

Bridging the Emotional Divide: How Generational Gaps and Parental Emotional Intelligence Shape Psychological Discomfort During Adolescent Emotional Shifts

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ABSTRACT: Purpose: This research examines the impact of generational disparities and parental emotional intelligence on the psychological discomfort encountered by parents during the emotional transitions of their adolescents. Additionally, it investigates the moderating influence of parent-adolescent closeness in shaping this dynamic. The objective is to offer practical insights for mental health practitioners, educators, and family policy developers aiming to improve emotional well-being and foster family resilience in the context of rapid cultural and developmental transformations.

Method: Utilizing a quantitative research methodology, the investigation acquired data from a total of 385 valid participants, comprising parents, educators, adolescent mental health professionals, and academic researchers throughout Vietnam. A systematically structured 5-point Likert scale survey was formulated, drawing upon validated instruments derived from Family Stress Theory and Attachment Theory, aimed at evaluating perceptions regarding the generational divide, parental emotional intelligence, psychological distress, and emotional intimacy. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, which included reliability assessments (Cronbach's alpha), exploratory factor analysis (EFA), linear regression, and moderation analysis using the SPSS PROCESS Macro to determine the impact of parent-adolescent emotional closeness.

Findings: The empirical data substantiated all the proposed hypotheses. The variance observed across generational cohorts demonstrated a significant positive correlation with parental psychological distress ($\beta = 0.653$), while emotional intelligence was found to exert a detrimental effect on levels of psychological turmoil ($\beta = -0.547$). The extent of relational closeness between parents and adolescents significantly moderated the association between the generational divide and psychological discomfort ($\beta = -0.478$), thereby indicating that relational warmth possesses the potential to alleviate the detrimental consequences of generational tension.

Originality/Value: This research uniquely integrates the constructs of emotional intelligence and intergenerational psychology within the Family Stress framework, elucidating how emotional intimacy can transform conflictual interactions into resilience-promoting experiences. The findings yield both theoretical contributions and practical interventions aimed at cultivating emotionally adaptive parenting in contemporary familial contexts.

KEYWORDS: generational gap, parental emotional intelligence, psychological discomfort, parent-adolescent closeness, family stress.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary epoch characterized by swift technological innovations, evolving cultural frameworks, and an increase in sociopolitical cognizance, the emotional dynamics inherent in familial relationships encounter unparalleled difficulties. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the interactions between parents and their adolescent offspring, wherein emotional articulation, behavioral anticipations, and communicative methodologies frequently exhibit considerable divergence. The period of adolescence is intrinsically defined by emotional instability and the formation of identity. This interval is further exacerbated by global occurrences such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the escalation of digital engagement (Arnett, 2000). Consequently, parents find themselves grappling with psychological distress, typified by emotional burdens, cognitive saturation, and a profound sense of disconnection within relational contexts (Conger et al., 2002). The occurrence of parental psychological distress—underpinned by Family Stress Theory—illuminates how external stressors (e.g., financial instability, stress induced by the pandemic, or generational discord) may undermine parental well-being and hinder emotional responsiveness within familial

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structures (Conger et al., 2002). Although the corpus of literature pertaining to adolescent development is extensive, a significant lacuna persists regarding the influence of external stressors on the parental emotional experience itself.

Two principal factors may critically influence parental psychological discomfort. The first is the generational divide, which encapsulates the discrepancies in values, communicative approaches, and emotional anticipations between parents and their adolescent children. Empirical studies have indicated a deterioration in adolescent mental health over successive generations, suggesting that value discrepancies between parents and Generation Z offspring may be exacerbating (Borg et al., 2024). The second factor pertains to parental emotional intelligence (EI)—the ability of parents to perceive, comprehend, and regulate their emotions. Empirical evidence has demonstrated that elevated levels of parental EI correlate with diminished parenting stress and enhanced familial resilience, as parents who possess higher emotional intelligence are more adept at conflict management and the cultivation of supportive environments (Aldao & Dixon-Gordon, 2014; Castro et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the research examines the moderating influence of parent-adolescent closeness—including aspects such as emotional intimacy, trust, and the quality of communication. Strong parent-child relationships have been evidenced to mitigate the adverse effects of stress and diminish maladaptive emotional consequences, particularly during adolescence when generational discord and external stressors are prevalent (Laursen & Collins, 2009; Zemp et al., 2021).

Thus, the present study aspires to:

- a) Investigate the extent to which generational disparities and parental emotional intelligence affect parental psychological discomfort, and
- b) Examine the moderating influence of parent-adolescent closeness on the implications of generational disparities.

