

## **Hardiness as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Emotional Autonomy and Depression Among Adolescents**

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The present study has been designed to study the hardiness as a moderating variable in the autonomy and depression relationship. For this purpose, a sample of 300 adolescents (boys = 129, girls = 171) was collected belonging to 16 to 19 years of age. Incidental sampling technique was employed. The Emotional Autonomy Scale (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1961) and Personal View Survey (Kobasa, 1986) were used to study the variables. Statistical analysis revealed emotional autonomy as a significant predictor of depression. Hardiness moderates this relationship significantly. There was a significant difference in the relationship between depression and emotional autonomy for three levels of hardiness (low, average, and high). The relationship between emotional autonomy and depression was observed to be stronger for low levels of hardiness.

*Keywords.* Hardiness, emotional autonomy, depression, adolescents

Adolescence is the most crucial stage of an individual's life because of the various changes that take place. These changes can be transformation in relationships or biological changes or can be social changes. During this transitional period, task of autonomy is crucial. It is the time when individual's relinquish childish dependencies on their parents and become self-reliant. There is a conflict between dependency and the newer demands of independence.

During adolescence, adolescents experience turbulent moods and emotions. Adolescents also strive for identity and recognition. According to Sibnath and Bhattacharjee (2009), individuals experience depressive symptoms which are characterized by a range

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of experiences from a slightly noticeable and temporary mood change to a profoundly impaired and life threatening disorder.

Depression refers to a constellation of experiences including not only mood but also mental, physical and behavioral experiences that define more prolonged impairing and severe conditions that maybe clinically diagnosable as the syndrome of depression. Depression is defined as a mood disorder characterized by a range of symptoms that may include feeling depressed all the time, loss of pleasure, feelings of worthlessness and suicidal thoughts. The episodes of depression mostly occur in mid to late adolescence and have shown to predict future adjustment problems in many areas including academic functioning. The study of adolescent depression has been the focus of many psychologists and numerous attempts have been made to understand what can aggravate depression and what can moderate the effects of depression. One personality factor which can moderate the depressive effects in adolescents is hardiness.

Hardiness is a recent resurgence of interest in the role of personality factors in health and illness. Personality hardiness is a composite of interrelated attitudes of commitment, control and challenge that provide courage and motivation needed in turning stressful circumstances into growth (Maddi, 2002). These related variables of hardiness give a person hope and an optimistic view to life. It is considered as a global personality aspect which includes emotional, behavioral and cognitive qualities (Bartone, 2006). Later research has clearly suggested that hardiness is a buffer against depressive symptoms. Hardiness alters the individual's cognitive processes and reduces the anxiety and depression and increases health and individual happiness (Vogt et al., 1992). Being hardy also does not mean that one will never experience stress but it means that one is able to deal with stress in adaptive ways (Crook, 2014).

Steinberg and Silverberg (1986) first used the term "emotional autonomy" to describe the affective disengagement of the adolescent from his or her parents, and established a scale to measure it. This term according to them suggests a detachment from parents, which means withdrawing from the family and moving to wider community. The scale Emotional Autonomy Scale that has been developed is a measure of detachment and it assesses the adolescent's ability to perceive parents as people, parental de-idealization, non-dependency on parents and individuation. Thus high scores of emotional autonomy on this scale will suggest that the adolescents' are detached from their parents. This means that emotional autonomy will have a negative relationship with self-esteem and will have a positive relationship with externalizing behaviors in adolescents. Parra and Oliva (2009) also

suggest that emotional autonomy is associated with negative family relationships. In a study on Spanish adolescents, by Parra, Oliva, and Sánchez-Queija (2015) it was reported that emotional autonomy was negatively correlated to family cohesion and life satisfaction and these relationship gained prominence as one transcended from adolescent to adulthood. Thus, social and environmental changes brought on by the child's transition into early adolescence have found to generate stress. There are affective challenges faced by the adolescent which demand that there be a gradual increase in emotional distance from the parents. The attachment relationship with parents provides a supportive framework from which child can master developmental transitions. It not only results in congenial family environment, but also acts as a combative force against development of negative cognitions like those of depression.

