

Prioritizing Emotional Climate Factors in Families with Adolescent Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to identify, categorize, and prioritize the emotional climate factors influencing families with adolescents experiencing anxiety through an integrated qualitative-quantitative approach.

Methods and Materials: A mixed-methods exploratory-quantitative design was employed in two sequential phases. In the qualitative phase, an extensive literature review was conducted until theoretical saturation, and data were analyzed using NVivo 14 through thematic coding. Seven main themes were identified, including parental emotional expression, communication patterns, parental control and autonomy, family cohesion and support, parental mental health influence, emotional validation and empathy, and family stress and conflict climate. In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was developed based on the qualitative findings and administered to 220 participants from Kenya, consisting of parents and adolescents aged 13–18 years. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26, applying the Friedman ranking test to determine the relative importance of emotional climate factors.

Findings: Results indicated statistically significant differences in the prioritization of emotional climate factors ($p < .01$). Family Cohesion and Support received the highest mean rank score (4.72), followed by Emotional Validation and Empathy (4.51), Parental Emotional Expression (4.38), and Communication Patterns (4.12). Parental Control and Autonomy (3.89), Parental Mental Health Influence (3.65), and Family Stress and Conflict Climate (3.47) ranked lower, suggesting that affective closeness and empathic validation are stronger predictors of adolescent emotional well-being than external stress factors.

Conclusion: The study highlights that family cohesion, empathy, and emotional validation are the most influential components of a healthy emotional climate in mitigating adolescent anxiety. These results emphasize the need for family-centered interventions that enhance emotional communication, promote empathy, and strengthen relational bonds as preventive and therapeutic strategies for adolescent anxiety.

Keywords: Family emotional climate; adolescent anxiety; empathy; family cohesion; emotional validation

1. Introduction

Family emotional climate represents a multidimensional construct encompassing the affective tone, interactional style, and communication quality within family systems, shaping the emotional development and psychological adjustment of adolescents. In families with anxious adolescents, emotional climate becomes a particularly salient determinant of mental health outcomes, as it mediates how young individuals experience stress, regulate emotions, and internalize coping mechanisms. The nature of warmth, emotional expressiveness, and responsiveness within the family context forms the foundation for adolescents' socio-emotional security and their ability to manage anxiety-related symptoms (Kapetanovic & Skoog, 2020). Theoretical models across developmental and family psychology emphasize that an emotionally attuned and cohesive family environment fosters adaptive emotion regulation, while an emotionally volatile or invalidating climate amplifies vulnerability to anxiety and related disorders (Akbari et al., 2024).

Adolescence is marked by heightened sensitivity to interpersonal cues, where family emotional climate functions as a regulatory and protective buffer against external stressors. Studies indicate that the emotional quality of parent-child interactions predicts emotional resilience and overall well-being during this developmental stage (Chernikova & Oblasova, 2024). Conversely, a negative family climate—characterized by conflict, inconsistency, or emotional neglect—contributes to maladaptive emotion regulation and increased anxiety prevalence (Balan, 2025). Evidence suggests that adolescents raised in supportive families exhibit greater emotional intelligence, empathy, and optimism, while those exposed to emotional coldness or criticism tend to experience internalizing symptoms, including anxiety and depression (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024).

Recent research has expanded the understanding of emotional climate by integrating contextual and relational factors such as parental mental health, communication style, and perceived family cohesion. Emotional contagion processes within families, wherein parental anxiety or distress is transmitted to children, underscore the interdependent nature of family systems (Rodríguez-Rubio et al., 2025). This contagion mechanism may be especially pronounced in families facing chronic stressors or health-related challenges, as evidenced by studies among families of adolescents with chronic conditions (Lacomba-Trejo et

al., 2025). Similarly, parenting characterized by overprotection, emotional invalidation, or psychological control can disrupt the adolescent's sense of autonomy and competence, escalating anxiety-related responses (Lee, 2024). Thus, the structure and function of family relationships play a vital role in determining emotional outcomes during adolescence.