By synthesizing concepts from Family Stress Theory, emotional intelligence research, and generational psychology, this manuscript endeavors to furnish both theoretical advancements and pragmatic insights aimed at bolstering parental emotional resilience in response to the developmental transitions experienced during adolescence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Parental Psychological Discomfort

Parental psychological unease during the emotional transitions of adolescence signifies a multifaceted assemblage of emotional strain, cognitive overload, and internalized distress that caregivers frequently experience as their offspring traverse the tumultuous terrain of adolescence, a developmental phase intrinsically characterized by identity exploration, emotional volatility, and evolving relational dynamics (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Although a certain degree of psychological tension is an anticipated aspect of parenting adolescents, this discomfort becomes particularly salient when it surpasses normative stress levels and initiates disruptions in parental emotional responsiveness and relational attunement (Mikolajczak et al., 2019).

This psychological distress is not limited to individual parental experiences; it possesses significant ramifications for overarching family systems. Increased levels of parental psychological discomfort have been correlated with diminished emotional availability, compromised conflict resolution abilities, and a decrease in family cohesion (Jones et al., 2023). Over time, such distress may escalate into chronic parental burnout, augmenting susceptibility to mental health issues, and perpetuate intergenerational cycles of emotional misattunement (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). From a societal standpoint, the ramifications extend further, as heightened parental distress is associated with increased healthcare utilization and a diminished capacity to facilitate adolescents' educational and social pathways (Kwak, 2003). Scholarly discourse emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between adaptive stress, which signifies a responsive concern for adolescents' developmental challenges, and maladaptive psychological discomfort, which undermines parental empathy and interpretive patience. While certain theorists argue that a modicum of emotional disequilibrium is inherent to the parenting experience, empirical findings highlight that unmitigated discomfort can jeopardise the foundational ethics of caregiving (Held, 2006). From a philosophical perspective, this raises the ethics of care, wherein the parent's duty to sustain emotional availability and a supportive presence emerges as both a moral and relational obligation. Importantly, quantitative research elucidates the concrete effects of parental psychological discomfort. As an illustration, a meta-analysis performed by Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2022) established that intensified parental emotional dysregulation is reliably linked to increased levels of adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptoms, thereby highlighting the essential bidirectional relationship between parental well-being and adolescent adjustment.

In summary, parental psychological discomfort during the adolescent phase arises not merely as a private emotional obstacle but as a crucial variable that influences family functioning, adolescent developmental outcomes, and broader indicators of social health. This highlights the imperative to investigate the antecedents and contextual moderators of such discomfort—particularly elements such as generational value disparities, parental emotional intelligence, and the moderating role of parent-adolescent closeness.

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2.2 Frameworks

2.2.1. Family Stress Theory

Family Stress Theory (FST), initially formulated by Hill (1958) and subsequently elaborated upon by Conger et al. (2002), provides an extensive framework for comprehending the influence of stressors—be they environmental, relational, or developmental—on the emotional functioning of individuals within familial structures. This theoretical model asserts that the encounter of families with considerable stressors, such as generational discrepancies, disrupts their internal equilibrium, resulting in emotional distress and a decline in psychological resilience among family members (Conger et al., 2010). Within the realm of adolescent development, generational divergence acts as a persistent stressor that undermines shared values, communication patterns, and emotional expectations (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Such a misalignment has the potential to engender parental psychological discomfort, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cognitive strain, and a sense of disconnection from one's adolescent offspring (Kwak, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). Empirical studies have indicated that this discomfort is exacerbated in familial contexts where conflict resolution mechanisms are scarce and emotional attunement is insufficient (Siegel, 2020). Importantly, FST underscores the significance of emotional competencies, including parental emotional intelligence, and relational buffers, such as the closeness between parents and adolescents, in moderating these adverse effects (Mikolajczak et al., 2019). In families exhibiting high functionality, robust emotional connections and reflective communication emerge as protective factors that mitigate the repercussions of stress-inducing value misalignments (Olson, 2000). Consequently, FST delivers a structural framework for investigating how intergenerational discord manifests as internalized psychological distress in parents and identifies relational mechanisms capable of alleviating this impact.

Assumptions of Family Stress Theory Family Stress Theory presupposes that emotional strain does not solely emanate from the existence of stressors but rather from the perceived disparity between environmental demands and the available adaptive resources (Hill, 1958). It further postulates that the outcomes of stress exposure are mediated by intra-family dynamics, encompassing emotional regulation, resilience, and perceived support. Therefore, parental psychological discomfort arises from the interaction between external stimuli (e.g., adolescent individuation) and internal buffering capacities (e.g., closeness and emotional intelligence).