Attachment theory suggests that anxiety and depression may result from the actual or threatened loss of attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1980). The adolescents, during this transitional period, face transformation in relationships and breaking these close ties with parents may result in feelings of anxiety and depression. During the process of disengaging from their parents, the adolescents may develop feelings of anxiety and depression in case the individuation does not take place in context of supportive relationships. The adolescents may develop problem behaviors too if they are detached from parental relationships and are high on emotional autonomy (Sandhu & Kaur, 2012). Both as separation and detachment, emotional autonomy plays a role in predicting depression or psychological maladjustment or internalizing problem behaviors (Lo Coco et al., 2000, 2001). Detachment would be related to adolescent's depression.

In this study, an effort was made to study the role of emotional autonomy in relationship with depression. Further, how hardiness acts a moderator variable to reduce the effects in depression was keenly studied. For this purpose the total scores on hardiness and emotional autonomy were used. The mid/late adolescence age group is taken for the purpose of the study, as depressive symptoms are at peak during this time period. It is also a crucial time period for forming identity and autonomy.

## **Hypotheses**

Keeping in mind the literature review and empirical evidences, it was hypothesized that:

1. Emotional autonomy and hardiness will negatively predict depression among adolescents.
2. Hardiness will moderate the relationship between emotional autonomy and depression among adolescents.

## Method

### Sample

A sample of 300 adolescents was taken for the purpose of this study. The age range was 16-19 years (boys = 129, girls = 171,  $M_{age} = 17.8$  years,  $SD = 2.03$ ). In the total sample, 151 adolescents belonged to nuclear families (girls = 100; boys = 51) and 149 adolescents thrived in joint family (girls = 71; boys = 78). The sample is collected from the various public schools and colleges of Amritsar city. Incidental sampling technique was employed.

### Measures

**Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, 1961).** BDI is a 21-item, self-report rating inventory that measures characteristic attitudes and symptoms of depression (Beck et al., 1961). Its development marked a shift among health care professionals, who had until then viewed depression from a psychodynamic perspective, instead of it being rooted in the patient's own thoughts. It is composed of items relating to symptoms of depression such as hopelessness and irritability, cognitions such as guilt or feelings of being punished, as well as physical symptoms such as fatigue, weight loss and lack of interest in sex. The internal consistency for the BDI ranges from .73 to .92 with a mean of .86 (Beck, Steer, & Garbin, 1988). The BDI demonstrates high internal consistency, with alpha coefficients of .86 and .81 for psychiatric and non-psychiatric populations; respectively (Beck et al., 1988). The scale was successfully used on the sample of Indian students by Kumar, Jain, and Hegde (2012).

**Emotional Autonomy Scale (EAS; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986).** The measure of emotional autonomy was developed by Steinberg and Silverberg keeping in mind Blos's perspective on individuation as a guiding framework. There are four components of emotional autonomy. Two components are relatively more cognitive in nature that is perception of parents as people and their de-idealization by the adolescents; and two relatively more affective

components that is non-dependency on parents and individuation. The items were based on the contemporary perspective that de-emphasizes the storm and stress of adolescent detachment, rebellion and conflict but lays more stress on the processes of individuation. A total of 20 items constitute the test and are presented in declarative statements. Adolescents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each item on a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The maximum score is of 80 and minimum score is 20. The internal consistency as determined by Cronbach's alpha is .75. The scale has been used in Indian population in several studies (Sandhu, & Kaur, 2012; Tung & Sandhu, 2005).

**Personal View Survey (PVS; Kobasa & Kahn, 1982).** It consists of 12 items with three subscales, challenge, commitment and control. It is a multiple choice inventory where the individuals are scored on four options that is, strongly disagree, mildly disagree, mildly agree and strongly agree. The total score on hardiness is obtained by adding up the scores on the three dimensions. The reliability of this scale is .62 and the validity is .54 as calculated by the test developer. The scale is used in Indian sample successfully (Akram & Khan, 2017).

### **Procedure**

The data on aforesaid variables was collected on 300 students in a span of one month. Tests were administered in group of 30-35 students, in two sessions of 30 and 20 minutes, respectively. In between the two sessions, 10 minute recess was given where the students were asked about their normal well-being and lifestyle as a part of de-stressing them. Tests were administered as per instructions in the manual. Any query or doubt as raised by the students was cleared by the test taker to their satisfactions. Scoring was done as per manual.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before carrying out the data collection, purpose and nature of study was explained to all the participants. Only those who were willing to fill out the questionnaires were given the tests. Identity of the participants, especially their name was not asked, so as to maintain the confidentiality. Moreover, the participants were assured that the data was to be used only for research purpose. Those who were interested in knowing their scores on the tests were correctly revealed so, and interpretation of same was also conveyed.

