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Final dissertation

Family and Social ties as Protective Factors for Effective Emotional

Regulation. A Cross-sectional study of Salvadoran Children and Adults.

Supervisor

Professor Sara Scrimin

Candidate: **Jimena Maria Vega Quiroz**

Student ID number: **2042031**

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Abstract

Previous studies have explored emotional regulation's (ER) important role in well-being. Discussing the internal and external factors that influence the effective development of strategies and responses. In order to address the cultural gap in the literature, this study aimed to explore protective factors that promote effective ER, focusing on the importance of familial and social ties in a Latin American population sample. This cross-sectional study was composed of 112 Salvadoran children and 90 Salvadoran adults. We tested the following through an online questionnaire, emotional regulation (ERQ & DERS), parental availability (LEAPS), and social ties (MSPSS). Findings showed that children and adults who perceived social and familial support reported better emotional regulation, but comparatively, adults reported less dysregulation. This supports the conclusion that social and familial support serve as protective factors for well-being, emphasizing the primary role of maternal warmth in effective emotional regulation. This study's main limitations were methodological restraints and sample size. Nevertheless, our findings provide an insight on El Salvador's cultural background and factors that will aid in the understanding of protective factors necessary to enrich people's well-being, and serve as a foundation for future research in other Latin American samples.

Keywords: Emotion Regulation, Family, Social Ties, El Salvador

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A mi hermoso país El Salvador, por darme cultura, música, arte y todas las personas que más amo. Espero que esto sea un granito de arena para que las personas conozcan todo lo bello de ti.

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Family and Social ties as Protective Factors for Effective Emotional Regulation. A Cross-sectional study of Salvadoran Children and Adults.

Introduction

Emotion regulation is one of the most discussed topics in the current developmental literature. Several authors have attempted to uncover the biological, contextual, and psychological factors that contribute to effectively developing an individual's coping ability in this changing world. Despite the extensive literature on emotion regulation, a noticeable gap persists in studies encompassing culturally and longitudinally diverse age groups. The following thesis embarks on a comprehensive exploration, employing a cross-sectional sample of Salvadoran children and adults.

Therefore, within Chapter 1, we will tackle the existing literature, firstly delving into the basic concepts of emotions and emotional regulation. Followed by an examination of protective factors that ensure a stable development, and finally, a deeper inspection of the limited literature on Latin America, specifically looking into the inner workings of El Salvador's culture. Chapter 2 is the methodological section, containing the introduction of our research, identifying the main aims, hypothesis, procedure, chosen measures, and data analysis plan. Based on the setup of the previous chapter, Chapter 3 will be composed of our findings, analyzing them in line with our previous research. The final section, Chapter 4, will be our discussion, where we will debate if our results support our hypothesis and what this means for our sample and future research.

1.   Theoretical background

1.1 Emotion Regulation

1.1.1 The basics of emotion and defining emotion regulation

What is an emotion? This is the first inquiry we will encounter when setting up this research. Like many authors, we must find the most appropriate approach to answer it. The first works we come upon are those of Darwin and James in the 19th century; from these, it is worth highlighting James' (1884) earliest rationale, where he described emotions as passive mental feelings of body movements. As we do a deeper dive into the literature, we discover that emotion can be explained from a number of different perspectives, the most cited being the cognitive, structural-developmental, system, socio-cultural, and functional perspectives. After examining these, all authors agree that emotions are not a simple phenomenon.

Therefore, this study will understand emotion by its complex nature, taking into account the biological, expressive, and experiential factors (Izard, 1977). Understanding that emotional expression entails a process of encoding and decoding, acting regardless of external factors or demographics. We must consider how individuals adapt their emotional responses based on their perception of the environment's significance in relation to their well-being. Additionally, it is essential to be aware of its uniqueness since a single emotion can have varying effects on individuals and differ depending on the situation (Izard, 1971; Cole, 2016).

