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Original Article

The Role of Family Cohesion and Psychological Hardiness in Predicting Emotional Creativity: A Study on Petroleum University Students in Ahvaz

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Emotional creativity is a crucial psychological asset for adaptive functioning and problem-solving. This study aimed to investigate the role of family cohesion and psychological hardiness in predicting emotional creativity among university students.

Materials and Methods: A descriptive-correlational research design was employed. The statistical population comprised students at the Petroleum University of Ahvaz, Iran, during the 2024–2025 academic year. Through convenience sampling, 151 students participated. Data were collected using the Emotional Creativity Inventory, the Balanced Cohesion subscale of FACES-IV, and the Ahvaz Psychological Hardiness Scale. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were used for data analysis.

Results: Significant positive correlations were found between emotional creativity and both family cohesion ($r=0.35$, $P<0.001$) and psychological hardiness ($r=0.31$, $P<0.001$). The multiple regression model was statistically significant ($F=51.60$, $P<0.001$), accounting for 16.4% of the variance in emotional creativity ($R=0.164$, $R=0.41$). Both family cohesion ($\beta=0.26$, $P=0.001$) and psychological hardiness ($\beta=0.28$, $P=0.001$) emerged as significant positive predictors.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that family cohesion and psychological hardiness are associated with higher levels of emotional creativity among university students. These results identify family cohesion and psychological hardiness as correlates that warrant further investigation in relation to emotional creativity in young adults. Components of university counseling programs that address these factors could be examined in future research as potential intervention targets.

Keywords: Creativity, Family relations, Psychological hardiness, Students

Background

The transition to university life is a pivotal developmental milestone, representing a period characterized by profound psychosocial maturation, increased autonomy, and heightened academic demands [1]. In contemporary society, driven by rapid technological advancements and shifting socio-cultural paradigms, university students are increasingly required to cultivate robust critical and creative thinking skills to effectively navigate complex social problems and academic pressures [2]. The university environment routinely exposes young adults to multifaceted stressors, including rigorous academic competition, career uncertainties, financial pressures, and the necessity for independent decision-making [3, 4]. Consequently, relying solely on cognitive intelligence is often insufficient for optimal adaptation. Students must also develop nuanced emotional and psychological resources to manage these stressors, maintain subjective well-being, and achieve sustained educational success [5, 6]. Failure to adapt to these transitions can result in maladaptive coping behaviors, academic burnout, anxiety, depression, and compromised mental health [5].

Central to this adaptive capacity is emotional creativity, a multifaceted construct defined as the ability to experience and express a diverse range of emotions in novel, effective, and authentic ways [7]. Unlike traditional emotional intelligence, which primarily focuses on regulating and suppressing emotions to fit societal norms, emotional creativity emphasizes the divergent generation of emotional responses uniquely tailored to complex, ambiguous, and novel situations [8]. For university students, emotional creativity is intricately linked to educational progress, personal growth, effective social functioning, and resilience in the face of setbacks [9, 10]. Students who exhibit high emotional creativity are better equipped to reinterpret academic failures, formulate innovative solutions to interpersonal conflicts, and maintain psychological vitality amid uncertainty [9-11].

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While the importance of emotional creativity is increasingly acknowledged, its developmental antecedents remain insufficiently understood. Most existing research has focused on cognitive aspects of creativity or general emotional intelligence, with comparatively less attention devoted to the specific environmental and intrapersonal factors that foster emotional creativity in emerging adulthood [11]. This represents a notable gap in the literature, particularly within non-Western educational contexts where familial and cultural influences may play distinct roles.

Among the most critical environmental determinants, the family system plays a foundational role in shaping an individual's emotional repertoire. Family cohesion, conceptualized as the degree of emotional bonding, supportive interpersonal relationships, and balanced structural rules within the family, serves as a primary context for emotional socialization [12]. Psychologists and family therapists posit that a highly cohesive family environment provides a secure base from which young adults can safely explore, process, and articulate complex emotional experiences without fear of rejection [13, 14]. When students perceive their familial environment as warm, supportive, and emotionally available, they are more likely to internalize adaptive emotion regulation strategies and feel validated in expressing unique and creative emotional responses [14, 15]. Conversely, low cohesion or dysfunctional patterns (enmeshment or disengagement) can constrain emotional exploration and inhibit the development of emotional creativity [15].