In cross-cultural contexts, family emotional climate exhibits both universal and culture-specific dynamics. For instance, the influence of family warmth and cohesion appears consistently beneficial across diverse cultural backgrounds, while the expression of emotion and control strategies varies based on sociocultural norms (Yadav & Yadav, 2025). Studies from Asian and Middle Eastern settings have demonstrated that collectivist values emphasizing family interdependence can both protect against and contribute to anxiety, depending on the emotional expressiveness allowed within family systems (Rosharudin et al., 2023). Adolescents in families emphasizing emotional suppression or compliance may experience reduced autonomy and increased anxiety due to internalized emotional constraints (Huang, 2023). Conversely, emotionally open and validating families promote adaptive communication, reducing anxiety through perceived safety and acceptance (Maulina et al., 2024).

A growing body of evidence indicates that parental emotional expressiveness and empathy are key predictors of adolescent emotion regulation capacity. When parents model effective regulation strategies—such as calmness, acceptance, and constructive dialogue—adolescents are more likely to develop adaptive coping mechanisms (Marcus, 2024). However, parents who exhibit hostility, irritability, or inconsistent affective cues create an unpredictable environment that heightens vigilance and anxiety in adolescents (Hadley et al., 2024). Moreover, studies highlight that emotional invalidation—where a parent dismisses or minimizes a child's feelings—has a lasting impact on self-worth and emotional control, reinforcing maladaptive patterns of anxiety (Peng, 2024). Emotional validation, in contrast, acts as a protective factor, fostering trust and psychological stability within the family (Magklara et al., 2025).

The emotional climate of the family also intersects with the broader psychosocial environment. Economic hardship, migration, and societal pressures can erode family cohesion and affect emotional communication patterns (Kovalchuk et al., 2021). Adolescents living in families burdened by financial strain or parental absence—such as labor migrant

families—often report emotional detachment and heightened anxiety due to inconsistent parental involvement (Iacopetti et al., 2021). Similarly, the experience of social isolation or poverty amplifies the negative effects of a poor emotional climate, as limited emotional resources hinder parents' ability to respond sensitively to adolescents' needs (Hadley et al., 2024). Family-based interventions targeting these contextual stressors can therefore play a crucial role in reducing adolescent anxiety and enhancing family connectedness (Munthe et al., 2024).

Family communication patterns form another critical determinant of emotional climate. Research suggests that open and supportive communication fosters emotional safety, while avoidance and conflict-oriented dialogue reinforce anxiety symptoms (Maulina et al., 2024). Adolescents benefit from environments that encourage self-expression and emotional disclosure, leading to stronger relationships and reduced internal stress (Manjarrés-Zambrano, 2025). In contrast, families that rely on criticism or control-based communication often perpetuate cycles of emotional withdrawal, hostility, and fear (Posokhova & Kolpakova, 2020). Studies from both Western and Asian contexts affirm that mutual understanding and validation in communication predict reduced anxiety and higher life satisfaction among adolescents (Leung et al., 2023; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024).

Parental mental health further influences the quality of family emotional climate. Parents struggling with anxiety or depression frequently transmit their emotional instability to children through over-involvement or emotional withdrawal (Wang, 2024). This intergenerational transmission of affective distress reinforces maladaptive coping mechanisms in adolescents, who may internalize parental fear and worry as part of their emotional schema (Akbari et al., 2024). Studies conducted in China, for example, have linked parental anxiety and poor emotional regulation with increased adolescent behavioral difficulties and internet addiction (Wang et al., 2024). Such findings highlight that effective emotional regulation at the parental level is crucial for maintaining emotional balance within the household.

Adolescent anxiety is also shaped by how families respond to stress and external challenges. Emotional climates characterized by high tension, unresolved conflict, or lack of repair mechanisms are strongly correlated with anxiety symptomatology (Balan, 2025). In contrast, families that actively engage in reconciliation, open dialogue, and mutual understanding are better equipped to buffer adolescents from the emotional consequences of conflict

(Thomson et al., 2024). Notably, marital discord and triangulated relationships—where adolescents are drawn into parental disputes—create psychological insecurity, increasing the likelihood of anxiety and emotional instability (Charmaraman et al., 2022).

Socio-emotional learning within families also contributes significantly to adolescent well-being. Emotional intelligence, empathy, and prosocial behavior are often nurtured in emotionally cohesive families (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024). Adolescents exposed to emotional validation and perspective-taking within family contexts tend to exhibit lower anxiety and higher life satisfaction. In contrast, emotional neglect, parental perfectionism, and rigid emotional expectations can undermine adolescent self-efficacy (Αντωνοπούλου et al., 2025). Family-based emotional intelligence training programs have been found effective in reducing both emotional volatility and anxiety symptoms among youth populations (Khofifah & Aliza, 2024).