When discussing the human emotional experience, we should first note how individuals acquire the necessary skills to manage and adjust their emotional responses. Hence, we must understand emotional regulation. This study will refer to it as the continuous,

dynamic, and adaptive modulation of internal states composed of emotion, cognition, and behavior (Niggs, 2017). From the first years of life, regulation is moderated by extrinsic elements, primarily directed by caregivers in addition to their surrounding contextual factors. In this perspective, adults play a crucial role as part of the child's regulatory system, and their presence is a prerequisite for the child's subsequent gradual shift into internal control, which we define as self-regulation (Grandis et al., 2019). In the study of child development, authors primarily focus on intrinsic processes and their progression (Cole et al., 2004; Gross, 2013; Gagne et al., 2021). We will understand self-regulation as the ability to handle behavior, emotion, and cognition in an adaptive way (Eisenberg & Zhou, 2016; Canet-Juric et al., 2016). According to Hoffman, Schmeichel, and Baddley (2012), self-regulation encompasses automatic and controlled forms. The automatic form is rooted in past behaviors that have been efficiently and unconsciously executed. The controlled form involves the ability to modify responses in order to achieve a desired state or outcome.

Numerous contributions have been made in the extensive literature concerning a child's emotional development. However, despite these collective efforts, the search for a sole definition of emotion regulation remains an ongoing debate. Nevertheless, many authors define emotion regulation as a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors, functioning at biological, behavioral, and social levels (Thompson, 1994; Cole et al., 2004; Gross & Thompson, 2007). Likewise, it is understood as a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic processes whose three primary responsibilities are monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, particularly their intensity and duration. In line with Thompson's (1994) proposition, it is essential to emphasize individual differences in adaptation and the fundamental, universal regulatory processes involving the emotional system. It is essential to grasp the functional aspects of emotion regulation; this entails

recognizing the importance of regulation in achieving goals and giving due consideration to motives and contextual factors when describing the processes of emotion regulation (Thompson, 1994). When looking at children's ability to manage emotional arousal, we must assess their ability to efficiently use regulatory strategies and their proficiency to adapt and respond to their environmental context over time.

When talking about the environmental context in which the child develops, one prolific author to cite is Bronfenbrenner. In 1974, he proposed that development should be studied as bi-directional. Introducing the Ecological System theory, he named four system structures: (1) Microsystem (immediate environment: parents, peers, teachers), Mesosystem (interaction with microsystem), Exosystem (social structures: workplace, neighborhood), Macrosystem (cultural elements: status, wealth, ethnicity). Here, we note that the child's ability to regulate emotionally depends on their interactions with others; this is especially relevant during infancy as regulation occurs in a dyadic context with their caregiver (Cole et al., 2004; Grandis et al., 2019).

In the recent literature, Bronfenbrenner has revised his highly acclaimed theory, proposing a "more complex and dynamic structure" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; p.794). The new bioecological model of human development takes a closer look at the different stages in life, taking into account four main aspects: process, person, context, and time (For the model, refer to *Figure 1*).

Starting with *process,* this is the proximal and distal interactions that occur over time between the individual and the environment, which we can label as proximal processes. Second, we have *person* which emphasizes the active role of the individual. There are three

key characteristics: (1) dispositions: active behaviors that initiate and sustain the operation of proximal processes in specific developmental domains; (2) resources: the abilities, experiences, knowledge, and skills that may enhance proximal processes; and (3) demand: those that prompt or discourage reactions from the social environment, such as temperament, age and gender (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Third, we have *context* that expands on the ecological systems of the earlier model by applying the previously mentioned person characteristics to each system. Additionally, it goes a step further as it includes the individual's interaction with objects and symbols, which is essential when evaluating aspects in the environment, such as stability and chaos, that may act as protective or risk factors for effective development. Moreover, *time,* the fourth and last component that can affect both the individual and the environment, includes chronological time, such as developmental stages, and events that can happen in the environment, such as socio-economic changes. Time can be contemplated across the systems, with Microtime pertaining to the consistency or breaks in ongoing episodes of proximal processes. Mesotime is the regularity of these episodes across more extensive time intervals (days and weeks). Lastly, Macrotime focuses on evolving societal expectations and events within and across generations. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Shelton, 2019).

