

## Family Dynamics: The Role of Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness in Problem-Solving

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To investigate the relationships between family emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and family problem-solving abilities.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study design was employed with a sample of 310 participants. Data were collected using the Family Assessment Device, Family Expressiveness Questionnaire, and Social Connectedness Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and linear regression analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27.

**Results:** Descriptive statistics revealed mean scores of 3.45 (SD = 0.67) for Family Problem-Solving, 4.12 (SD = 0.89) for Family Emotional Expressiveness, and 4.56 (SD = 0.78) for Social Connectedness. Significant positive correlations were found between Family Problem-Solving and Family Emotional Expressiveness ( $r = 0.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Social Connectedness ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The regression model was significant ( $F(2, 307) = 148.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with  $R^2 = 0.49$ , indicating that 49% of the variance in Family Problem-Solving was explained by Family Emotional Expressiveness ( $B = 0.38$ ,  $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Social Connectedness ( $B = 0.47$ ,  $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Conclusion:** The study highlights the significant roles of family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness in enhancing family problem-solving capabilities. Both factors were found to be positively correlated with and predictive of effective family problem-solving, suggesting that fostering open emotional communication and strong social ties can significantly contribute to family resilience and functionality.

**Keywords:** Family Problem-Solving, Family Emotional Expressiveness, Social Connectedness, Family Dynamics.

## 1 Introduction

Family problem-solving is an essential skill that significantly impacts the emotional and psychological health of family members. Effective problem-solving within families can reduce conflicts, foster understanding, and enhance relational satisfaction (Schuman et al., 2013). Conversely, poor problem-solving abilities can lead to increased stress, misunderstandings, and persistent conflicts, which may negatively affect the mental health of both children and adults within the family unit (Siu & Shek, 2005). In this regard, examining family problem-solving provides critical insights into the mechanisms that support or hinder family resilience and adaptability.

Emotional expressiveness within families is another critical factor influencing family dynamics and individual well-being. Families that effectively express and manage emotions tend to have stronger bonds and better conflict resolution skills (Kitzmann et al., 2008). The ability to express emotions openly and constructively allows family members to understand each other's perspectives and needs, fostering a supportive and empathetic environment. Emotional expressiveness is linked to various positive outcomes, including lower levels of stress and depression and higher levels of life satisfaction (Jose et al., 2012).

Social connectedness, defined as the sense of belonging and being close to others, is a fundamental human need that significantly impacts mental health and well-being (Foster et al., 2017). In the context of family, social connectedness refers to the strength of the relationships among family members and their connections to broader social networks. Strong social connectedness has been associated with various positive outcomes, including enhanced psychological resilience, better coping mechanisms, and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Kiss et al., 2022). Studies have shown that individuals who feel connected to their family and community are more likely to report higher levels of well-being and life satisfaction (Jose et al., 2012).

The relationship between family emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and problem-solving is complex and interdependent. Effective family problem-solving often requires high levels of emotional expressiveness and social connectedness, which facilitate open communication and mutual support (Walsh, 2003). Conversely, families that struggle with emotional expressiveness and social connectedness may find it challenging to resolve conflicts and address problems

effectively, leading to increased stress and relational difficulties (Lee et al., 2005).

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in family systems theory, which posits that families function as interconnected systems where each member's behavior affects the entire system (Stevenson-Hinde & Akister, 1995). This perspective underscores the importance of examining the interactions between different family dynamics to understand their collective impact on family functioning and individual well-being.

Previous research has highlighted the significance of family resilience, defined as the ability to withstand and rebound from adversity, in promoting healthy family functioning (Nadrowska et al., 2017). Family resilience is often bolstered by effective problem-solving, emotional expressiveness, and strong social connections, which enable families to navigate challenges and maintain stability (Orthner et al., 2004).

Studies have also examined the role of external support systems, such as community resources and social services, in enhancing family resilience and connectedness (Roelands et al., 2007). For instance, interventions targeting family caregivers of stroke survivors have demonstrated the importance of social support in alleviating caregiver stress and improving family dynamics (Grant et al., 2002). Similarly, programs designed to enhance social problem-solving skills in children with intellectual disabilities have shown positive effects on their social inclusion and interpersonal relationships (Vlachou & Stavroussi, 2016).