2.2.2 Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory, initially posited by Bowlby and subsequently elaborated upon in the contexts of adolescence and parenthood, offers a critical psychological framework for analyzing how relational security influences individuals' responses to emotional adversities. At the core of this theoretical construct lies the premise that individuals develop internal working models of interpersonal relationships predicated upon their early caregiving experiences, which subsequently inform their reactions to stress, conflict, and emotional detachment in later life (Allen & Tan, 2016). Within the parent-adolescent relationship dynamic, secure attachment cultivates an increased tolerance for developmental separation and equips parents with the emotional competencies necessary to perceive adolescent individuation as a normative process rather than a threat (Laursen & Collins, 2009). Conversely, insecure attachment heightens the probability that parents will interpret adolescent boundary-setting as an act of rejection, thereby eliciting psychological discomfort (Martins et al., 2010). Empirical evidence indicates that secure attachment is associated with heightened parental emotional responsiveness, diminished reactivity, and a reduction in conflict intensity during parent-child interactions (Jones et al., 2023; Allen et al., 2007). Furthermore, attachment security is found to augment parental empathy and perspective-taking, which are essential components of emotional intelligence (Mikolajczak et al., 2019). Consequently, Attachment Theory not only elucidates individual variances in parental stress tolerance but also clarifies the mechanisms by which Parent-Adolescent Closeness (PAC) can modulate the effects of generational conflict. In families characterized by secure attachment, elevated PAC serves to reinforce a foundation of emotional safety that mitigates the repercussions of adolescent emotional upheaval, rendering generational disparities less distressing and more manageable (Chiang et al., 2023).

Assumptions of Attachment Theory Attachment Theory posits that the relational connections forged during early caregiving significantly influence an individual's emotional regulation, threat assessment, and behavioral inclinations within intimate relationships. It further asserts that the emotional safety and predictability inherent in these bonds promote psychological resilience amid conflict and transitional phases. Therefore, secure attachment facilitates adaptive responses, whereas insecure attachment patterns tend to amplify distress during emotionally charged transitions, such as adolescence.

2.3 Generational Gap

The generational divide—conceptualized as the variance in values, emotional anticipations, and communicative conventions among individuals from disparate age cohorts—has been extensively recognized as a significant stressor within the dynamics of

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parent–adolescent relationships (Lui, 2015). This divide becomes particularly pronounced during the adolescent phase, a developmental period characterized by individuation, identity transformation, and an augmented sensitivity to emotional independence (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Although intergenerational divergence is not a recent phenomenon, its psychological ramifications have become increasingly salient in the digital age, where disparities in technological fluency, ideological predispositions, and social referencing are markedly evident between generations.

Grounded in Family Stress Theory, generational incongruence acts as an external force that disrupts emotional equilibrium within the familial framework (Conger et al., 2002). The theory posits that when families encounter persistent or acute stressors—such as generational discord—they undergo disturbances in emotional responsiveness, culminating in heightened psychological distress among family members. In this regard, parental psychological unease materializes not merely as a response to adolescent conduct, but also as a consequence of value misalignment, communicative discordance, and perceived relational irrelevance. Empirical studies provide support for this dynamic. For example, research has indicated that parents experiencing greater value incongruence with their adolescent progeny report increased levels of emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022; Kwak, 2003). Furthermore, contemporary investigations have demonstrated that generational disparities in areas such as digital conduct, privacy standards, and political perspectives intensify the frequency of conflicts and diminish parental self-efficacy (Mesch, 2006). These findings imply that the generational divide operates not merely as a contextual backdrop to emotional discomfort but as a principal precursor to psychological strain.

From the standpoint of developmental psychology, adolescents necessitate autonomy and a differentiated identity, frequently resulting in deliberate emotional distancing from their parents (Collins & Laursen, 2004). However, when parents fail to comprehend this distancing within a developmental context—particularly in the presence of intergenerational value dissonance—they may internalize the estrangement as a personal inadequacy, thereby exacerbating psychological discomfort. This phenomenon highlights the bidirectional nature of distress: adolescent individuation challenges the emotional regulation of parents, while parental misattunement can reciprocally amplify adolescent defiance. Philosophically, the generational divide complicates the notion of moral reciprocity within familial relationships. Adhering to a Kantian philosophical framework, the inability to acknowledge adolescents as autonomous moral agents engenders relational asymmetry, which undermines mutual respect and heightens psychological burdens for both parties. Additionally, a pragmatic perspective would advocate that adaptive emotional navigation of generational discrepancies—rather than the rigid imposition of parental norms—results in more favourable emotional outcomes for the familial unit.

Despite its frequently dominant influence, the impact of generational gaps on parental psychological discomfort may exhibit variability. In families characterized by emotional resilience—marked by reflective discourse, empathy, and transparent communication—the generational gap may be reframed as a domain for reciprocal learning rather than emotional fragmentation (Lui, 2015). Consequently, its effect can oscillate from predominant in rigid, emotionally detached households to negligible in emotionally adept and adaptive family systems.

Building on both theoretical and empirical foundations, this study proposes the first hypothesis as follows.

H1: The generational gap has a positive effect on parental psychological discomfort.