Emerging studies have also examined how adolescents' emotional responses are shaped by environmental uncertainty and global crises. For instance, family discussions surrounding climate-related anxiety have been linked to children's sense of control and emotional engagement (Jiménez-Vázquez et al., 2025; Magklara et al., 2025). Adolescents who feel emotionally supported in conversations about global threats demonstrate greater emotional regulation and reduced anxiety. In these cases, family emotional climate serves as a resilience mechanism, buffering adolescents against existential fears and social pressures (Dayasiri & Anand, 2025). Similarly, emotional contagion within families—where anxious or fearful emotions spread across members—can either heighten distress or promote collective empathy depending on the quality of family interactions (Rodríguez-Rubio et al., 2025).

The integration of ecological and family systems perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of how emotional climates are constructed and maintained. The ecological model of adolescent well-being posits that family interactions represent the most immediate layer of influence shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes (Singh et al., 2025). Moreover, educational and school contexts interact with family climate in shaping adolescents' mental health trajectories, emphasizing the importance of cohesive emotional environments across both home and institutional settings (Yadav & Yadav, 2025). Family climate thus functions as both an internal system of emotional exchange

and an adaptive mechanism responsive to broader environmental demands (Marcus, 2024).

Collectively, the reviewed literature underscores the complex interplay between parental emotional expression, communication style, empathy, and family cohesion in determining adolescent anxiety outcomes. Families that foster emotional openness, validation, and support create secure emotional climates that buffer adolescents from anxiety, whereas emotionally disorganized, invalidating, or conflict-laden climates amplify distress. Despite substantial progress in understanding individual factors, few studies have systematically prioritized emotional climate components within families of anxious adolescents, especially across diverse cultural settings such as Kenya.

Therefore, the present study aims to identify, categorize, and prioritize the key emotional climate factors influencing families with adolescents experiencing anxiety, through an integrated qualitative and quantitative analysis.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a mixed-methods exploratory-quantitative design implemented in two sequential phases. The first phase was qualitative, aimed at identifying the key emotional climate factors influencing families with adolescents experiencing anxiety. The second phase was quantitative, focused on prioritizing and ranking these factors statistically.

In the qualitative phase, data were obtained exclusively from a systematic literature review until theoretical saturation was achieved. Sources were selected from leading academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, focusing on studies published between 2010 and 2025. Theoretical saturation was reached when no new themes or subthemes emerged from additional literature analysis.

In the quantitative phase, the study involved 220 participants drawn from family counseling centers and secondary schools in Kenya. Participants included both parents (mothers and fathers) and adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of different socioeconomic and family structures. Inclusion criteria included having at least one adolescent child, being co-residential parents or guardians, and willingness to participate voluntarily.

2.2. Measures

In the first (qualitative) phase, data collection consisted of a systematic and integrative literature review that focused on theoretical, empirical, and clinical studies examining emotional climate and its influence on adolescent anxiety. The search strategy used predefined keywords such as family emotional climate, adolescent anxiety, parent-child relationship, and family dynamics. Key constructs, definitions, and conceptual categories were extracted and coded.

In the second (quantitative) phase, the factors identified from the qualitative analysis were operationalized into measurable items and compiled into a structured questionnaire. This instrument included Likert-scale items evaluating the relative significance of each emotional climate factor (e.g., warmth, emotional expressiveness, criticism, parental anxiety, emotional validation). The questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in family psychology for face and content validity. Data collection was conducted both online and through in-person surveys, ensuring ethical compliance and participant anonymity.

2.3. Data Analysis

In the qualitative phase, data were analyzed using NVivo 14 software. Thematic analysis was applied to code and categorize the emotional climate factors emerging from the literature. Coding reliability was established through iterative cross-checking, and themes were refined through axial and selective coding procedures. The resulting conceptual framework identified major categories and their interrelationships within the emotional climate construct.

In the quantitative phase, the extracted factors were statistically prioritized using SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics were first computed to summarize participant demographics and item responses. To determine the relative importance of emotional climate factors, a Friedman ranking test was conducted. Additional inferential analyses, including correlation and factor analysis, were used to assess inter-factor relationships and construct validity.

