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The Role of Emotional Flexibility in Relationship Between Behavioral Problems and Coping Strategies Among Late Adolescence

Areeba Rafique¹ Rabia Maryam²

¹ BS Applied Psychology, Department of Applied Psychology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Correspondence Author: rabiamaryam@gcuf.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the relationship among emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and coping strategies among late adolescents and investigated the mediating role of emotional flexibility in the relationship between internalizing and externalizing behavioral problem and Adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. A correlational research design was used with a sample of N=200 late adolescent's age 17 to 19 years, including 97 males and 103 females, selected through convenience sampling from different educational institute. Data were collected using a demographic information sheet, Emotional flexibility scale (EFS), Behavioral problem scale (BPS) and brief COPE inventory. Data analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Independence sample test, pearson correlation and mediation analysis through process model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples. Finding indicate the males reported significantly higher behavioral problem than females. Significant difference was also found according to the institutional type, with private institute student reporting higher behavioral problem scores, whereas government institute student reported higher coping strategies score. Emotional flexibility significantly predict adaptive coping strategies was significantly negative associated with externalizing behavioral problem. However, emotional flexibility did not significantly mediate with relationship between internalizing or externalizing behavioral problem and adaptive or maladaptive copy as the booster confidence interval for the indirect effect included zero. Overall, the finding suggests the emotional flexibility associate with adolescent coping and behavioral functioning but does not significantly explain the relationship between behavioral problem and copying strategies in the present sample.



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Introduction

Late adolescence is a sensitive development stage characterized by significant emotional, cognitive and social change. Typically spanning from 17 to 19 years of age, this period involves increasing Independence, identity development, academic demands, career decisions and changing family and peer relationship with development transitions may increase emotional reactivity and vulnerability to behavioral difficulties, making effect emotional Regulation and behavioral adjustment particularly important during the stage (Schäfer et al., 2017).

Behavioral problem during adolescence may include internalizing and externalizing difficulties such as emotional deregulation, impulsivity, aggression, rule break tendencies, and interpersonal problems. Such difficulties may negatively affect Academy functioning, family relationship and social adjustment and may increase vulnerability to psychological problems later in life (chen at al., 2023). Behavioral difficulties is influence by multiple factors, including biological development, environmental pressure, family dynamics and peer influence (Schäfer et al., 2017). Adolescents experiencing persistent behavioral problem may also have a difficulty regulating emotional and may rely on less effective copying strategies.

Copying strategies refers to the cognitive and behavioral effect individuals use to manage stressful and demanding situations. Adolescents encounter various academic, social and familial stressors that require effective coping adaptive coping strategies, including problem solving, social support, cognitive reappraisal and acceptance are generally associated with better emotions and behavioral adjustment whereas the maladaptive strategies such as avoidance, denial, rumination, emotional suppression and self-blame may contribute to psychological distress and behavioral difficulties (chen et al., 2023). The effectiveness of copying may also depend on an individual ability to adjust copying response according to situational demand.

Emotional flexibility has emerged as an important psychological factor associated with adaptive functioning. It refers to the capacity to modify emotional response, shift perspective and select regulatory strategies according to situational demands (Haag et al., 2024). Higher emotional flexibility may facilitate adaptive copy and reduce difficulties associated with emotional and behavioral adjustment, whereas emotional in flexibility has been associated with emotional distress, interpersonal difficulties, and behavioral problem (wen et al., 2021). Previous research has therefore suggested that emotional flexibility may be an important mechanism through which and adolescents manage emotional and behavioral challenges (Chen et al., 2023; Schäfer et al., 2017).

Although previous researches has highlighted association among emotional flexibility, coping and behavioral functioning limited research has directly examined the mediating role of emotional flexibility between behavioral problem and copying strategies, particularly within the Pakistani context. The present study therefore aimed to examine the relationship among emotional flexibility behavioral problem and copying strategies among late adolescent and to investigate the mediating role of emotional flexibility in relationship between Internalizing and externalizing behavioral problem and adaptive and maladaptive copying.

Previous research has highlighted the importance copying Strategies and emotional regulation in adolescence behavioral adjustment Zimmer-Gembeck and skinners (2016) reported that adaptive copying strategies, including problems solving, positive reappraisal, and active engagement were associated with battery emotional functioning and fewer behavioral difficulties, whereas avoidance and denial were associated with greater stress and conduct problem. Similarly, Compas et al., (2007) found the adaptive copy was associated with better emotional adjustment while maladaptive copy related to emotional this Regulation and psychological difficulties among adolescents.