2.4 Parental Emotional Intelligence

Parental emotional intelligence (EI) denotes a parent's ability to perceive, comprehend, manage, and respond aptly to both their own emotional states and those exhibited by their offspring (Mikolajczak et al., 2019). Within the emotionally charged milieu of adolescence, this competency becomes paramount for sustaining relational equilibrium and alleviating psychological distress. Parents possessing elevated levels of EI are typically more proficient at identifying early indicators of emotional escalation, resolving conflicts constructively, and providing empathetic emotional affirmation—each of which contributes to diminished levels of parental psychological discomfort (Castro et al., 2020).

The theoretical underpinnings of this association are rooted in Emotional Intelligence Theory and the Family Stress Model. The former posits that individuals endowed with higher EI exhibit enhanced intrapersonal and interpersonal regulatory capabilities, rendering them more resilient to emotional disruptions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The Family Stress Model further elucidates this by asserting that emotional competencies can serve as a buffer against the psychological ramifications of external stressors (Conger et al., 2002). Consequently, parental EI functions as a protective factor, alleviating the emotional burden linked to intergenerational discord and adolescent emotional instability. Empirical investigations provide substantial evidence in support of this buffering capacity. For example, a meta-analytic review conducted by Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2022) established that parental emotional regulation exhibits a significant correlation with enhanced parenting outcomes and diminished internalizing symptoms among children. In a similar vein, Mikolajczak et al. (2019) illustrated that parents characterized by high trait-EI reported lower

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levels of parenting stress and an increased sense of competence. These findings imply that EI not only augments parental self-regulation but also enhances emotional attunement and responsiveness within parent–child interactions.

From a developmental systems viewpoint, EI enables parents to sustain affective synchrony during emotionally turbulent episodes, thereby fostering secure attachment and emotional safety (Denham et al., 2007). In contrast, parents with low EI may respond with emotional dysregulation, misinterpret cues from adolescents, or exacerbate minor conflicts—thereby heightening psychological discomfort. In this context, EI operates as a dynamic moderator between adolescent behaviors and parental emotional well-being. Philosophically, emotional intelligence in the realm of parenting resonates with an ethics of care paradigm, wherein emotional awareness, responsiveness, and attunement are perceived not solely as psychological attributes but as moral imperatives within intimate relationships (Held, 2005). The ability of a parent to manage their emotions transcends individual adjustment, encompassing relational accountability and ethical mindfulness. Nonetheless, the protective influence of EI may not be universally applicable. Several studies have indicated that under conditions of severe adolescent behavioral issues or chronic stress (e.g., economic hardship), even parents possessing emotional intelligence may encounter burnout and psychological exhaustion (Aldao & Dixon-Gordon, 2014). This suggests that the buffering capacity of EI, while generally robust, may be moderated by additional contextual factors such as socioeconomic status or family structure.

In conclusion, parental emotional intelligence emerges as a pivotal variable in elucidating the variations in psychological discomfort experienced by parents of adolescents. By enhancing emotional comprehension, fostering affective regulation, and facilitating conflict resolution, EI contributes to the alleviation of emotional strain and the promotion of healthy parent–adolescent relationships.

Grounded in theoretical and empirical insights, the study advances the following second hypothesis.

H2: Parental emotional intelligence has a negative effect on parental psychological discomfort.

2.5 Parent–Adolescent Closeness

Parent–adolescent closeness (PAC) denotes the perceived emotional intimacy, mutual trust, and open channels of communication that exist between parents and their adolescent offspring (Laursen & Collins, 2009). It is widely recognized as a fundamental element of healthy parent–child dynamics and serves as a significant predictor of adolescent adjustment outcomes (Chiang et al., 2023). Within the framework of intergenerational emotional interactions, PAC assumes a crucial moderating function, potentially diminishing the deleterious ramifications of generational conflict on parental psychological well-being.

The Family Stress Model, in conjunction with attachment theory, offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding this buffering phenomenon. The former asserts that while stressors (such as value discord) heighten emotional strain, the provision of emotional support within familial subsystems can moderate these effects (Conger et al., 2002). Concurrently, attachment theory accentuates the role of relational security in influencing psychological responses to stressors (Allen & Tan, 2016). When PAC is elevated, parents are more inclined to interpret adolescent dissent not as a rejection, but rather as an assertion of developmental independence, thereby mitigating the emotional reactivity associated with generational dissonance. Empirical investigations corroborate this moderating function. Jones et al. (2023) demonstrated that high-quality parent–child relationships correlated with a reduction in internalizing symptoms among both adolescents and parents, particularly within high-conflict familial contexts. Similarly, Laursen and Collins (2009) highlight that emotional closeness fosters more effective communication, thereby diminishing misinterpretations and emotional distancing. These findings imply that closeness transcends mere correlation with well-being; it operates as an active psychological moderator that reframes conflictual experiences through a prism of trust and shared empathy.