3. Findings and Results

In the qualitative phase of this study, an extensive literature review was conducted to identify and synthesize emotional climate factors relevant to families with adolescents experiencing anxiety. Using NVivo 14, thematic analysis was applied to systematically code and organize the

data into hierarchical categories, subcategories, and conceptual indicators. Through iterative coding and refinement, seven main themes emerged, representing core dimensions of family emotional climate. Each theme encompasses several subthemes reflecting specific

behavioral, emotional, and relational components observed in the literature. The following table summarizes the structure of the qualitative findings, detailing categories, subcategories, and their corresponding conceptual (open code) elements.

Table 1*Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts*

Main Categories	Subcategories	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Parental Emotional Expression	Positive emotional expressiveness Negative emotional expressiveness Emotional regulation modeling	warmth, praise, emotional sharing, physical affection, empathy anger outbursts, criticism, irritability, sarcasm, emotional volatility coping demonstration, calm responses, conflict de-escalation
2. Communication Patterns	Open communication Avoidant communication Conflict communication style	active listening, mutual feedback, validation, transparency silence, evasion, topic withdrawal, emotional suppression blame patterns, hostility, defensive dialogue, overgeneralization, harsh tone
3. Parental Control and Autonomy	Supportive dialogue Overprotection Psychological control Autonomy support	reassurance, problem-solving talk, trust-based conversation parental monitoring, restriction, fear-based decision-making guilt induction, invalidation, conditional affection encouragement of independence, joint decision-making, emotional encouragement
4. Family Cohesion and Support	Emotional bonding Family adaptability Instrumental support Parental availability	sense of belonging, shared activities, emotional closeness flexibility, problem-solving, adjustment to stress help-seeking facilitation, joint coping, tangible assistance responsive presence, emotional accessibility, shared routines
5. Parental Mental Health Influence	Parental anxiety	projection of fears, hypervigilance, contagion of worry
6. Emotional Validation and Empathy	Parental depression Intergenerational emotional transmission Emotional awareness	emotional withdrawal, low responsiveness, affective flatness learned helplessness, negative emotional scripts, role modeling of distress
7. Family Stress and Conflict Climate	Validation practices Empathic engagement Family tension Marital conflict spillover Coping and repair strategies	recognition of child's emotions, labeling feelings, noticing distress acceptance of emotions, non-judgmental response, active comforting perspective-taking, emotional resonance, compassionate reaction chronic stress, unresolved issues, daily hassles
		parental arguments, triangulation, emotional contagion apology patterns, reconciliation behaviors, family meetings, positive reframing

The first major theme, *parental emotional expression*, emerged as a central dimension of the family emotional climate influencing adolescent anxiety. Families in which parents demonstrated positive emotional expressiveness—through warmth, empathy, praise, and affectionate communication—tended to foster a secure emotional base for adolescents. Conversely, frequent displays of anger, sarcasm, irritability, and emotional volatility were associated with heightened adolescent distress and emotional dysregulation. The ability of parents to model emotional regulation through calm responses and conflict de-escalation appeared to mitigate anxiety symptoms, underscoring the regulatory role of parental affect in shaping adolescents' emotional coping mechanisms.

The second theme, *communication patterns*, reflected the quality and style of interactions within the family system. Open communication, characterized by active listening, mutual validation, and transparency, contributed to emotional safety and trust. In contrast, avoidant or defensive communication—such as silence, withdrawal, or evasion—was linked to emotional suppression and relational distance. Patterns of hostile or blaming dialogue further amplified anxiety levels by reinforcing a threatening interpersonal atmosphere. Supportive dialogues, including reassurance and collaborative problem-solving, provided emotional containment and reduced adolescents' perception of family-based stress.

The third theme, *parental control and autonomy*, described the delicate balance between protection and

independence. Overprotective and psychologically controlling parenting styles, involving excessive monitoring, guilt induction, or conditional affection, were frequently identified as antecedents to adolescent anxiety, as they restricted self-efficacy and fostered fear of failure. On the other hand, autonomy-supportive behaviors—encouraging independent thinking, emotional expression, and shared decision-making—were correlated with adaptive coping and lower anxiety levels. The findings suggest that adolescents thrive emotionally when parents balance structure with trust in their child's growing autonomy.