Figure 1.

The bioecological model of human development by Bronfenbrenner (2007).
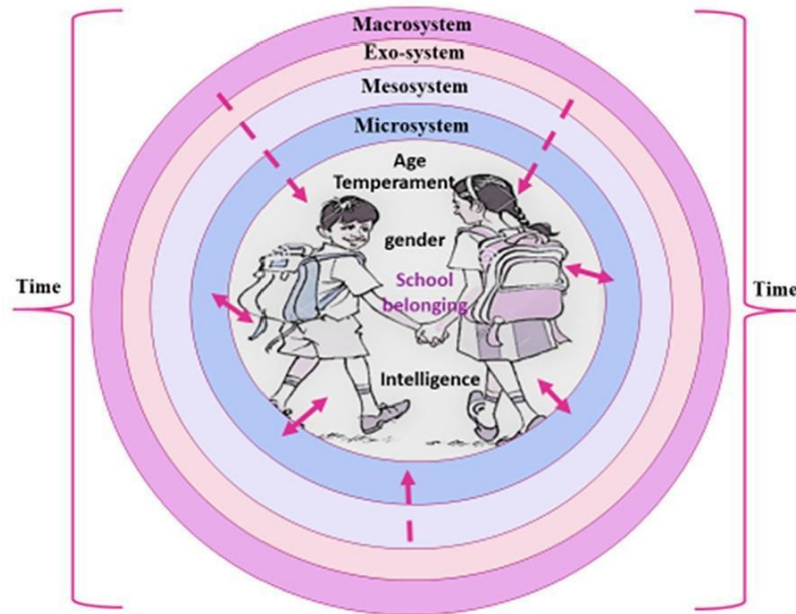
Note. This diagram represents the 2007 bioecological   model of human development   by Bronfenbrenner. Found in El   Zaatari, W., & Maalouf, I. (2022). How the Bronfenbrenner Bio-ecological System Theory Explains the Development of Students'   Sense of Belonging to School? SAGE Open, 12(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221134089

1.1.2 Emotion regulation in development

As previously mentioned,   emotion regulation is characterized by its dynamic nature. Changing as a product of an individual's development and, therefore, differing as a function of age. As individuals undergo maturational changes and face new experiences, their ability to regulate adapts by constantly acquiring new styles and more sophisticated reappraisal strategies (Cole et   al., 1994). In order to better understand the topic at   hand, we will refer back to Kopp's (1982) developmental framework, which is based on a child's first five years of life. She proposed that   self-regulation consists of adaptable action systems organized by internal resources (cognitive processes) and external   resources (caregiving) that   structure a child's engagement.

Many authors who study development focus primarily on the first years of childhood; however, in this thesis, we will take a cross-sectional approach by considering emotional regulation in childhood and adulthood.

Childhood. Starting from the first moments of life, we note that newborns possess reflexive, organized motor-based actions such as sucking and hand-to-mouth movement, which aid in the modulation of high arousal levels. Besides this, they remain unable to survive and regulate themselves. This is why caregivers play a crucial role during the first three years as the primary regulators of infants' emotions (Feldman, 2009). Parents are initially responsible for satisfying every basic need (for example, food and clothing), physical nurturing, and promoting cognitive and emotional development (Calkin, 1994). They provide infants with the social interactions and routines necessary to begin employing some of their external control mechanisms and modulation practices (Kopp, 1982). According to the literature, factors that have been proven to influence the development of regulation are the infant's biological predispositions as well as the caregivers' sensitivity, responsivity and environmental context (Ainsworth & Bell, 1974; Kopp, 1982; Escalona, 1963). As the infants acquire more skills and sensorimotor independence, there begins to be a gradual shift in the balance between caregiver regulation and the child's developing capacity to control and affect their surroundings (Werner, 1957).

