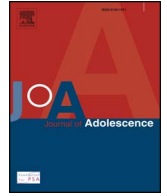


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Journal of Adolescence

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/adolescence

Negative emotions and behaviour: The role of regulatory emotional self-efficacy

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Regulatory emotional self-efficacy
Prosocial behaviour
Aggression
Negative emotions
Adolescence
Longitudinal data

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to test a longitudinal model that analyses the direct effect of negative emotions (anger, depression and anxiety, wave 1) on prosocial and aggressive behaviour (wave 2) in adolescents. And the indirect effect of negative emotions (wave 1) on prosocial and aggressive behaviour (wave 2) through regulatory emotional self-efficacy. Data was obtained from 417 adolescents in a two-wave longitudinal study (225 girls, M age = 14.70 years) from schools located in Valencia, Spain. SEM was employed to explore longitudinal models. The results showed that anger had a direct relationship with prosocial behaviour and aggression, measured two years later. However, the depression and anxiety states did not predict prosociality and aggressiveness. The mediation role of regulatory emotional self-efficacy between negative emotion and behaviours was only partially confirmed. Finally, only the perception of self-efficacy in expressing positive affect is related to prosociality and aggressiveness.

Aggression and prosocial behaviour are indicators of interpersonal competence in adolescence (Belgrave, Nguyen, Johnson, & Hood, 2011). Both behaviours are related to positive and negative emotions and emotional states. In relation to positive emotionality, several studies have shown that positive emotions (like joy, gratitude, serenity and personal satisfaction) inhibit aggressive behaviour and promote prosocial behaviour (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Richaud & Mesurado, 2016; Author, under review). With reference to negative emotions, empirical evidence shows that aggressiveness is related to anxiety (Salaam & Mounds, 2016), depression (Benarous, Hassler, Falissard, Consoli, & Cohen, 2015) and anger (DeWall, Anderson, & Bushman, 2012). On the other hand, prosocial behaviour relates in a negative way, to negative affective states like depression (Davis et al., 2016) and anger (Roberts, Strayer, & Denham, 2014). For example, a recent experimental study found that expressions of disappointment increase compliance with requests for help, whereas expressions of anger undermine compliance (Van Doorn, Van Kleef, & Van der Pligt, 2015).

Adolescence is a stage of high emotional vulnerability (Steinberg, 2005). Adolescents are able to move from love to hate, from acceptance to rejection, from pride to shame in their interpersonal relationships (Main, 2000). Therein, adjusted behaviour requires an effective regulation of emotions, and an effective regulation of emotions includes a control over positive and negative emotions. Emotional regulation makes social relationships easier and contributes to people's positive adjustment. Adolescents who are able to manage negative affect and to prolong the benefits of positive affect, have more personal resources that protect them from negative behaviours and promote positive behaviours (Caprara, Gerbino, Paciello, Di Giunta, & Pastorelli, 2010). Also, experience and expression of positive emotions are associated with rewarding social relationships and health (Gunzenhauser et al., 2013). Conversely, those who have difficulty containing their emotions when facing stressors or negative events can show problematic interpersonal

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behaviour (Gunzenhauser et al., 2013).

Adolescents differ vastly in the way they manage their emotions in everyday life, not only because they have different abilities, but also because they differ in their perceived capabilities to regulate their emotions. It is possible for a person to feel a positively ability to manage their emotions in perturbing or stressful situations, while they are not able to do so when actually facing these situations. However, it is more difficult for a person to actually manage their emotions if they don't believe they are able to do so; ultimately, the feelings about their self-regulation ability will contribute to their psychological wellbeing (Azizli, Atkinson, Baughman, & Giammarco, 2015).

Based on self-efficacy theory developed by Bandura (1997), Caprara (Caprara, Vecchione, Barbaranelli, & Alessandri, 2013; Caprara et al., 2008) which postulated the concept of regulatory emotional self-efficacy, which includes two dimensions: self-efficacy in managing negative affect and self-efficacy in expressing positive emotions. The former refers to the belief in one's ability to improve negative emotions, which can arise when facing different stressing events and to prevent negative results. In the same way, self-efficacy in expressing positive emotions refers to the belief in one's capacity to experiment or allow oneself to express positive emotions like happiness, enthusiasm and pride as an answer to success and pleasurable events. Caprara's self-efficacy beliefs analysis (Caprara & Gerbino, 2001), links regulatory emotional self-efficacy with social relationships in the same way as the latter with the regulation of affections. That is, the capacity to experiment and express positive and negative affects is thought to be as decisive for managing fulfilling and productive relationships with others as the ability to regulate affection (Caprara, Alessandri, Di Giunta, Panerai, & Eisenberg, 2010, Caprara, Gerbino, et al., 2010; Nocentini, Pastorelli, & Menesini, 2013). In addition, self-efficacy is specific and refers to particular domains and given times. For example, just as some people consider themselves highly efficient in academic tasks, they may also perceive themselves as not efficient in their relations with others, and vice versa (Salavera, Usán, & Jarie, 2017). Adolescents can feel they are efficient in regulating certain emotions but less efficient in regulating others, which could affect or modify their subsequent behaviour.