The fourth theme, *family cohesion and support*, emphasized the structural and emotional connectedness among family members. Emotional bonding, adaptability, and mutual support emerged as protective factors against anxiety, enabling adolescents to navigate stress through shared problem-solving and belonging. Families exhibiting flexibility in roles and communication patterns were better equipped to adjust during challenging situations. Moreover, consistent parental availability—through emotional presence and shared routines—provided adolescents with a sense of predictability and security that buffered the impact of anxiety-provoking experiences.

The fifth theme, *parental mental health influence*, highlighted how parents' psychological well-being directly affects the emotional climate of the home. Parents experiencing anxiety or depression often transmit emotional distress to their children through modeling, emotional withdrawal, or hypervigilant caregiving. Such intergenerational transmission of emotional vulnerability creates an environment of uncertainty and instability that exacerbates adolescent anxiety. Conversely, emotionally healthy parents foster stability and demonstrate adaptive emotional coping, helping adolescents internalize constructive ways of managing fear and stress.

The sixth theme, *emotional validation and empathy*, captured the interpersonal processes through which parents recognize, accept, and respond to their adolescents'

emotional experiences. When parents displayed emotional awareness, labeled emotions accurately, and offered validating responses, adolescents felt understood and emotionally supported. Empathic engagement, including perspective-taking and compassionate listening, promoted emotional trust and openness. In contrast, dismissive or judgmental parental responses invalidated emotional experiences, often intensifying anxiety and leading to emotional avoidance. Thus, validation and empathy function as emotional regulators within the family environment.

The final theme, *family stress and conflict climate*, represented the broader emotional atmosphere shaped by tension, marital discord, and daily stressors. Chronic family stress, unresolved conflicts, and negative communication patterns collectively contributed to an emotionally charged environment that reinforced adolescents' anxiety responses. Marital conflicts, particularly when involving triangulation or parental hostility, were found to spill over into parent-child interactions, amplifying insecurity. Families that engaged in constructive coping and repair strategies—such as apologies, reconciliation efforts, and open discussions—were more successful in restoring emotional balance and reducing anxiety contagion across members. Collectively, these findings suggest that managing stress and conflict through emotional repair processes is essential for maintaining a healthy emotional climate in families with anxious adolescents.

In the second phase of the study, quantitative analysis was conducted to prioritize the emotional climate factors identified in the qualitative phase. Using SPSS version 26, descriptive and non-parametric statistical tests, including the Friedman ranking test, were performed to determine the relative importance of each factor based on the responses of 220 participants from Kenya. Mean rank scores were calculated to reflect the perceived significance of each emotional climate dimension in influencing adolescent anxiety within family systems.

Table 2

Ranking of Emotional Climate Factors in Families with Adolescent Anxiety

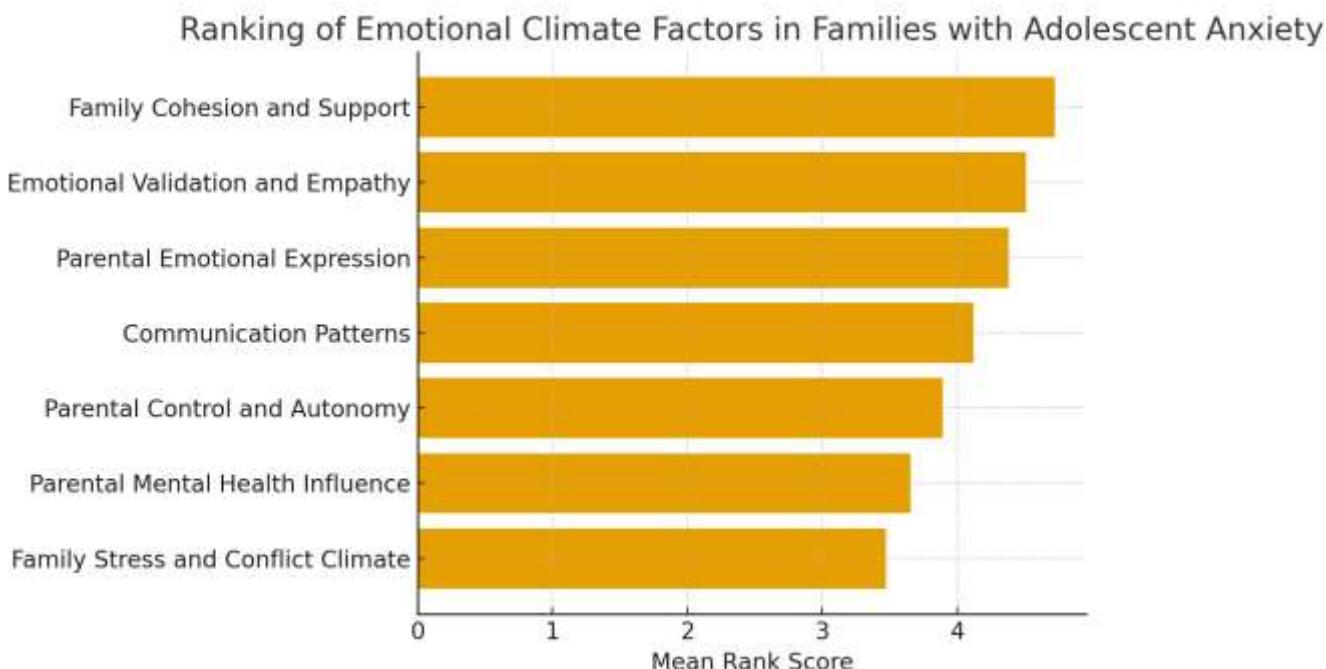
Rank	Emotional Climate Factor	Mean Rank Score
1	Family Cohesion and Support	4.72
2	Emotional Validation and Empathy	4.51
3	Parental Emotional Expression	4.38
4	Communication Patterns	4.12
5	Parental Control and Autonomy	3.89
6	Parental Mental Health Influence	3.65
7	Family Stress and Conflict Climate	3.47