Moving into middle childhood, we characterize it as a transition period, where biological mechanisms mature, complex behavioral skills develop, and children navigate more intricate social environments (Blair et al., 2014). We distinguish a shift from primarily depending on external support and guidance to acquiring the ability to regulate themselves. Infants start to understand both their own and others' emotions and gradually recognize how

beliefs and desires lead to specific emotional reactions (Braciszewski, 2010). At this time, we start to notice the influence of societal expectations. Children are expected to control their display of emotions, as failing to do so can lead to challenges, including peer rejection (Sallquist et al., 2009).

Adolescence. Many studies on adolescence regard it as a time of emotional turmoil, new stressors, and dysregulation (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014; Allen & Nelson, 2018). Being a period of significant biological, cognitive, and social changes (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2019; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Somerville et al., 2010; Fields & Prinz, 1997; Larsen & Luna, 2018). One critical shift includes the separation from caregivers as sources of regulation and, in turn, becoming more reliant on peers, romantic partners, or their skills to regulate emotion (Silvers, 2022; Allen & Nelson, 2018). Regardless of the difficulties these new challenges present to adolescents, they promote the development of response inhibition and neurocognitive maturation. This encourages the opportunity to adapt and utilize different combinations from their repertoire of emotion regulation strategies (Crone & Dahl, 2012; Defoe et al., 2015; Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). Age and experience contribute to the development of stable preferences for specific strategies, while emotional intensity influences the choice of strategy (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). Throughout adolescence, there are age-related shifts in emotion regulation strategies' frequency, effectiveness, and situational appropriateness, particularly in social situations (Zimmerman, 1999; Silvers, 2022). Adolescents are known for the regular use of expressive suppression, as well as cognitive reappraisal strategies in social contexts, which tend to increase from early to middle adolescence (Sullivan et al., 2008; Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006; Seiffge-Krenke & Beyers, 2005)

Adulthood. Compared to previous developmental stages, there has not been as much focus on emotional regulation dynamics during adulthood. Although there is limited literature on the subject, age-related changes regarding temporal perspective are worth noting. We can refer to the highly cited Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1993, 2006; Carstensen et al., 2003). Younger adults have a more effusive perception of time, they are burdened with thoughts about their future, which may affect their emotional security regarding role status. Likewise, it increases their focus on life demands and pressures them to prioritize present-oriented emotional goals (Arnett, 2001; Charles & Levine, 2018). Meanwhile, older adults realize how limited time might be, letting go of many of these demands and instead leaning towards the chance to live in the moment (Fung et al., 1999; Soto et al., 2011). This shift can also be observed in the changes in response to stressors, where older adults reported utilizing both attention deployment and "do nothing" strategies (Aldwin et al., 1996; Gross, 1998). Consequently, there is less confrontation and greater acceptance in situations, whether positive or negative. These passive strategies at other stages might be regarded as inefficient, but here, it's actually associated with lower levels of neuroticism, sadness and anger. As a result, higher emotional stability, resilience, and conscientiousness (Soto et al. 2011; Charles & Levine, 2018).

1.1.3 Culture and emotion regulation

When assessing emotion regulation, it has been argued that to understand how emotions influence social dynamics and behaviors, we must consider culture as part of the broader context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Matsumoto, 1990; Mesquita, 2001). In this study, we understand culture as a multidimensional construct consisting of attitudes, norms, practices, and inter-system dynamics that connect an individual to their referential group (Tutic, 2022; Vignoles et al., 2016; Kitayama, 2002; Kitayama et al., 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991,

1994; Matsumoto, 1993; Wierzbicka, 1993; Butler et al., 2007). There has been some debate on dissecting its complexity, sometimes regarded as a dichotomous construct divided into independence/interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this framework, previous studies place Western European values as independent and assertive, where emotional expression is encouraged and the individual focuses on self-actualization. On the other hand, Non-Western values are considered interdependent; the individual focuses on their relationships with the group, resulting in the frequent use of suppression, especially in circumstances that elicit self and others protection (Matsumoto, 1990, Butler, Lee & Gross, 2007; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994).