In parallel with external familial influences, intrinsic personality variables, such as psychological hardiness, significantly influence how students process emotional experiences. Psychological hardiness is widely conceptualized as a constellation of personality characteristics, comprising commitment, control, and challenge, that functions as a vital resilience resource against stress [16]. Hardy individuals tend to view difficulties as opportunities for growth (challenge), believe in their ability to influence outcomes (control), and remain deeply engaged with their life pursuits (commitment) [17]. This resilient orientation promotes cognitive flexibility, emotional openness, and proactive engagement with affective experiences rather than avoidance [18, 19]. Consequently, individuals with high hardiness are hypothesized to demonstrate greater capacity for emotional creativity [20].

Despite the recognized importance of these constructs, a conspicuous gap persists in the literature. Few studies have simultaneously examined the predictive roles of family cohesion (as an environmental factor) and psychological hardiness (as an intrapersonal resource) in relation to emotional creativity. Moreover, the majority of existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, limiting understanding of these dynamics in collectivist cultures such as Iran, where family ties often remain central throughout young adulthood. Investigating these predictive relationships is essential for informing evidence-based university counseling programs and designing targeted interventions that leverage both familial support and individual resilience to enhance students' emotional adaptability.

Objectives

The present study aimed to investigate the role of family cohesion and psychological hardiness in predicting emotional creativity among undergraduate and master's students at the Petroleum University of Ahvaz, Iran.

Materials and Methods

Design and Participants

The current research employed a descriptive-correlational design. The target population comprised all undergraduate and master's students enrolled at the Petroleum University of Ahvaz, Iran, during the 2024–2025 academic year. A convenience sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants. Initially, 175 survey packets were distributed across various university faculties. Following the exclusion of incomplete or invalid responses, a final analytical sample of N=151 students was retained. This sample size provided adequate statistical power (>0.80) for the planned analyses.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be actively enrolled students at the university and willing to provide informed consent. Individuals who submitted partially completed questionnaires were excluded. Regarding sample characteristics, 68.2% of participants were female. Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine whether gender acted as a confounding variable or moderated the relationships among the study variables; no significant moderating effects were observed, and gender was not included as a covariate in the primary analyses. All participants provided explicit informed consent prior to data collection, and they were assured of the anonymity and strict confidentiality of their responses.

Instruments

Emotional Creativity Inventory (ECI): Emotional creativity was measured using the 30-

item ECI developed by Averill [21]. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Total scores range from 30 to 150, with higher scores indicating greater emotional creativity. Previous Iranian validations reported satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's α=0.72–0.85) [22]. In the current study, internal consistency was acceptable (α=0.81).

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale IV (FACES-IV): Family cohesion was assessed using the 7-item Balanced Cohesion subscale of the FACES-IV [23]. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 7 to 35. Higher scores reflect healthier family cohesion. Iranian adaptations have shown good reliability (α=0.78–0.89) [24]. The subscale demonstrated strong internal consistency in this sample (α=0.83).

Ahvaz Psychological Hardiness Scale (AHS): Psychological hardiness was measured with the 27-item AHS [25]. Responses are given on a 4-point scale (0=never to 3=often). After reverse scoring, total scores range from 0 to 81. Previous studies on Iranian samples reported acceptable reliability (α=0.75–0.87) [25]. In the present study, the scale showed good internal consistency (α=0.84).