The ranking results reveal that Family Cohesion and Support received the highest mean score (4.72), indicating its dominant role in shaping a healthy emotional climate for adolescents. Emotional Validation and Empathy ranked second (4.51), emphasizing the importance of parental responsiveness and understanding in reducing anxiety symptoms. Parental Emotional Expression (4.38) and Communication Patterns (4.12) followed closely, suggesting that both affective and communicative dimensions are

critical for emotional regulation within families. Lower-ranked factors such as Parental Control and Autonomy (3.89) and Parental Mental Health Influence (3.65) still demonstrated notable influence but were perceived as less direct determinants. Finally, Family Stress and Conflict Climate ranked lowest (3.47), reflecting that while stress and conflict affect the emotional environment, their impact may be more indirect or moderated by other relational variables.

Figure 1

Ranking of Emotional Climate Factors in Families with Adolescent Anxiety



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this mixed-methods study identified and prioritized seven key emotional climate factors influencing families with adolescents experiencing anxiety. The qualitative phase revealed multifaceted emotional dimensions—parental emotional expression, communication patterns, parental control and autonomy, family cohesion and support, parental mental health influence, emotional validation and empathy, and family stress and conflict climate—each contributing uniquely to the emotional functioning of adolescents. The quantitative ranking results demonstrated that *Family Cohesion and Support* and *Emotional Validation and Empathy* were the most influential factors, followed by *Parental Emotional Expression* and *Communication Patterns*, while *Family*

Stress and Conflict Climate ranked lowest. This hierarchy underscores the centrality of emotional bonding, empathy, and validation in shaping a secure family environment that mitigates adolescent anxiety and promotes resilience.

The dominant ranking of *Family Cohesion and Support* indicates that a connected, cooperative, and emotionally accessible family structure forms the foundation of adolescent emotional well-being. Cohesive families offer emotional safety, trust, and shared problem-solving, which foster adolescents' confidence in navigating stressful situations (Kapetanovic & Skoog, 2020). Research across contexts consistently supports this result. For example, studies in Iran and Europe have demonstrated that a warm and cohesive family climate predicts better emotion regulation and lower anxiety symptoms among adolescents (Akbari et al., 2024). Similarly, emotionally connected families encourage secure attachment patterns, enabling

adolescents to explore autonomy without fear of rejection or loss (Lacomba-Trejo et al., 2025). The strong emphasis on cohesion also resonates with findings by (Balan, 2025), who reported that emotionally fragmented families were highly predictive of eating-related anxiety among adolescent girls, showing how affective disconnection manifests as internal distress. Thus, the present findings reinforce the view that emotional togetherness within families acts as a powerful protective mechanism against adolescent anxiety.