## Results

Data collected were analyzed using the Moderated Multiple Regression approach. A moderator variable is the one that changes the size, strength, or direction of relationship between the predictor and criterion variable (Hayes, 2013). Hardiness was taken as the moderator variable in the present study. Table 1 shows the results of regression analysis including emotional autonomy, hardiness and the interaction of the two variables as predictors.

Table 1

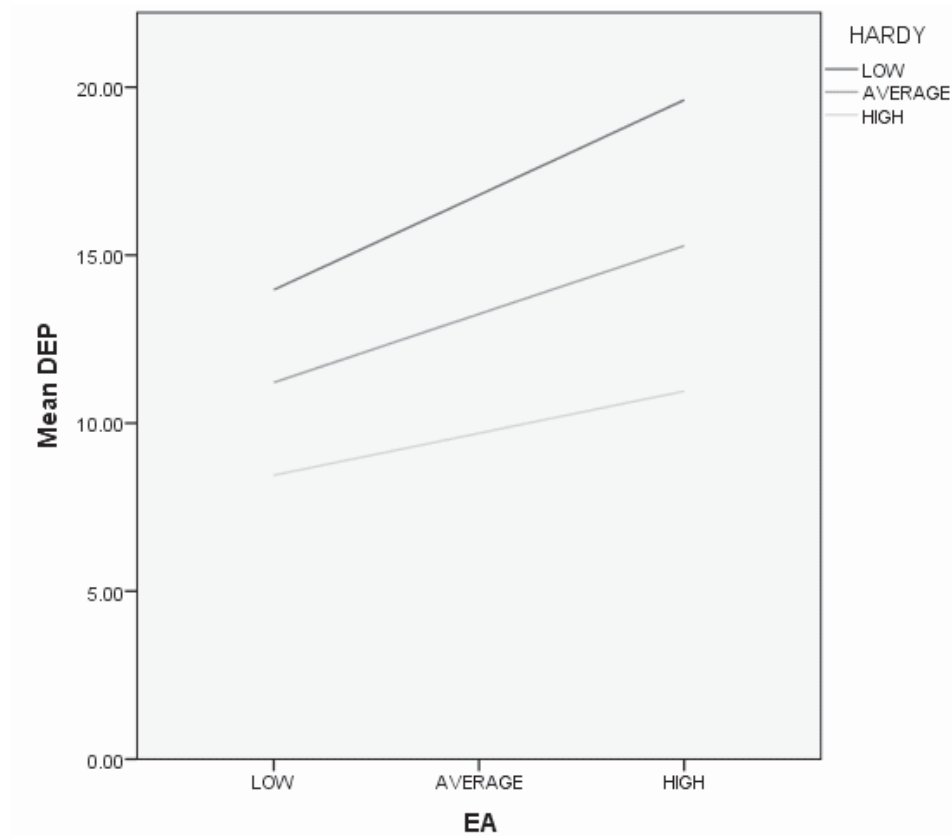
*Regression Coefficients for the Predictor and Moderator Variables*

Model	$\beta$	$R^2$	<i>S.E</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Autonomy	.25	.08	.07	3.17	.01
Hardiness	-.86	.19	.11	-7.43	.01
Emotional Autonomy X Hardiness	-.02		.01	-1.46	n.s.

As noted in Table 1, both emotional autonomy and hardiness are observed to be significant predictors of depression in adolescence. The interaction of the two is not significant thereby indicating that the criterion variable as well as the moderator variable do not have a combined effect in predicting depression. There is a variation of 8% observed in depression due to emotional autonomy and an additional 9% variation in depression because of hardiness. Total variation in depression among adolescents is 19% due to the predictor variables.

Further, the regression slope for emotional autonomy (predictor) and depression (criterion) were plotted for three levels of hardiness (moderator) that is, low, average, and high. The data is centered meaning that average hardiness is taken as the mean of hardiness for the current sample (Mean = 1.5) and low and high level of hardiness were taken at -1 *SD* and +1 *SD*, respectively (*SD* = 4.09). Accordingly the regression slopes are plotted. The illustration is shown in Figure 1.

As seen in Figure 1, for high hardiness (i.e. +1 *SD* from Mean), the regression plot shows the lowest slope, thereby indicating weak relationship between emotional autonomy and depression when hardiness is high. For average hardiness, the regression slope is somewhat steep as compared to high hardiness. For low hardiness (-1 *SD* from Mean), the regression slope is steepest showing that when an adolescent is low on hardiness, emotional autonomy from parents becomes a strong and significant predictor of depression.