Procedure

Data collection was conducted through in-person visits to various faculties and classrooms across the university campus. To ensure a diverse and representative cross-section of the student body, the researcher actively recruited both undergraduate and master's level students. Prior to the administration of the survey packets, potential participants were provided with a comprehensive overview of the study's primary objectives. The researcher emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and reiterated guarantees of data confidentiality. Once informed consent was secured, participants were given the battery of standardized self-report questionnaires. The surveys were completed within the classroom setting, and the researcher remained available to address any questions or clarify instructions during the administration process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize sample characteristics and variable distributions. Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within acceptable ranges (-2 to +2), supporting the use of parametric analyses. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate relationships. A simultaneous multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive roles of family cohesion and psychological hardiness on emotional creativity. Before interpretation, key regression assumptions were tested. The normality of the residuals was confirmed by inspection of P-P plots and histograms. Multicollinearity was not a concern (Variance Inflation Factor [VIF] values < 2.0 for both predictors). Homoscedasticity was verified via scatterplots of standardized residuals, and no significant violations were observed. In addition, the significance level was set at P<0.05.

Results

The sample consisted of 151 university students. In terms of age distribution, 109 participants (72.2%) were between 19 and 29 years old, while 42 participants (27.8%) were between 30 and 39 years old. Regarding marital status, 92 (60.9%) and 59 (39.1%) participants were single and married, respectively. Moreover, regarding gender, 103 students (68.2%) were female.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables. Emotional creativity had a mean score of 64.28 (SD=11.38), family cohesion averaged 20.62 (SD=4.31), and psychological hardiness showed a mean of 46.38 (SD=11.83). The skewness and kurtosis values for all three variables fell within the acceptable range of -2 to +2, indicating approximately normal distributions suitable for parametric analyses.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional creativity	64.28	11.38	-0.15	0.42
Family cohesion	20.62	4.31	0.23	-0.28
Psychological hardiness	46.38	11.83	-0.09	0.35

As indicated in Table 2, Pearson correlation coefficients revealed significant positive associations between emotional creativity and both family cohesion (r=0.35, P<0.001) and psychological hardiness (r=0.31, P<0.001). These moderate correlations suggest that higher levels of family cohesion and psychological hardiness are related to greater emotional creativity among the students.

Table 2. Pearson correlations between emotional creativity and predictor variables

Variable	Emotional creativity	P
Family cohesion	0.35	0.001
Psychological hardiness	0.31	0.001

A simultaneous multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive utility of family cohesion and psychological hardiness on

emotional creativity. The overall model was statistically significant, F=51.60, P<0.001, and explained 16.4% of the variance in emotional creativity (R=0.41, R^2=0.164, Adjusted R^2=0.152). Both predictors made unique and statistically significant contributions to the model. Family cohesion emerged as a significant positive predictor (B=0.25, SE=0.04, β=0.26, t=2.26, P=0.001), as did psychological hardiness (B=0.27, SE=0.05, β=0.28, t=4.10, P=0.001). These findings indicate that family cohesion and psychological hardiness are independent positive predictors of emotional creativity in this sample of university students. (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of simultaneous multiple regression analysis predicting emotional creativity

Predictor variable(s)	F	R	R^2	B	SE	β	t	P
Family cohesion	51.60	0.41	0.16	0.25	0.04	0.26	2.26	0.001
Psychological hardiness				0.27	0.05	0.28	4.10	0.001

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the predictive roles of family cohesion and psychological hardiness in emotional creativity among university students at the Petroleum University of Ahvaz, Iran. The findings supported the hypotheses, revealing significant positive associations and unique predictive contributions from both variables. These results contribute to the growing body of literature on emotional creativity by integrating an environmental factor (family cohesion) with an intrapersonal strength (psychological hardiness) within a specific cultural and educational context.

The significant positive relationship between family cohesion and emotional creativity underscores the critical role of the family system in emotional development. From a family systems perspective, cohesive families provide a secure base that encourages open emotional expression, validation of feelings, and experimentation with novel emotional responses [26, 27]. Such environments foster psychological safety, which is a prerequisite for creative emotional functioning [13, 14]. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that supportive family dynamics have been linked to better emotion regulation and creative problem-solving abilities in adolescents and emerging adults [28]. Importantly, the present study extends these findings by showing that family cohesion remains a significant predictor even after accounting for psychological hardiness, highlighting its distinct environmental contribution beyond individual personality resources.