The second-highest ranked factor, *Emotional Validation and Empathy*, highlights the importance of parental attunement to adolescents' emotional experiences. When parents recognize, accept, and validate their adolescents' feelings, they provide a sense of emotional visibility and legitimacy that counteracts anxiety's isolating effects (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2024). This result aligns with earlier research demonstrating that empathic parental communication fosters higher emotional intelligence and reduces internalizing problems (Marcus, 2024). Moreover, parental empathy serves a bidirectional function: it not only supports adolescents' emotional stability but also reduces parental frustration and guilt, thereby improving the overall family emotional climate (Rodríguez-Rubio et al., 2025). In contrast, emotionally invalidating responses—such as dismissing or minimizing an adolescent's emotional distress—were shown to increase vulnerability to anxiety and self-blame (Peng, 2024). These findings are consistent with evidence from collectivist contexts, where empathy and validation play central roles in mediating adolescents' mental health outcomes within hierarchical family structures (Rosharudin et al., 2023).

The significant ranking of *Parental Emotional Expression* reflects how parents' affective tone shapes adolescents' emotional expectations and coping mechanisms. Parental warmth, praise, and emotional transparency emerged as facilitators of security and emotional growth, while harshness and irritability intensified anxiety symptoms (Chernikova & Oblasova, 2024). This finding parallels the model of affective transmission proposed by (Wang, 2024), which found that parental anxiety directly predicts adolescent emotional difficulties through emotional contagion and modeling. Furthermore, parents who demonstrate adaptive emotional regulation act as behavioral exemplars, teaching adolescents to manage fear and uncertainty constructively (Hadley et al., 2024). Conversely, inconsistent or volatile emotional expression disrupts adolescents' sense of predictability, reinforcing hypervigilant and anxious patterns of interaction

(Amanelahi et al., 2023). The present findings reaffirm that adolescents internalize parental emotional styles as templates for interpreting and regulating their own emotions.

Communication Patterns ranked fourth, illustrating that the quality of interpersonal communication is a critical determinant of emotional climate. Open and supportive communication allows adolescents to express distress, seek reassurance, and engage in problem-solving collaboratively. Studies by (Maulina et al., 2024) emphasize that families characterized by emotional openness experience fewer anxiety symptoms among adolescents, whereas avoidance and silence foster emotional suppression. Additionally, (Manjarrés-Zambrano, 2025) observed that emotional communication between parents and adolescents enhances socio-emotional competencies, supporting the current results. Conversely, hostile or critical exchanges reinforce adolescents' beliefs that emotional expression is unsafe, contributing to maladaptive coping (Posokhova & Kolpakova, 2020). The alignment between these findings underscores that anxiety reduction depends not only on emotional warmth but also on the communicative channels through which emotions are negotiated and expressed.

The fifth-ranked factor, *Parental Control and Autonomy*, demonstrated the dual influence of structure and independence. Adolescents from overprotective or psychologically controlling families reported higher anxiety, consistent with the theory that excessive control undermines autonomy and fosters dependency (Lee, 2024). Conversely, autonomy-supportive families that encourage decision-making and independence help adolescents develop confidence and emotional resilience. This dynamic is echoed in (Avtονοπούλου et al., 2025), where excessive parental perfectionism and control predicted poorer emotion regulation in children. Similarly, research in educational contexts found that students with autonomy-supportive parents showed higher academic achievement and lower emotional distress (Yadav & Yadav, 2025). Together, these studies and the current findings indicate that healthy family climates balance parental guidance with emotional freedom, supporting adolescents' developmental needs without compromising security.

Parental Mental Health Influence ranked sixth, suggesting that while parental psychological well-being is an important contextual factor, its influence may be mediated through other emotional climate variables. Parents struggling with anxiety, depression, or chronic stress often engage in inconsistent caregiving and emotional withdrawal (Wang et al., 2024). Adolescents internalize such emotional

instability, leading to heightened sensitivity and anxiety. This intergenerational transmission of emotional distress is well documented in both Western and Asian studies, where parental affective disorders predict adolescent anxiety through decreased family cohesion (Hadley et al., 2024; Kovalchuk et al., 2021). Furthermore, families facing external pressures such as poverty or migration exhibit weakened emotional climates due to limited parental emotional resources (Iacopetti et al., 2021). Although the current study found this factor less influential in direct ranking, its indirect role as a background determinant remains substantial, reinforcing the need for holistic approaches that address both parental and adolescent mental health.

