

Individual and Social Regulation of Emotion in Families with Adolescents

Introduction

The Fribourg research group focuses on emotional processes inside the family. In spite of the fact that the family became the center of private emotion regulation in recent history, we know only little about the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes in regard of the formation and regulation of emotions in the family. We study the influence of cognitive factors, setting, day-time and activity on emotional states. A second purpose concerns the effects of the different modalities of social coping with stressful emotions on the well-being of the family and the development of the adolescent. The assessment procedure is an innovative computer-aided self-monitoring method. This approach gives access to daily life experience and behavior. A part of the hypotheses are also tested in the laboratory project of the Geneva research group as well as in the Lemman-Project.

Keywords:

Emotion Family Adolescence
 Stress Conflicts Coping
 Well-being Empathy

Difference in well-being between employed mothers and fathers versus unemployed mothers

Figure 1 and 2 show the daily rhythm of the emotional and the somatic state of parents during a typical workday. At the end of a day the mood rises and the somatic well-being decreases - the family-members get tired.

The mood of fathers is very consistent but Figure 1 shows an improve after work.

As remarked in the figure some points are very interesting for women concerns: The emotional well-being decreases at noon, when full-time working mothers go home for preparing lunch etc. There is also a slight decrease, when these women come home in the afternoon. The decrease at this moment, when in general all family-members come home, is more obvious for those women, who are not employed. But there is an increase of their emotional well-being after 6.00 p.m..

In our current study we will have a further look on the reasons, why women show these increases during the day. We hope that the results can lead to ideas how to avoid these increases.

Why feel periodically bad reasoned by the workday-organization? Which are the reasons for these stress-symptoms in women all-day life?

Figure 1: Emotional state during the day

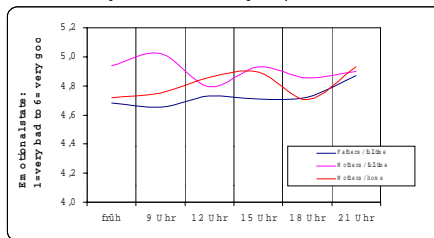
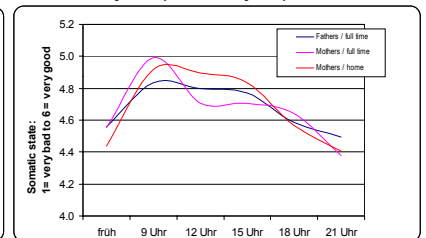


Figure 2: Physical state during the day



Influences on Emotional State During the Week

Figure 3 shows the weekly rhythm of the emotional state of male and female family members. As can be seen very clearly, everybody starts with a quite bad mood in the morning which improves during the day. There is no difference in the mean emotional state of male and female participants, but there is a significant difference in the variability between sexes and generations. Female participants improved far more during the morning, male participants only in the evening. This might be the case because most of the men go to work in the morning and they only start to feel better emotionally when they come back from work. Because most of the women participating in our study were not working fulltime they might not show this late afternoon improve of mood.

Another very interesting point in Figure 3 is the major increase in emotional state on Friday, when the week-end is close. Also during the week-end all family members feel much better than on week-days. Sunday ends with a huge decrease of emotional state which might be due to the work coming up on Monday.

Figure 3 shows the weekly rhythm of the emotional state in families. The influence of other things, that have not been taken into account, are shown in Figure 4. We can find for example that the emotional state is significantly worse at work or in school than in any other setting. Compared with their spare time Swiss families feel worse when doing homework and even when they relax.

Conflicts seem to be an especially important factor for the emotional state one is experiencing.

As this short description shows there are many influences on one's emotional state. We can conclude by saying that we would feel best doing spare time activities with friends on week-ends (but only activities that do not cause any conflicts).

Figure 3: Emotional State: Estimated Time Related Effects (without control of situational and psychological factors)

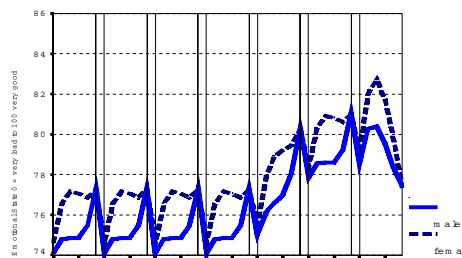


Figure 4: Effects of different Variables on the Emotional State

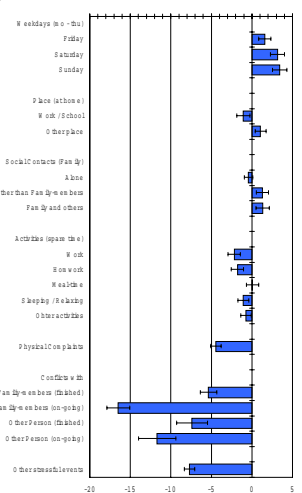
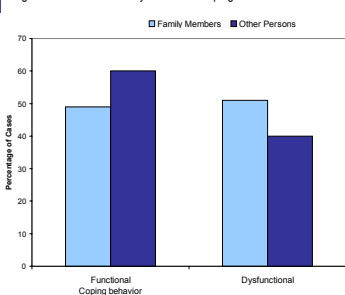


Figure 5: Functional and Dysfunctional Coping Reactions in Different Social Settings



Functional and Dysfunctional Coping Reactions in Different Social Settings

In our study we define functional coping as coping behavior, that does not impair anybody's self-worth, whereas dysfunctional coping does so.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of functional and dysfunctional coping behavior in different social settings. Dysfunctional coping is reported more often in conflict situations with other family members than when having problems with people not belonging to the family. The opposite is true for functional coping behavior. There is a slight influence of generation and sex on this relationship, but the results were the same in two different studies.

It seems that dysfunctional coping behavior is very important in conflicts with other family members. This setting within the family leaves people a possibility to act in a dysfunctional way without being afraid of putting at risk the personal relationship. People not belonging to the family are treated with much more care, because they might risk to lose something.

Further information about the following research questions can be found in the handout and on the CD-Rom:

- How to assess emotions in families and their regulation (see handout 5; CD-Rom 3 and 6)
- Influencing factors of mood in families (see handout 3 and 4; CD-Rom 4 and 5)
- Social regulation of emotion in families (see handout 6; CD-Rom 7)
- Transmission of emotions in families (see handout 3; CD-Rom 4)
- Differences in well-being between employed mothers and fathers versus unemployed (see handout 1; CD-Rom 1).

A detailed bibliography is available with the handout and on the CD-Rom.

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