Researches has also increasingly focused on emotional flexibility as a factor in adolescent adjustment. Smetana et al (2015) reported that adolescent with better emotional Regulation and flexibility demonstrated better adjustment in family and peer context. Chen et al., (2023) found the emotional flexibility was associated with adaptive copy and fewer behavioral problems, suggesting its potential role in the relationship between copying and behavioral functioning Haag et al. (2024) further demonstrated that greater emotional flexibility was associated with the fawer behavioral difficulties and better psychological adjustment over time. In contrast, wen et al. (2021) found the emotional flexibility predicted greater behavioral problem and psychological difficulties, particularly when maladaptive regulatory strategies such as rumination and suppression were involved.

Evidence from Pakistan also highlights the relationship between copying, emotional Regulation and behavioral adjustment among adolescent khan et al. (2018) found that problem-focused coping has negatively associated with behavioral problems whereas the avoidance and denial were positively associated with behavioral difficulties. Awan and Iqbal (2019) reported that lower emotional flexibility was associated with greater aggression and impulsivity among Pakistani adolescents. Similarly, Naeem and Zia (2020) found the social sport and cognitive reappraisal were associated with fewer behavioral problems. Shamim and Muazzam (2021). Reported better emotional Regulation and fewer behavioral difficulties among adolescents receiving stronger familial support, while Rasheed and Farooq (2022) found that emotional flexibility was associated with more effective adaptive copy and better psychological adjustment among Pakistani youth.

Collectively, previous finding indicates that emotional flexibility coping Strategies and behavioral problem were closely related during adolescence. Adolescence whose demonstrate greater emotional flexibility and use adaptive copying strategies generally show better behavioral and psychological adjustment, wereas

is the maladaptive copy and emotional in flexibility are associated with greater behavioral difficulties. However Limited researches has directly examiner emotional flexibility as a mediator between the behavioral problem and coping strategies particularly among Pakistani late adolescence the present study address this gap by examine these variable together and investigating the mediating role of emotional flexibility.

Objective

- To examine the relationship between emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and coping strategies among late adolescents.
- To examine demographic differences in emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and coping strategies among late adolescents.
- To examine whether emotional flexibility mediate the relationship between internalizing and externalizing behavioral problem and adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant relationship between emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and coping strategies among late adolescents.
- Emotional flexibility will mediate the relationship between internalizing behavioral problem and adaptive coping strategies.
- Emotional flexibility will mediate the relationship between internalizing behavioral problem and maladaptive coping strategies.
- Emotional flexibility will mediate the relationship between externalizing behavioral problem and adaptive coping strategies.
- Emotional flexibility will mediate the relationship between externalizing behavioral problem and maladaptive coping strategies.
- There will be a significant demographic differences in emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and coping strategies among late adolescents.

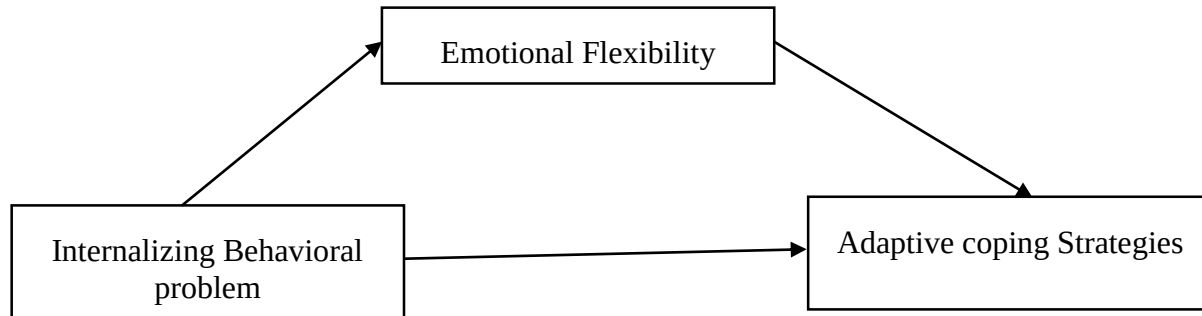
Theoretical Framework

The study specified four simple mediation model. In each model behavioral problem were treated as

the predictor, emotional flexibility as the mediator, and a coping strategy dimension as the outcome.