Despite the extensive research on family dynamics and social connectedness, there remains a need to further explore the specific mechanisms through which these factors influence family problem-solving. Additionally, there is limited understanding of how these dynamics interact in diverse family contexts, particularly among socially vulnerable populations (Foster et al., 2017). This study aims to address these gaps by examining the relationships between family emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and family problem-solving in a diverse sample.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Assess the relationship between family emotional expressiveness and family problem-solving.
- Examine the association between social connectedness and family problem-solving.
- Investigate the combined effect of family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness on family problem-solving.

## 2 Methods and Materials

### 2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study utilized a cross-sectional design to investigate the relationship between family problem-solving, family emotional expressiveness, and social connectedness. The sample consisted of 310 participants, selected based on the sample size recommendations from the Morgan and Krejcie table, ensuring sufficient statistical power for the analyses conducted. Participants were recruited through various community centers, schools, and online platforms to ensure a diverse representation of family backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required participants to be adults aged 18 and older, living with at least one family member, and able to understand and complete the survey in English.

### 2.2 Measures

#### 2.2.1 Family Problem-Solving

The Family Problem-Solving measure utilized in this study is the Family Assessment Device (FAD), developed by Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop in 1983. The FAD is a widely used instrument designed to evaluate family functioning across several dimensions. Specifically, the Problem Solving subscale, consisting of 6 items, assesses a family's ability to resolve problems effectively in a manner that maintains family harmony. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree), with higher scores indicating greater problems in family problem-solving. The FAD has demonstrated strong validity and reliability in numerous studies, confirming its effectiveness in measuring family dynamics (Schuman et al., 2013).

#### 2.2.2 Family Emotional Expressiveness

The Family Emotional Expressiveness measure employed in this research is the Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (FEQ), created by Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Parke, and Fox in 1995. The FEQ assesses the frequency and type of emotional expressions within the family context. It comprises 40 items divided into four subscales: Positive Dominant, Positive Submissive, Negative Dominant, and Negative Submissive expressiveness. Respondents rate each item on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all frequently) to 9 (very frequently). The FEQ has been extensively validated, demonstrating strong reliability and validity in various

studies, making it a standard tool for assessing family emotional expressiveness (Keshavarz-Afshar et al., 2015; Milojevich & Haskett, 2017; Pezard et al., 2017).

#### 2.2.3 Social Connectedness

The measure for Social Connectedness in this study is the Social Connectedness Scale (SCS), developed by Lee and Robbins in 1995. The SCS is designed to assess individuals' sense of belonging and interpersonal closeness within their social network. The scale includes 8 items, each rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a greater sense of social connectedness. The SCS has demonstrated robust psychometric properties, with high reliability and validity reported across multiple studies, ensuring its appropriateness for measuring social connectedness in various populations (Fox, 2023; Jose et al., 2012; Larsson, 2007; Lim, 2023; Ransome, 2023; Stone et al., 2014; Templeton, 2021).

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. To examine the relationships between the dependent variable (Family Problem-Solving) and each independent variable (Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness), Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. This analysis helped identify the strength and direction of the bivariate relationships between these variables.

Further, to assess the combined effect of Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness on Family Problem-Solving, a linear regression analysis was performed. In this model, Family Problem-Solving was the dependent variable, while Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness were included as independent variables. This analysis provided insights into how much variance in Family Problem-Solving could be explained by these two predictors and the relative contribution of each predictor.

All statistical tests were conducted with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## 3 Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the study participants ( $N = 310$ ) revealed a diverse sample. The sample included 167 females (53.87%) and 143 males (46.13%). The age distribution showed that 24 participants (7.74%) were aged 18-25 years, 102 participants (32.90%) were aged 26-35

years, 89 participants (28.71%) were aged 36-45 years, 62 participants (20.00%) were aged 46-55 years, and 33 participants (10.65%) were aged 56 years and older. Regarding marital status, 198 participants (63.87%) were married, 82 participants (26.45%) were single, 21 participants (6.77%) were divorced, and 9 participants (2.90%) were widowed. In terms of education level, 49 participants (15.81%) had a high school diploma, 112

participants (36.13%) had some college education, 92 participants (29.68%) held a bachelor's degree, and 57 participants (18.39%) had a graduate degree.

