaviours, while supportive friendships may provide protection.
- P4: Emotional regulation may be negatively associated with aggressive responses to romantic rejection.
- P5: Empathy and responsibility awareness may be positively associated with respect for interpersonal boundaries.
- P6: Digital monitoring and controlling behaviours may be associated with unhealthy adolescent relationship patterns.
- P7: Social and Emotional Learning may contribute to improved emotional regulation and responsible decision-making. These propositions are intended for empirical investigation and should not be interpreted as established causal relationships.

18. EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

18.1 Implications for Parents

- Maintain regular and meaningful communication with children.
- Recognise emotional needs rather than focusing exclusively on material provision.
- Combine affection with appropriate boundaries.
- Encourage age-appropriate independence.
- Teach financial responsibility.
- Help children understand rejection and disappointment.
- Demonstrate respectful conflict resolution.

18.2 Implications for Educational Institutions

- Integrate Social and Emotional Learning into school activities.
- Provide age-appropriate relationship education.
- Promote empathy and respect for personal boundaries.
- Develop digital citizenship programmes.
- Strengthen school counselling services.
- Encourage healthy teacher–student relationships.
- Establish appropriate reporting and safeguarding mechanisms.

18.3 Implications for Counsellors Counsellors should pay attention to rejection sensitivity, emotional dependency, low self-esteem, jealousy and controlling behaviour, difficulties in emotional regulation, and peer rejection and social isolation. Early supportive intervention may help adolescents develop healthier coping mechanisms.

18.4 Implications for Policymakers Educational and child welfare policies should integrate rights education with age-appropriate responsibility education. Prevention programmes should involve families, schools, mental health professionals and community organisations.

19. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Note on figures: The diagrams in this paper are conceptual illustrations prepared to clarify the theoretical discussion. They do not represent original statistical findings or empirically validated causal pathways.

This paper is conceptual in nature and does not report original empirical data. The proposed relationships are based on established psychological theories and selected published research.

The paper does not claim that nuclear families, economic prosperity, children's rights awareness or student participation in educational decisions independently cause antisocial behaviour. Such interpretations would require carefully designed empirical investigations.

The proposed RRE Model has not yet been empirically validated. Further research is necessary to examine its measurement properties, cultural relevance and practical effectiveness.

20. CONCLUSION

The transformation of adolescent romantic affection into resentment, possessiveness or aggression cannot be adequately understood through the narrow perspective of romantic failure alone. It requires a broader examination of emotional development, childhood experiences, family relationships, peer interactions, parenting practices, social values and the ability to regulate emotions.

Adolescents should receive affection, freedom, protection and recognition of their rights. However, they must also develop the ability to respect other people's autonomy, accept rejection, manage emotional disappointment and take responsibility for their actions.

An individual has the right to love another person, but does not have the right to demand reciprocal affection. Rejection may be painful, but it does not justify intimidation, harassment or violence.

Love should never be confused with ownership, and emotional attachment should never become a justification for controlling another person's life.

The proposed Rights–Responsibility–Emotional Regulation Model offers a conceptual approach to integrating these dimensions into adolescent education and family guidance.

A society that teaches children their rights must also equip them with the emotional maturity and responsibility to respect the rights of others.

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