Furthermore, a vast body of research attests to the pervasive influence of regulatory emotional self-efficacy on effective functioning of adolescents and on the course of their life. The individual acts relates to the beliefs they have about their own abilities in a particular situation. The thoughts and feelings people have about their regulatory emotional self-efficacy to control events have an influence over the choices they make, the effort they invest, their motivation and their behaviour (Alessandri, Caprara, Eisenberg, & Steca, 2009; Galicia-Moyeda, Sánchez-Velasco, & Robles-Ojeda, 2013). In this way, if adolescents believe they can successfully obtain proposed objectives, they are motivated to undertake activities oriented to attain those objectives, and they persevere when facing difficulties and failures. Therefore, regulatory-emotional self-efficacy beliefs have a direct influence on the behaviour (Bandura, 2006).

Moreover, previous findings demonstrated the role of regulatory-emotional self-efficacy beliefs in mediating the contribution of different personal traits (e.g. agreeableness and conscientiousness) to positive behaviours in adolescents (e.g. prosociality and academic achievement, respectively) (Caprara, Alessandri, et al., 2010; Caprara, Vecchione, Alessandri, Gerbino, & Barbaranelli, 2011). Another longitudinal study has shown primacy in the direction of the influence of emotional stability on self-efficacy beliefs (Caprara et al., 2013). Caprara et al. (2013) suggested “that the initial levels of emotional stability are highly correlated with initial levels of self-efficacy beliefs in managing both positive and negative emotions. Likely individuals who are more emotionally stable, also feel more capable of exerting proper control over their emotions” (p. 152). Consequently, it is likely that emotional instability (characterized by experience of negative emotions such as anger, anxiety and depression) could be associated with lower levels of regulatory-emotional self-efficacy beliefs; and this in turn, mediates the relationship between negative emotions and behaviour.

1. The present study

Previous cross-sectional studies have found a positive relation between regulatory emotional self-efficacy and prosocial behaviour, and a negative relation to aggressive behaviour. Specifically, the ability to express positive affect, to manage despondency or distress, and to manage anger or irritation are associated in a positive way with prosocial behaviour and in a negative way with aggressiveness (Caprara et al., 2008). Moreover, a longitudinal study investigated the relationship between efficacy in managing negative emotions and in expressing positive emotions at wave 1 with prosocial behaviour and delinquency at wave 2 (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003). The wave 1 constructs showed a negative correlation to wave 2 prosocial behaviour and a positive correlation to wave 2 delinquencies.

Despite the available evidence on the links among anger, depression, anxiety, regulatory emotional self-efficacy, prosocial behaviour and aggressiveness, most studies are limited to the inference of causality due to their cross-sectional design. Consequently, the objective of this study is to test a longitudinal model that analyses the direct effect of negative emotions (anger, depression and anxiety, measured in wave 1) on prosocial and aggressive behaviour (measured in wave 2) in adolescents. And the indirect effect of negative emotions (wave 1) on prosocial and aggressive behaviour (wave 2) through regulatory emotional self-efficacy (1. perceived self-efficacy in expressing positive affect, 2. perceived self-efficacy in managing anger/irritation and 3. perceived self-efficacy in managing despondency/distress, measured in wave 2). The mediating role of regulatory emotional self-efficacy will be studied because, previous studies have shown that emotional stability is associated with regulatory emotional self-efficacy, and the regulatory emotional self-efficacy plays a mediating role between trait and behaviours (Caprara, Alessandri, et al., 2010; Caprara et al., 2011). Consequently, it is likely that emotional instability -characterized by experience of negative emotions- is associated with regulatory emotional self-efficacy, and the regulatory emotional self-efficacy mediates the relation between negative emotions and prosocial and aggressive behaviour.

Based on these previous studies, we hypothesize that:

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