The descriptive statistics for the variables of interest are presented in Table 1. The mean and standard deviation for Family Problem-Solving, Family Emotional Expressiveness, and Social Connectedness are provided.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 310)*

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Family Problem-Solving	3.45	0.67
Family Emotional Expressiveness	4.12	0.89
Social Connectedness	4.56	0.78

The mean score for Family Problem-Solving was 3.45 (SD = 0.67), indicating a moderate level of problem-solving ability among the families. Family Emotional Expressiveness had a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.89), suggesting that families generally exhibited moderate to high levels of emotional expressiveness. Social Connectedness had the highest mean score of 4.56 (SD = 0.78), reflecting strong social bonds and connections within the sample.

Before conducting the main analyses, assumptions of linear regression were checked and confirmed. Linearity was assessed through scatterplots, which indicated a linear relationship between the dependent variable (Family Problem-Solving) and the independent variables (Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness). Normality of residuals was verified using the Shapiro-Wilk

test ( $p = 0.21$ ) and by inspecting Q-Q plots, which showed that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. Homoscedasticity was examined using the Breusch-Pagan test ( $p = 0.34$ ), indicating that the variance of residuals was constant across levels of the independent variables. Multicollinearity was checked by calculating the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all VIF values below 2, suggesting no issues with multicollinearity. Finally, independence of residuals was confirmed with the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.98, indicating no significant autocorrelation. These checks ensured the validity of the regression analysis results.

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients and p-values for the relationships between Family Problem-Solving and the independent variables: Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Matrix*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Family Problem-Solving	1.00		
2. Family Emotional Expressiveness	0.58** ( $p < .001$ )	1.00	
3. Social Connectedness	0.62** ( $p < .001$ )	0.53** ( $p < .001$ )	1.00

The correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between Family Problem-Solving and both Family Emotional Expressiveness ( $r = 0.58, p < .001$ ) and Social Connectedness ( $r = 0.62, p < .001$ ). Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness ( $r =$

$0.53, p < .001$ ), indicating that these variables are interrelated.

The summary of the regression results, including the sum of squares, degrees of freedom, mean squares, R, R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, F value, and p value, is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Regression Analysis*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> adj	F	p
Regression	55.23	2	27.61	0.70	0.49	0.48	148.85	<.001
Residual	57.52	307	0.19					
Total	112.75	309						

The regression model was significant ( $F(2, 307) = 148.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.49, indicating that 49% of the variance in Family Problem-Solving was explained by Family Emotional Expressiveness and Social Connectedness. The adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.48 suggests that

the model accounts for 48% of the variance when adjusted for the number of predictors.

The results of the multivariate regression analysis, including the unstandardized coefficients (B), standard error, standardized coefficients ( $\beta$ ), t values, and p values, are provided in [Table 4](#)

**Table 4**

*Multivariate Regression Results*

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	0.75	0.18		4.17	<.001
Family Emotional Expressiveness	0.38	0.05	0.42	7.60	<.001
Social Connectedness	0.47	0.06	0.49	8.12	<.001

The regression analysis showed that both Family Emotional Expressiveness ( $B = 0.38$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $t = 7.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Social Connectedness ( $B = 0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $t = 8.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of Family Problem-Solving. The positive coefficients indicate that higher levels of emotional expressiveness and social connectedness are associated with better problem-solving abilities within families.

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the relationships between family emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and family problem-solving. Pearson correlation coefficients revealed significant positive correlations between family problem-solving and both family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness. Further, the linear regression analysis indicated that both family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness were significant predictors of family problem-solving, with the combined model explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in family problem-solving abilities.

The findings of this study align with existing literature emphasizing the critical role of family emotional expressiveness in enhancing family problem-solving capabilities. Families that effectively communicate their

emotions are better equipped to manage conflicts and develop cooperative problem-solving strategies (Kitzmann et al., 2008). This is consistent with the family systems theory, which posits that open emotional communication strengthens family bonds and fosters a supportive environment conducive to effective problem-solving (Stevenson-Hinde & Akister, 1995).