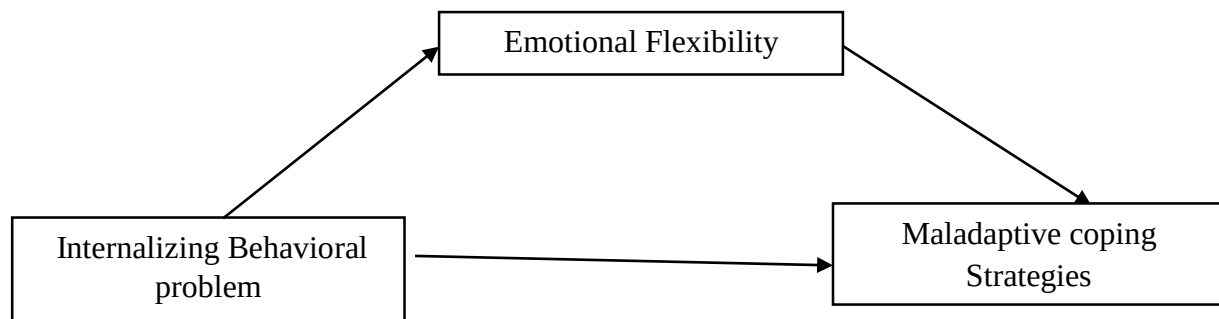
Model 1

Mediation Model of Emotional Flexibility in relationship between Internalizing Behavioral problem and adaptive coping Strategies.



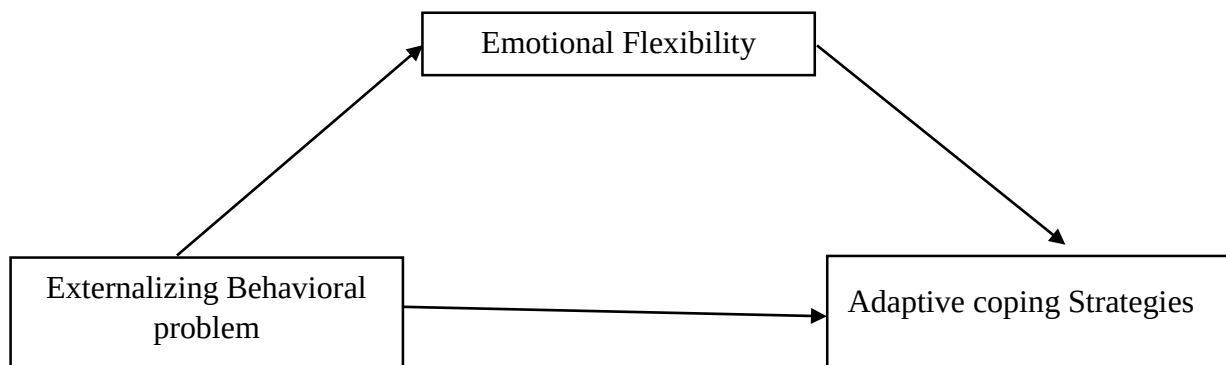
Model 2

Mediation Model of Emotional Flexibility in relationship between Internalizing Behavioral problem and Maladjusted Coping Strategies.



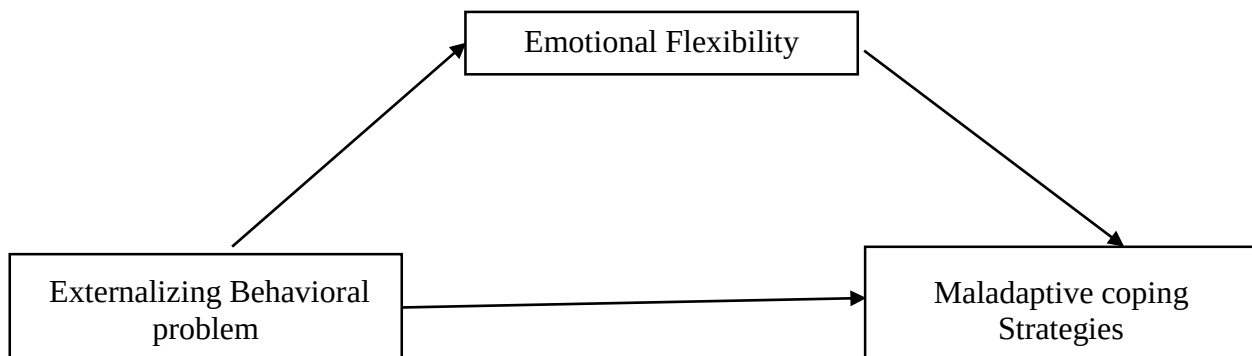
Model 3

Mediation Model of Emotional Flexibility in relationship between Externalizing Behavioral problem and adaptive coping Strategies.



Model 4

Mediation Model of Emotional Flexibility in relationship between Externalizing Behavioral problem and Maladjusted Coping Strategies.



Methodology

Research Design

A correlation research design was used to examine the relationship among Behavioral problem, emotional flexibility and copying strategies without manipulating the study variables.

