Emotional dysregulation as a predictor of peer attachment perceptions of adolescents in residential care

Alexandra M. Lino¹ and Luiza Nobre Lima²

Abstract

Adolescents who live in residential care tend to have a development characterized by insecure and ambivalent emotional experiences. In addition, they frequently exhibit levels of emotional dysregulation that potentially compromise the quality of their interpersonal relationships. Considering that in this context the peer group has an important role in providing emotional support, the present study aimed to analyse the levels of emotional dysregulation of adolescents living in residential care and to explore its predictive role in the perception of the attachment to peers. The sample is composed of 100 adolescents (71 girls; 29 boys) living in residential care, aged between 12-18 years old. Measures included the Portuguese versions of the Abbreviated Dysregulation Inventory and the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (peer version only). The levels of dysregulation were not high, and adolescents displayed a higher affective than a behavioural dysregulation. Only cognitive dysregulation negatively accounted for the variability of communication, trust and perception of attachment to peers in general. This is understandable, since cognition has an important role in managing negative emotions and controlling their behavioural outputs. Albeit modest, the results encourage the promotion of emotional regulation as a means of fostering secure interpersonal relationships in residential care.

Keywords: adolescents; residential care; emotional dysregulation; peer attachment

¹ Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. E-mail: alexandra.lino@gmail.com
² Cognitive and Behavioral Center for Research and Intervention (R&D Unit). Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences. E-mail: luizabelima@fpce.uc.pt