Additionally, the positive association between social connectedness and family problem-solving highlights the importance of strong interpersonal relationships within and beyond the family unit. Socially connected individuals benefit from enhanced psychological resilience and support, which facilitate collaborative problem-solving and conflict resolution (Foster et al., 2017). This finding is supported by Jose, Ryan, and Pryor (2012), who demonstrated that adolescents with strong social connections reported higher levels of well-being and effective problem-solving skills (Jose et al., 2012).

The significant predictive power of family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness in the regression model underscores the interdependent nature of these constructs in promoting effective family problem-solving. The ability to express emotions openly and maintain strong social ties provides a robust framework for families to navigate challenges and maintain harmony (Walsh, 2003).

These findings are in line with the work of Kiss et al. (2022), who identified emotional support and social connectedness as key factors in preserving mental health and facilitating problem-solving during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kiss et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have highlighted the role of emotional expressiveness in family functioning. For instance, Kitzmann et al. (2008) found that families with high levels of emotional expressiveness were more successful in treating pediatric obesity, underscoring the broader applicability of these findings across various family issues (Kitzmann et al., 2008). Similarly, Stevenson-Hinde and Akister (1995) demonstrated that open emotional communication within families is associated with better problem-solving outcomes, further validating our results (Stevenson-Hinde & Akister, 1995).

Social connectedness has also been extensively studied as a critical component of family resilience and well-being. Foster et al. (2017) showed that socially connected adolescents in vulnerable communities exhibited higher levels of resilience and problem-solving skills, supporting our findings on the importance of social ties in family functioning (Foster et al., 2017). Moreover, the work of Jose et al. (2012) and Kiss et al. (2022) consistently emphasizes the protective effects of social connectedness on mental health and problem-solving, reinforcing the significance of these factors in our study (Jose et al., 2012; Kiss et al., 2022).

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationships between family emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and family problem-solving, several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences from the observed relationships. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish the directionality and causal mechanisms underlying these associations. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants may respond in socially desirable ways or may not accurately recall their behaviors and experiences. Third, the sample, though diverse, may not be fully representative of all family structures and cultural backgrounds, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Future research should address the limitations of this study by employing longitudinal designs to examine the causal pathways between family emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and problem-solving. Such studies could provide more definitive evidence on how these factors interact over time and contribute to family resilience and well-being. Additionally, incorporating objective measures, such as observational data or physiological indicators of

emotional expressiveness, could enhance the validity of the findings. Exploring the role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping these dynamics would also be valuable, as different cultural backgrounds may influence family communication patterns and social connectedness differently (Lee et al., 2005).

Furthermore, investigating the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to enhance family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness could provide practical applications for improving family problem-solving. Programs that focus on building emotional communication skills and fostering social networks within communities could be particularly beneficial for families facing significant challenges, such as those with members experiencing chronic illness or disability (Grant et al., 2002; Roelands et al., 2007).

The findings of this study have important implications for practitioners working with families. Interventions aimed at enhancing family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness should be prioritized, as these factors are critical for effective problem-solving and overall family functioning. Family therapy and counseling programs can incorporate techniques to improve emotional communication, such as emotion-focused therapy or expressive writing exercises, to help families express their emotions more openly and constructively (Walsh, 2003).

Community-based programs that foster social connectedness, such as support groups, community centers, and social skills training, can also play a crucial role in enhancing family problem-solving abilities. Practitioners should advocate for and facilitate access to these resources, particularly for families in socially vulnerable or isolated situations (Foster et al., 2017). Additionally, incorporating family problem-solving training into existing programs for chronic illness management or disability support could provide comprehensive support for families dealing with significant stressors (Grant et al., 2002; Vlachou & Stavroussi, 2016).

In summary, enhancing family emotional expressiveness and social connectedness can significantly improve family problem-solving capabilities, contributing to healthier and more resilient family dynamics. By addressing these critical factors through targeted interventions and community support, practitioners can help families navigate challenges more effectively and foster a supportive and cohesive family environment.

#### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### 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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### Ethics 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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