One of the characteristics of regulation is the ability to appraise; numerous studies have found similar patterns among different cultures. In a study by Wallbott and Scherer (1988), they assessed 27 countries and found that all of the appraisal dimensions were due to emotions and independent of cultural differences. On the other hand, when talking about appraisal propensity, we notice that it may differ according to a specific culture's interpretation of a situation (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). Culture does not only affect our perception but also how we display emotional behaviors. Cross-culturally, basic emotions such as joy and anger can be portrayed with universal verbal and non-verbal expression patterns or action tendencies. Nevertheless, culture presents certain expectations and behavior models, which dictate what is deemed acceptable and appropriate. Thus, individuals may differ in how and when they utilize their behavioral repertoires in given circumstances (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). For this reason, we can maintain that there is a bidirectional relationship between culture and emotion, as emotion is shaped by cultural influences while consequently reinforcing practices and upholding norms significant to the culture where they belong (Mesquita, 2001).

Looking further into the practices that are shaped by culture, we should examine the different dimensions of parenting. Parents from individualistic cultures tend to promote their children's autonomy; they encourage them to face difficult situations and, in doing so, allow them to express negative emotions. Their child-parent communication patterns lean towards being open and cooperative, illustrated when parents make requests, offer choices, and remain open to negotiation. On the other hand, in collectivist cultures that are relatedness-oriented, parents use more regulatory language to guide their children's behavior and establish a clear hierarchy. They emphasize obedience without being open to negotiation, but while maintaining warmth and respect (Mata & Pauen, 2023).

In order to have a better grasp on these arguments, Mata and Pauen (2023) conducted a cross-cultural study of three countries: El Salvador, Chile, and Germany, where they considered the role of parent-child interaction on child self-regulation development. Their findings showed that in Germany, parents have high expectations for their children's self-regulation and compliance, using strategies that encourage autonomy while clearly expressing their expectations. This parenting style is suitable for a low-risk living environment, promoting self-driven behavior in children. On the other hand, parents in El Salvador have less defined expectations for their children's self-regulation and use more hierarchical strategies to foster these skills. As a result, children in El Salvador tend to negotiate less and readily accept parental demands without challenging authority, which may be beneficial for survival in a high-risk living environment. Chile falls in the middle, possibly reflecting a cultural orientation that values autonomy and relatedness. Alternatively, the diversity in parenting strategies in Chile may be linked to significant societal changes in the country over the past decades. From this, we conclude that specific aspects of parent-child interactions may act as protective or risk factors depending on the social context.

1.2 Protective Factors

1.2.1 The influence of familial relationships

Delving further into the exogenous factors that modulate emotion regulation, research continuously emphasizes the crucial role of the bidirectional relationships between the infant and its caregiver. This relationship is characterized by being rich in emotional dynamics and an opportunity for infants to learn, practice, and acquire the skills to regulate their emotions (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Morris et al., 2018). The role of caregivers begins at birth, becoming responsible for regulating the infants' bio-behavioral states (Schore, 1996). The first most meaningful social interaction reported in the literature pertains to the mother-child relationship, as it serves as a framework for emotional expression and future successful social relationships (Perry & Calkins, 2018; Stack et al., 2010). Through the context of these interactions, we see the transition towards efficient self-regulation. Even though caregiver presence has been deemed essential for emotional and physiological regulation (Tottenham et al., 2019; Silvers, 2022), it is still not the most influential characteristic. In fact, the quality of parental engagement sets the tone for familial interactions, which allow the infant to learn how to respond to environmental challenges encountered throughout their lives (Silvers, 2022; Morris et al., 2007). For this reason, the literature suggests that promoting high emotion regulation skills to parents will lead children to more positive development (Hajal & Paley, 2020; Silvers, 2022).