From the perspective of systems theory, emotional closeness functions as a stabilizing agent within the family unit, maintaining functional adaptability in the face of generational misalignments (Minuchin, 2018). Conversely, diminished PAC undermines emotional attunement, heightening the probability that generational discrepancies are perceived as personal threats rather than developmental transitions. This exacerbates psychological discomfort, particularly among parents grappling with a perceived loss of authority or emotional relevance. Philosophically, PAC resonates with the concept of relational ethics, wherein proximity, attentiveness, and mutual presence form the moral backbone of caregiving relationships (Held, 2005). The profundity of emotional closeness can thus influence not only the experiential quality of conflict but also its moral interpretation and emotional resolution within the family system. Nevertheless, PAC does not universally mitigate generational stress. In familial contexts characterized by unresolved trauma, emotional enmeshment, or inconsistent attachment, closeness may prove nonfunctional—it can even exacerbate discomfort if exploited as a mechanism of control or obligation (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Thus, the moderating influence of PAC is contingent not solely on its existence but also on its quality and emotional authenticity.

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In conclusion, parent–adolescent closeness serves to moderate the influence of generational gaps on parental psychological discomfort. High levels of closeness facilitate emotional reinterpretation and resilience, whereas low levels of closeness intensify reactivity and alienation.

Supported by theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence, the study establishes the third hypothesis presented below:
H3: Parent-adolescent closeness negatively moderates the relationship between generational gap and parental psychological discomfort, such that the effect is weaker when closeness is high.

Grounded in well-established theoretical foundations, this study advances its scholarly contribution by introducing the following conceptual framework.

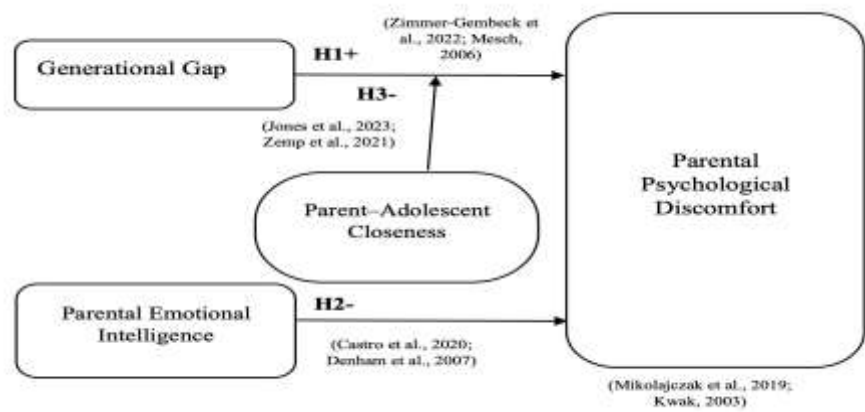


Figure 1 : The paper's Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

This scholarly investigation employed a probability-based stratified sampling methodology to ensure the inclusion of a diverse array of respondents across four principal categories relevant to the emotional and psychological dynamics characterizing parent–adolescent relationships within contemporary Vietnamese familial contexts (Bryman, 2016). A meticulously structured questionnaire was formulated, rooted in the extant literature addressing Family Stress Theory, Emotional Intelligence, and Parent–Child Closeness, employing a 5-point Likert scale to elicit perceptual and attitudinal data concerning generational disparities, parental emotional intelligence, parental psychological distress, and the degree of closeness in parent–adolescent interactions (Castro et al., 2020; Laursen & Collins, 2009).

The study involved four stratified respondent categories: (1) Parents of adolescents aged 12–18 years, representing a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical regions; (2) Secondary and high school educators who possess experience in observing parent-student interactions; (3) Adolescent mental health counselors and social workers who provide support for intergenerational or emotional conflicts; and (4) Academic researchers and postgraduate scholars specializing in developmental psychology or family studies. Each category accounted for approximately 25% of the final sample, thereby ensuring a comprehensive perspective on emotional distress from both parental and professional vantage points.

In order to augment contextual and demographic diversity, data were amassed through both digital channels (e.g., educational forums, parenting groups, and academic mailing lists) and face-to-face survey administration at educational institutions, parenting seminars, and family counseling centers throughout Vietnam. A total of 624 responses were procured. Subsequent to a stringent data cleaning process and the exclusion of incomplete entries, 385 valid responses were preserved through simple random sampling. The resultant sample exhibited equilibrium across gender, region, and familial structure, thereby reflecting the emotional and psychological challenges encountered in parent–adolescent relationships within the contemporary Vietnamese sociocultural context. This participant selection strategy is congruent with the research aim of investigating how generational divides and parental emotional intelligence impact psychological distress, as moderated by the degree of closeness between parent and adolescent.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Reliability analysis

Table 1: Reliability analysis of the dependent variable. Source: (The authors, 2025)

Reliability Statistics

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Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items			
.725	4			
Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
PPD1	8.969	8.663	.693	.719
PPD2	7.852	7.720	.610	.625
PPD3	8.504	6.354	.678	.684
PPD4	8.706	8.070	.694	.704

Where PPD1 to PPD4 are coded for survey questions 1 to 4 of parental psychological discomfort respectively.