Psychological hardiness also emerged as a robust predictor of emotional creativity. Individuals high in hardiness tend to appraise stressful situations as challenges rather than threats, maintain a sense of control, and exhibit strong commitment to meaningful activities [16, 29]. This resilient orientation has been linked in prior theory to more flexible engagement with emotional experiences and to the reinterpretation of negative affective states as opportunities for creative expression [17, 18]. The present results align with studies linking hardiness to adaptive functioning, resilience, and various forms of creativity [30]. They further extend this literature by specifically demonstrating the relevance of hardiness to emotional creativity in the demanding context of higher education.

A notable aspect of the findings is the modest proportion of variance explained by the model (R^2=0.164). Although the regression model was statistically significant, the two predictors together accounted for only 16.4% of the variability in emotional creativity. This indicates that a large proportion of emotional creativity may also be associated with other factors not included in the current model. Potential unmeasured variables may include personality traits such as openness to experience, specific coping strategies, peer relationships, academic stress levels, cultural expectations regarding emotional expression, and exposure to creative educational environments. This modest explanatory power highlights the complex, multifactorial nature of emotional creativity and suggests that future research should adopt more comprehensive models incorporating additional individual, social, and contextual predictors.

The results should be interpreted in light of several methodological limitations. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; it remains unclear whether family cohesion and hardiness lead to greater emotional creativity or whether individuals with higher emotional creativity perceive their families as more cohesive and report greater hardiness. Longitudinal studies are needed to clarify temporal relationships. Second, the reliance on convenience sampling from a single university limits the generalizability of the findings to other student populations, particularly those in different cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Third, the exclusive use of self-report measures may introduce common method bias and social desirability effects.

Additionally, the gender imbalance in the sample (68.2% female) warrants caution, although preliminary analyses did not indicate substantial confounding or moderating effects of gender.

Despite these limitations, the study has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it supports an integrative model in which both environmental (family) and individual (hardiness) factors are associated with emotional creativity. Practically, the findings suggest that family cohesion and psychological hardiness could be examined as potential targets in future university counseling research. Family-oriented psychoeducational programs and hardiness-training workshops—focusing on cognitive reframing, commitment-building, and challenge appraisal—could be evaluated in subsequent studies to determine whether they are associated with adaptive emotional functioning. Such dual-focused approaches may be especially relevant to investigate in collectivist cultural contexts like Iran, where family ties remain influential throughout young adulthood.

Future research should address the limitations identified here by employing longitudinal designs, more diverse and representative samples, and multi-method approaches (e.g., combining self-reports with behavioral measures or informant reports). Additionally, expanding the model to include mediators (e.g., emotion regulation strategies) and moderators (e.g., cultural values or academic stress) would provide deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying emotional creativity.

In summary, this study advances our understanding of the predictors of emotional creativity by highlighting the complementary roles of family cohesion and psychological hardiness. While the explained variance is modest, the findings offer valuable directions for theory development and for future research examining applied approaches that may support university students' psychological well-being and creative potential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study provides evidence that family cohesion and psychological hardiness are positively associated with emotional creativity among university students. While these factors are meaningful statistical predictors, they explain only a modest portion of the variance, suggesting that emotional creativity may also be associated with a broader range of individual, familial, and contextual variables. These findings have potential practical implications for university mental health services that should be tested in future research. Psychoeducational programs focused on family communication and support networks, as well as hardiness-training workshops that emphasize cognitive reframing, commitment, and viewing challenges as growth opportunities, could be considered possible approaches to supporting students' emotional well-being. Longitudinal and intervention studies are needed to determine whether programs addressing both environmental and individual resources are associated with greater emotional creativity and resilience in young adults. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, more diverse sampling strategies, and multi-method approaches to clarify temporal relationships and improve the generalizability of these findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for this research was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Branch, Iran (Approval ID: IR.IAU.AHVAZ.REC.1403.250).

Data Availability Statement

The data produced and examined in this study can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Author Contributions

R.L. contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, original draft preparation, and supervision. A.H. was responsible for data curation, formal analysis, and review and editing of the manuscript. R.L. contributed to project administration, resource provision, and visualization. A.H. further contributed to validation, funding acquisition, and manuscript review and editing.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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