Participants

The sample consists of $N=200$ late adolescents and age 17 to 19 years, including 97 males and 103 females recruited from different educational institutions through convenience sampling.

Inclusion criteria

Male and female adolescence age 17 -19 years old enrolled in classes 10, 11 or 12 is willing to participate word including in the studies

Exclusion criteria

Adolescence below 17 or above 19 years, those not enrolled in class 10, 11 or 12 or unable to provide reliable self-report data are excluded.

Measures

Data were collected using a demographic sheet emotional flexibility scale (EFS; Fu et al., 2018), behavioral problem scale (BPS; Ara, 2018), and COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997). The measures

assessed demographic characteristics, emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and copying strategies.

Procedure

Participant were recruited from different educational Institute through convenience sampling. After obtaining institutional permission the informed constant, Participant complete the demographic sheet and standardized questionnaires in a quiet classroom setting. Completed questionnaires were coded and securely stored.

Ethical consideration

Participant was volunteer and informed constant. Participant were assured the confidentiality and Anonymity and informed of their right to withdraw and any time without penalty data were used only for research purpose.

Data analysis

Data Analyzed using SPSS version 24 descriptive statistics, person correlation and mediation analysis work conducted mediation was testing you using process model for with 5000 boost trap sample with significant set at $P < 0.05$.

Results

Table 1: Percentages, Frequencies, Mean and SD of Demographic Characteristics of Participant (N=200).

Demographic Variable	Categories	F	%	M	SD
Age				17.2300	.79388
Class				11.1100	1.29083
Gender					
	Male	97	8.5%		
	Female	103	51.5%		
Residential Area					
	Urban	96	48.0%		
	Rural	104	52.0%		
Family system					
	Joint family	73	36.5%		
	Nuclear family	127	63.5%		
Intuitied					
	Private	73	32.0%		
	Government	127	68.0%		
Socioeconomic status					
	Low	2	1.0%		
	Middle	197	98.5%		
	High	1	0.5%		

Note: f= Frequency, % Percentage, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

The sample Consisted of 200 participants, with females (51.5%) slightly outnumbering males (48.5%). Most participants belonged to nuclear families and reported a middle socioeconomic

status. The mean age of the participants was 17.23 years (SD=0.79), while the mean class level was 11.11(SD=1.29).

Table 2: Reliability of study subscale

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
EF	.70	4
BP	.82	3
CS	.66	28

Note. EF = Emotional Flexibility, BP = Behavioral Problem, and CS = Coping Strategies.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were reported to assess the internal consistency reliability of each subscale, and the number of items included in each subscale was also presented.

The cronbach's alpha value were .70 or emotional flexibility, .82 for behavioral problem and .66 for coping strategies, indicating varying level of internal consistency across the study measures.

Table 3: Correlation among Emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and coping strategies.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Note. NE=Negative emotion, EC= Emotional communication, PE=Positive emotion, EF=Emotional flexibility, IP=Internalizing problem, EP= Externalizing Problem, BP=behavioral problem, ACS= Adaptive coping strategies, MACS= Maladaptive coping strategies. ** $p < .01$, $p < .05$ (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis show that emotional flexibility was positively correlated with negative emotional, emotional communication positive emotion and adaptive coping strategies. Whereas it was negatively correlate with externalizing behavioral problem and total behavioral problem.

Emotional communication was negatively correlate with internalizing behavioral problem, externalizing behavioral problem and total behavioral problem while behavioral problem was showed positive correlation with maladaptive copy strategies.

	NE	EC	PE	Total_EF	IP	EP	Total_BP	ACS	MACS
NE	1								
EC	-.023	1							
PE	.214**	.043	1						
Total_EF	.738**	.560**	.528**	1					
IP	.132	-.143*	-.017	.003	1				
EP	-.130	-.188**	-.162*	-.251**	.252**	1			
Total_BP	-.009	-.211**	-.118	-.166*	.762**	.819**	1		
ACS	.222**	.146*	.122	.276**	.208**	-.121	.042	1	
MACS	.093	.012	-.078	.042	.342**	.207**	.342**	.237**	1

Table 3: Independent sample t-test for demographic differences.

Outcome/Grouping	Group1 M(SD)	Group2 M(SD)	t	p	95%CL
Behavioral problem/gender	Male 24.7(6.09)	Female 22.00 (6.34)	2.58	.010	[0.54, 4.01]
Behavioral problem/Institution	Private 25.07(6.53)	Government 22.17(6.19)	3.09	.002	[1.05, 4.74]
Coping strategies/ Institution	Private 65.28(6.19)	Government 68.22(10.11)	-2.53	.012	[-5.24,-0.65]

Note. M=Mean. SD =Stander Deviation, CL= Confidence interval. Statistical Significance was considered at $p < .5$.