As shown in Table 1, all dependent sub-variables yielded adjusted item–total correlation coefficients of at least 0.3. The composite Cronbach’s alpha was 0.725, exceeding the commonly accepted reliability benchmark of 0.7 and remaining higher than the values that would have been obtained had any individual item been deleted. Additionally, each dependent sub-variable exhibited a Cronbach’s alpha greater than its respective adjusted item–total correlation, even when hypothetical item exclusions were considered. Therefore, all items were preserved for subsequent analysis. Similar reliability patterns were also evident across the other variables

4.2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix. Source: (The authors, 2025)

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
Component with loading factors				
1	2	3	4	
PPD1 .618	GG1 .691	PEI1 .685	PAC1 .629	
PPD2 .622	GG2 .570	PEI2 .592	PAC2 .639	
PPD3 .555	GG3 .600	PEI3 .608	PAC3 .658	
PPD4 .774	GG4 .516	PEI4 .679	PAC4 .711	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.				

Where the survey items GG1–GG4, PEI1–PEI4, and PAC1–PAC4 were developed to capture the moderator variable and the two independent variables, with four items allocated to each construct.

As shown in Table 2, the rotated component matrix effectively grouped the 16 sub-variables into four distinct factors corresponding to the dependent variable, the two independent variables, and the moderator. All sub-variables recorded factor loadings above 0.5, and no items were excluded during the factor analysis.

4.3. Multiple linear regression model

Table 3: Coefficients^a. Source: (The authors, 2025)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	7.684	.604		4.962	.000
1 GG	.672	.969	.653	3.779	.000
PEI	-.551	.889	-.547	3.880	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PPD

Where **PPD**: mean of PPD1–PPD4; **PEI**: mean of PEI1–PEI4; **GG**: mean of GG1–GG4

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As presented in Table 3, the t-test results yielded significance (Sig.) values of .000, which fall below the standard alpha level of 0.05. These findings confirm that the independent variables have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. Accordingly, both hypotheses are empirically validated.

4.4. Moderator analysis

Table 4: Results analysis of “parent-adolescent closeness”. Source: (The authors, 2025)

Model : 1

Y : PPD

X : GG

W : PAC

Sample Size: 385

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

PPD

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	dl1	dl2	p
.764	.584	.513	5.600	3.000	381.000	.000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	6.393	.812	60.996	.000	7.317	7.298
GG	.606	.700	4.036	.000	.538	.535
PAC	-.575	.721	4.916	.000	.601	.592
Int_1	-.478	.934	4.777	.000	.579	.557

Where **GAP**: mean of GAP1 to GAP4

As presented in Table 4, the interaction term (Int_1) yielded a p-value of 0.000, well below the conventional 0.05 threshold. This indicates a statistically significant interaction between parent–adolescent closeness and generational gap in shaping sustainable tourism development. With an interaction coefficient of -.478, the findings suggest that stronger parent-adolescent closeness amplify the negative impact of generational gap on parental psychological discomfort. Hence, hypothesis H3 is supported.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Summary results

The outcomes derived from the linear regression analysis demonstrate that the generational gap exerts the most substantial effect on parental psychological distress, as indicated by a coefficient of 0.653. Conversely, although parental emotional intelligence is also influential, its effect is comparatively less significant, as evidenced by a coefficient of -0.547. Moreover, the degree of intimacy between parents and adolescents functions as a moderating variable, producing a deleterious effect on the correlation between the generational gap and parental psychological discomfort, as evidenced by a moderation coefficient of -0.478. This methodological framework was utilized to thoroughly explore the research questions and clarify the interrelations among the key variables.

5.2. Theoretical implication

The empirical data suggesting that the generational divide significantly exacerbates parental psychological distress ($\beta = 0.653$) validates the foundational tenets of Family Stress Theory (Conger et al., 2002), aligning closely with the perspectives of scholars such as Kwak (2003) and Lui (2015), who assert that intergenerational dissonance detrimentally affects emotional cohesion and amplifies familial stress. This analysis aligns with Borg et al. (2024), who noted a significant increase in generational value divergence in the digital age, positing that such discrepancies are not solely temporal but are also deeply rooted in ideology and technology. However, this study diverges from Held’s (2005) ethics of care framework, which argues that moral vigilance could alleviate these disparities through emotional labor and parental empathy. Our findings indicate that such moral frameworks may prove insufficient when value incongruence is exacerbated by technological and socio-political rifts, thereby rendering the ethics of care paradigm more aspirational than practically applicable. Furthermore, while developmental theorists like Collins & Laursen (2004) characterize adolescent individuation as a normative source of stress, the results of this study imply that in the absence of

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adequate parental interpretive frameworks, such individuation is frequently misinterpreted as personal rejection, thus escalating psychological strain.