Finally, *Family Stress and Conflict Climate* ranked lowest but still demonstrated measurable relevance. Chronic tension, unresolved disputes, and inconsistent conflict resolution processes negatively affected adolescents' sense of emotional safety. However, families capable of engaging in repair strategies—such as apologies and reconciliation—showed greater emotional stability despite occasional conflicts (Thomson et al., 2024). These findings align with prior research indicating that while family conflict contributes to anxiety, its effects can be mitigated through positive repair mechanisms and supportive communication (Charmaraman et al., 2022). Moreover, the contextual factors of stress, such as socioeconomic hardship or environmental uncertainty, influence how families manage emotional strain (Dayasiri & Anand, 2025). Thus, family stress does not inherently create anxiety but becomes problematic when unresolved and unbuffered by emotional cohesion.

The prioritization pattern observed in this study supports systemic theories emphasizing family interdependence and reciprocal emotional regulation. The hierarchy observed—from cohesion and empathy at the top to stress at the bottom—suggests that the internal qualities of emotional connection and validation have greater predictive power for adolescent anxiety than external stressors alone. This finding resonates with the ecological models proposed by (Singh et al., 2025) and (Marcus, 2024), which conceptualize family emotional climate as a micro-ecological system that regulates adolescents' psychological adaptation. Moreover, the identified interplay among variables indicates that emotional climate functions as an integrated construct rather than a sum of discrete elements. Cohesion, empathy, expression, and communication reinforce each other

dynamically, contributing to adolescents' perceived safety and emotional control.

Furthermore, the cross-cultural implications of this study merit attention. Research from diverse sociocultural contexts, including China, Greece, and Sri Lanka, confirms that although family warmth and empathy are universally beneficial, the specific modes of emotional expression and control differ according to cultural norms (Dayasiri & Anand, 2025; Magklara et al., 2025; Wang, 2024). In collectivist societies, where emotional restraint is often valued, validation may occur more through behavioral support than verbal expression (Huang, 2023). In contrast, individualistic contexts emphasize direct communication and affective transparency. The findings of the present study, conducted in Kenya, thus add valuable insight to the global understanding of how cultural context moderates family emotional dynamics and adolescent anxiety.

Importantly, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence suggesting that adolescent anxiety cannot be fully understood without reference to the emotional environment of the family. By identifying *Family Cohesion and Support* and *Emotional Validation and Empathy* as primary predictors, the research emphasizes emotional attunement and secure relatedness as central therapeutic targets. These findings align with family systems and attachment theories that conceptualize anxiety as a relational outcome shaped by patterns of affective exchange within the family (Kapetanovic & Skoog, 2020; Rodriguez-Rubio et al., 2025). Hence, interventions aiming to reduce adolescent anxiety should move beyond individual-focused models and incorporate systemic strategies to strengthen familial emotional bonds.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite the robustness of its mixed-methods design, this study faces several limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported quantitative data may introduce social desirability bias, as participants might present their families in a more favorable emotional light. Second, the qualitative phase, though comprehensive, relied on literature-based data rather than primary interviews or observations, which may limit the contextual depth of themes. Additionally, the study's sample was limited to Kenyan families, restricting generalizability to other cultural settings. The use of cross-sectional data also prevents causal inference regarding the directionality of relationships between emotional climate factors and adolescent anxiety. Future studies could employ longitudinal

or multi-informant approaches to capture dynamic changes over time.

Future research should expand the cross-cultural scope of this investigation to include comparative analyses between collectivist and individualist cultures. Integrating physiological and behavioral measures of emotional regulation could enrich understanding beyond self-report instruments. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could examine how changes in family cohesion and validation predict trajectories of adolescent anxiety across developmental stages. Experimental interventions targeting emotional validation, empathy training, and family communication should also be evaluated for their efficacy in reducing anxiety symptoms. Lastly, incorporating mixed-informant perspectives from parents, teachers, and peers would provide a holistic understanding of how emotional climate operates across contexts.

In clinical and educational practice, these findings highlight the importance of family-based interventions that strengthen emotional cohesion, enhance validation, and improve communication patterns. Practitioners should prioritize empathy training and emotion-coaching programs for parents to foster adaptive emotional climates. Schools and community centers can collaborate with families through psychoeducational workshops focusing on managing family stress and promoting supportive relationships. Additionally, counseling approaches should adopt systemic frameworks that address both adolescent anxiety and family emotional functioning concurrently, ensuring sustainable emotional well-being for adolescents within their familial contexts.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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