Significant gender differences were found in behavioral problem, with males reporting higher scores than female's significant institutional differences were also observed, with private institution student reporting higher behavioral

problem, while government institution student reported higher coping strategy scores.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship among emotional flexibility, behavioral problem

and copying strategies among late adolescent and investigated whether emotional flexibility mediate the relationship between internalizing and externalizing behavioral problem and adaptive and maladaptive copying strategies. The findings provided potential support for the expected relationship among the study variable while the purposed mediating affect was not statistical supported.

The finding showed that emotional flexibility was significantly associated with adaptive copying strategies. This finding was consistent with previous research suggesting that adolescent who were better able to adjust their emotional response according to situational demand were more likely to use adaptive copying strategies. Chen et al. (2023) reported that greater emotional flexibility was associated with adaptive copy and fewer behavioral problem. Similarly, Rasheed and Farooq (2022) found the emotional flexibility was associated with more affective adaptive copy among Pakistani adolescence. The present finding therefore suggested that emotional flexibility may be relevant to adolescence ability to use constructive coping responses when dealing with stress and challenging situations.

The study also found significant negative association with externalizing behavioral problem and emotional flexibility. This finding was consist with Wen et al. (2021), who reported that emotional inflexibility was associated with greater behavioral problem and psychological difficulties. Awan and Iqbal (2019) also found the lower emotional flexibility was associated with greater aggression and impulsivity among Pakistani adolescence. These findings suggested that difficulties in adjusting emotions responses may be related to externalizing behavioral difficulties such as, aggression, impulsivity and rule-break. Similarly, previously researches emphasized that emotional Regulation and flexibility are important for behavioral adjustment during adolescence.

Significant demographic differences were also observed. Male reported higher behavioral problems than females. The findings indicated that gender may be associated with differences in

behavioral functioning during late adolescence. Significant differences were also found according to the institutional students from private Institute reported higher behavioral problem whereas the student from government institute reported higher coping strategies. These difference might reflect variations in student educational and social environment. However, the present correlation design does not allow casual explanation for those differences.

Deposit significant association between some studies variable, emotional flexibility did not significantly media the relationship between behavioral problem and copying strategy. For both internal and externalizing behavioral problem, the bootstrap confidence and travel for the indirect effect including zero, indicating that the proposed in direct effect was not statistical significant. Thus, the finding did not support the hypotheses that emotional flexibility would mediate the relationship between Internalizing and externalizing behavioral problem other adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies

The absence of significant mediation may indicate that the emotional flexibility was associate with coping and behavioral functioning, it might not be the mechanism explaining the relationship between behavioral problem and cropping strategies in the sample. The findings differ from some previous researches particularly Chen et al. (2023), which suggested a mediating role of emotional flexibility. The difference may be related to the cultural factors, characteristics for the simple, or difference in the measurement and assessment of copying and behavioral problem. The present study focused specifically on late adolescents in Pakistani educational context, where the family relationship, social expectations and educational environmental, emotional regulation and coping differ from some other individualistic culture

Overall, the finding suggested the emotional flexibility remained an important psychological factor associated with adolescence adjustment, particularly adaptive copy and externalizing behavioral problem. However, its role appeared to

be more Complex than the simple mediating mechanism. The result highlighted importance of considering emotional flexibility and behavioral problem as a related but distinct aspects of adolescence psychological functioning.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The present study examined the relationship among emotional flexibility, behavioral problem and copying strategies among late adolescents and tested the mediating role of emotional flexibility. The finding showed that emotional facility was significantly associated with adaptive coping strategies was negatively associated with externalizing behavioral problem. Significant demographic differences were also observed in behavioral problems according to the gender and institutional type, while the copying strategies different according to the institutional type, however emotional flexibility did not significantly mediate the relationship between internalizing and externalizing problem and adaptive coping strategies. Overall, finding indicated the emotions

emotional flexibility was associated with adolescent copying and functioning, but it did not significant explain the relationship between the problem and coping strategies in present sample.

Based on the finding of the present study, educational institutional made focused on developing adolescence emotional flexibility and adaptive coping skills through counseling and psychological skill base programs. Teacher, parents and counsellors may also pay attention to behavioral difficulties particularly externalizing behavioral and providing appropriate support at early stages. Future studies should in the included larger or more diverse sample and examine additional psychological or contextual factors that may explain the relationship between behavioral problem and copying Strategies. Further researches may also explore emotional flexibility across different educational and cultural sitting to better understanding it role in adolescence adjustment.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research.

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