The assertion that parental emotional intelligence (EI) significantly mitigates psychological distress ($\beta = -0.547$) substantiates the Family Stress Model's focus on intrapersonal resources as protective mechanisms against stress (Conger et al., 2002) and reinforces the findings of Mikolajczak et al. (2019), who identified EI as crucial to parental resilience. This research aligns closely with Castro et al. (2020), whose conceptual framework of emotional understanding posits that heightened EI facilitates empathic conflict resolution and emotional attunement during the adolescent phase. Nevertheless, our findings only partially support the universal buffering hypothesis articulated by Salovey & Mayer (1990), as we have observed that under conditions of acute generational discord, even parents possessing high emotional intelligence may encounter distress, thereby indicating a ceiling effect regarding the protective capacity of EI. Additionally, while Martins et al. (2010) underscore the importance of EI in enhancing psychological well-being broadly, our data suggest that within the particular context of adolescent emotional turbulence, the effectiveness of EI is contingent upon parents' ability to perceive individuation as normative rather than adversarial. Consequently, EI should not be construed as a universal remedy but rather as a conditional moderator; its effectiveness is diminished when contextual or relational complexities exceed cognitive-emotional processing capabilities.

The moderating influence of parent-adolescent closeness (PAC) on the discomfort associated with the generational gap ($\beta = -0.478$) substantiates both Family Stress Theory and Attachment Theory, reinforcing the assertion that relational security serves to recalibrate stress responses (Allen & Tan, 2016; Conger et al., 2002). The results provide robust support for Laursen & Collins (2009), who contend that emotional intimacy fosters interpretive charity, enabling parents to perceive adolescent individuation as a developmental process rather than an act of defiance. Furthermore, the research advances the assertions made by Jones et al. (2023), illustrating that PAC not only mitigates adolescent internalizing symptoms but also functions as an emotional reframing mechanism for parents. Nonetheless, this investigation calls into question the generalizability of PAC's moderating role by indirectly challenging the findings of Barber & Harmon (2002), who caution against the phenomena of pseudo-closeness and emotional enmeshment. Our data indicate that closeness serves as a protective buffer solely when it is rooted in authenticity and secure attachment; in the absence of these qualities, it may inadvertently reinforce dependency or intensify distress. Consequently, PAC should not be regarded as a universally protective variable; its efficacy as a moderating factor must be contingent upon the quality of the relationship, emotional sincerity, and reciprocal respect.

5.3. Practical implication

The established association between the generational divide and parental psychological discomfort ($\beta = 0.653$) underscores the pivotal significance of intergenerational dialogue within parenting interventions. Conger et al. (2002) and Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2022) contend that unresolved generational conflict intensifies emotional turmoil, while Lui (2015) clarifies the manner in which cultural and technological advancements exacerbate such disparities. Consequently, practical initiatives should aim to furnish parents with interpretative frameworks that frame adolescent divergence as a normative phenomenon rather than one of antagonism (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). As articulated by Laursen & Collins (2004), the acknowledgment of adolescent individuation as a developmental occurrence can bolster emotional resilience. Hence, workshops situated in educational or community settings ought to emphasise reflective dialogue, value negotiation, and emotional interpretation to reconceptualize generational discord as pathways for relational development.

The established inverse correlation between the emotional intelligence of parents and psychological distress ($\beta = -0.547$) indicates that the enhancement of parental skills in emotional regulation and reflective empathy should be deemed a priority within preventive mental health strategies. Educational initiatives grounded in the pedagogy of emotional intelligence—such as those informed by the EUREKA model (Castro et al., 2020)—can be effectively incorporated into community-oriented parenting assistance programs. These interventions harbor the capacity to improve parents' proficiency in deciphering adolescents' emotional signals, sustaining emotional alignment, and alleviating emotionally charged exchanges.

Furthermore, the moderating effect of parent-adolescent relational proximity ($\beta = -0.478$) on the emergence of discomfort stemming from generational disparities underscores the paramount significance of fostering relational warmth and trust. Interventions ought to transcend mere superficial behavioral management to highlight the critical role of affective communication, the establishment of shared rituals, and the fortification of secure attachment. Family therapists may employ methodologies such as narrative therapy or emotion-focused therapy (EFT) to repair relational rifts and bolster resilience within parent-adolescent dyads. Importantly, these implications underscore that relational proximity ought to be predicated upon authenticity rather than coercive tactics—an excessive focus on closeness within emotionally enmeshed or traumatized families may yield adverse consequences, as articulated by Barber & Harmon (2002). Ultimately, policymakers and practitioners must recognize that the

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emotional distress encountered by parents is not merely a peripheral consequence of adolescent behavior but rather a systemic and modifiable phenomenon shaped by intergenerational, emotional, and relational competencies.