*Figure 1.* Moderating role of hardiness in the relationship between emotional autonomy and depression.

## Discussion

Adolescence is a sensitive phase during which individuals are most prone to developing depression (Saluja et al., 2004). Various studies have explored psychological as well as physiological factors leading to development of depression or depressive symptoms during this age. One of the major factors as highlighted in the literature is Emotional autonomy or emotional detachment from parents that leads to predicting depression in adolescents. Perusal of Table 1 shows that Emotional autonomy is a significant predictor of depression in adolescents. The regression coefficient is positive thereby indicating that higher is emotional autonomy in adolescents, higher is the depression. It can be, thus, inferred that as emotional detachment from parents' increases during the adolescence phase, their sensitivity to developing internalizing behaviors like anxiety or depression increases. The phase of adolescence is associated with identity exploration and experience of myriad changes. In such a sensitive time, emotional detachment from parents as perceived by the children



further adds to factors leading to depression. Chou (2000) reported that emotional autonomy often leads to depression in adolescents in both individualistic as well as collectivistic cultures. The results obtained in the current study are similar to earlier findings (Garber & Little, 2001; Lo Coco et al., 2000, 2001).

Further, hardiness emerged as a significant negative predictor of depression. As hypothesized, this denotes that adolescents high on hardiness are less likely to be depressed. Hardiness is a personality trait that comprises of three sub dimensions viz. Control, Commitment and Challenge. All the three facets of hardiness account for how well an individual can avert negative feelings during a stressful situation. As the phase of adolescence is a sensitive phase, those individuals who are low on hardiness are more prone to developing internalizing and externalizing problems. Similar results, showing a negative relationship between hardiness and depression are reported by Sinha and Singh (2009). A number of other studies also provide evidence regarding the role of hardy personality in combating depression across various samples (Cataldo, 2001). The interaction effect of emotional autonomy and hardiness in predicting depression in current sample is found to be nonsignificant. The finding can be traced to nonsignificant correlation between the two predictor variables. Hardiness is studied in the context of personality trait and emotional detachment is one of the major events occurring during adolescence. An adolescent may or may not develop a hardy personality in such circumstances. The development of hardy personality is studied as an individual difference and not as a byproduct of a particular event occurring in an individual's life. Thus, the interaction of the two variables does not provide significant results in predicting depression in the current sample.

Moderation can be seen from two perspectives, one from the interaction effects and other from the difference in regression slopes for various levels of moderator variable. In the current study, hardiness has been taken as the moderator variable. There is a significant difference in regression slopes between depression and emotional autonomy for three levels of hardiness (low, average, and high). The relationship between emotional autonomy and depression is observed to be stronger for low levels of hardiness. This implies that those adolescents who are low on hardiness and its dimensions, under sensitive situations such as emotional detachment during adolescence, they are at higher risk of developing depression, and other such negative cognitions.

On the other hand, for high levels of hardiness, the relationship is observed to be weakest. Since, adolescence is the age where periods



of emotional autonomy lead to depression, presence of hardy personality tends to avert the negative feelings. Adolescents high on hardiness are less likely to develop such internalizing behaviors because of emotional detachment from parents. Hardiness has caused the relationship between emotional autonomy and depression to vary. Thus moderation has occurred. Being high on hardiness, not only weakens the relationship between emotional autonomy and depression, but also combats various other risk factors that the adolescents might be exposed to, leading to high depressive levels among them. This relationship can particularly be said to exist in female adolescents, who are put at high risk of developing depression during their adolescent years, in comparison to their male counterparts.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

Only one personality variables that is hardiness was tested as a moderator in this study. A number of other variables may also contribute in the relationship between autonomy and depression among adolescents. Future researches should focus on other personal or contextual factors.

### **Implications**

The study has its implications in the area of adolescents' development. The findings of present study highlighted the importance of personality variables that contribute in developing or decreasing the depressive symptoms among adolescents. And this also suggests for further intervention plans.

### **Conclusion**

The study was carried out to find the role of emotional autonomy and hardiness in predicting depression in adolescents. Further the role of hardiness as a moderator in predicting depression from emotional autonomy was investigated. Analysis revealed that for low, average and high levels of hardiness the relationship between emotional autonomy and depression varied. For high level of hardiness the regression coefficient of emotional autonomy was nonsignificant. Thus, we may conclude that hardiness moderates the relationship and is an important personality trait in combating negative feelings during stressful times.

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