5.4. Limitation

While the investigation yields substantial insights, several constraints warrant meticulous scrutiny. Firstly, the dependence on self-reported data engenders potential biases stemming from social desirability or subjective misinterpretations, particularly in culturally sensitive areas such as emotional intimacy and parental distress. Secondly, the cross-sectional design inherently restricts causal inferences; the intricate dynamics between variables, such as emotional intelligence and distress, may fluctuate over time. Thirdly, despite the Vietnamese sociocultural context contributing valuable specificity, it simultaneously constrains generalizability to societies characterized by more individualistic or less collectivist frameworks. Finally, the study fails to account for socioeconomic stressors or pre-existing mental health conditions, which may independently affect parental distress and emotional competencies.

5.5. Future Direction for Research

Subsequent research endeavors should implement longitudinal designs to investigate how the interplay of generational gaps and emotional intelligence influences parental distress over time and in response to specific adolescent developmental milestones, such as puberty or academic transitions. Furthermore, employing mixed-methods approaches that integrate in-depth interviews or family diaries may yield richer insights into the qualitative aspects of emotional disconnection and attunement. Comparative cross-cultural investigations could elucidate how collectivist versus individualist values shape the experiences and regulation of intergenerational conflicts. Additionally, future studies might explore the intersectionality of gender, employment status, and parental role expectations as mediating factors in these relationships. Directly incorporating adolescent perspectives could further illuminate bidirectional emotional dynamics, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of familial emotional ecosystems.

5.6. Conclusion

This study elucidates the psychological burden that generational gaps impose on parents during the emotional transitions of adolescents and underscores the mitigating functions of parental emotional intelligence and relational closeness. By empirically substantiating these relationships, the research reinforces Family Stress Theory and broadens the applicability of emotional intelligence and attachment frameworks within practical parenting scenarios. It advocates for a conceptual transformation in parental support—from behavioral correction to emotional attunement, and from authoritative approaches to empathetic engagement. Significantly, the findings prompt practitioners, educators, and policymakers to develop interventions that are not only developmentally suitable for adolescents but also emotionally restorative for parents. In doing so, we address the emotional chasm that jeopardizes the integrity of contemporary family systems amid rapid generational and societal transformations.

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APPENDIX: Survey

Table 6. Survey Questionnaire

Background information

1	What is your relationship to the adolescent child	Father	Mother	Stepfather/Stepmother	Legal Guardian
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	currently living with you?				
2	How many years of teaching experience do you have with adolescents (ages 12–18)?	Less than 2 years	2–5 years	6–10 years	More than 10 years
3	Which of the following best describes your professional focus?	School Counseling	Family Therapy	Adolescent Mental Health	Social Work with Families
4	What is your highest level of educational qualification in psychology or family studies?	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree (PhD or equivalent)	Currently enrolled in postgraduate studies

No.	Variables	Coded Sub-variables	Content
1.	Parental Psychological Discomfort	PPD1	I often feel emotionally drained when interacting with my adolescent child. (Kwak, 2003; Mikolajczak et al., 2019)
		PPD2	I experience a sense of disconnection from my adolescent during emotionally intense moments. (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Siegel, 2020)
		PPD3	I feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands of parenting during my child's adolescence. (Mikolajczak et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2023)
		PPD4	I frequently internalize my adolescent's behavior as a personal failure. (Kwak, 2003; Conger et al., 2002)
2.	Generational Gap	GG1	I believe there is a significant difference in values between me and my adolescent child. (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022; Lui, 2015)
		GG2	I often struggle to understand my adolescent's expectations or communication style. (Mesch, 2006; Lui, 2015)
		GG3	My adolescent and I frequently disagree on issues related to privacy, technology, or lifestyle. (Mesch, 2006; Kwak, 2003)
		GG4	The gap in emotional expectations between me and my adolescent causes tension. (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022; Steinberg & Morris, 2001)
3.	Parental Emotional Intelligence	PEI1	I am good at recognizing my own emotions during conflicts with my adolescent. (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mikolajczak et al., 2019)
		PEI2	I can accurately perceive my adolescent's emotional state, even when it is unspoken. (Castro et al., 2020; Denham et al., 2007)
		PEI3	I manage my emotional reactions effectively when my adolescent becomes defiant or distant. (Mikolajczak et al., 2019; Salovey & Mayer, 1990)
		PEI4	I use emotional understanding to guide how I respond to my adolescent. (Castro et al., 2020; Denham et al., 2007)
4.	Parent–Adolescent Closeness (PAC)	PAC1	I feel emotionally close to my adolescent and can easily talk with them about personal issues. (Laursen & Collins, 2009; Jones et al., 2023)
		PAC2	My adolescent trusts me enough to share their problems and emotions. (Zemp et al., 2021; Allen & Tan, 2016)
		PAC3	Despite disagreements, we maintain a respectful and emotionally warm relationship. (Laursen & Collins, 2009; Zemp et al., 2021)

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		PAC4	The emotional bond between me and my adolescent helps us cope with stress and conflict. (Jones et al., 2023; Allen et al., 2007)
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Survey link: <https://forms.gle/RyMLFmCZvW4QXR5j8>

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