In light of this, we should discuss caregivers' sensitivity, which we will understand as the ability to detect and respond to the child's emotional cues (Hawk et al., 2018). Sensitive parents can intervene with the comfort and support necessary to reduce the child's emotional stress. Allowing the infant to experience up and down-regulation of arousal while teaching the appropriate responses and strategies to deal with certain situations (Perry & Calkins,

2018). How a parent chooses to respond to their child's emotions sets precedence (De Roo et al., 2019; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Eisenberg, 1998). As concluded in Zhou et al. (2002) study, children exposed since kindergarten to high parental displays of positive expression resulted in empathetic responses towards both negative and positive emotions. They exhibited lower externalizing problems and higher social competence later in life. Likewise, Eisenberg et al. (2005) found a positive correlation between warm and positive parental expressivity and fewer externalizing problems. Additionally, these researchers took a step further and extensively explored parents' reactions toward their child's negative emotions. Finding that less punitive and more calm responses towards children's negative emotions lead to better emotion regulation in children in the following two years. These results highlight the importance of studying positive parenting behaviors that promote children's emotional development, as they play a crucial role in determining later outcomes (Stack et al., 2010).

Furthermore, sensitive caregiving has been shown to influence attachment. As per the works of Bowlby (1969, 1982) and Ainsworth (1974), attachment is regarded as an instrumental tool for developing social relationships and emotion regulation. By forming a secure attachment in the first years of life, the infants count on the reassurance that their caregiver will be available to them; hence, they have the security to explore their environments and, by doing so, experience an array of emotional circumstances that allow them further train their regulation strategies (Srouffe, 1996; Perry & Calkins, 2018). Through this repetitive parent-child reciprocal interaction, the infant develops a more extensive repertoire of emotional abilities, while simultaneously, these abilities become influential to their caregivers' environment (Feldman, 2015; Perry & Calkins, 2018). For this reason, sensitive parenting serves not only as a tool for forming a secure attachment in infancy but also functions throughout all developmental stages due to its flexible nature. It allows

attachment to grow alongside the infant's maturing emotional skills, remaining constantly attuned to each stage's new demands and requirements.

Following Bowlby's attachment theory, one crucial factor that promotes secure attachment is high levels of parental emotional availability (Lum & Phares, 2005; Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2003). According to Lum and Phares (2005), emotional availability entails "parental responsiveness, sensitivity, and emotional involvement" (p.211). Unlike other aspects previously discussed, it is not a specific response to distress, but it may be observed in all of the child's emotional contexts, including negative and positive behaviors (Lum & Phares, 2005). Many authors consider the absence of availability to be one of the most frequent risk factors for maladaptive adjustment in later years, especially for youth who are already positioned in an at-risk context (Sturge-Apple et al., 2006; Sturge-Apple et al., 2012). Although we can observe an increase in autonomy and thus a decrease in parental help, during the dynamic changes in the parent-child relationship during adolescence and adulthood, the need for parental availability, responsiveness, and commitment remains. Especially emotional support and comfort from mothers (Lieberman et al., 1999).

As with other aspects, it remains essential to discern that attachment looks different across cultures, as the impact of parental responses varies across diverse backgrounds (e.g., Nelson et al., 2013). For example, when looking at levels of proximity, Latin American countries are characterized by their greater preference for physical contact and grander displays of gestures compared to more individualistic European countries (Zubieta et al., 1998). Nevertheless, the literature shows that irrespective of culture, a secure attachment, high maternal sensitivity, and parental availability remain the most optimal options for better

developmental outcomes (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mesman et al., 2012; Posada et al., 2013; Van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008).

1.2.2 The mother and father role

As we studied in the previous section, the parent-child relationship is essential for developing emotion regulation skills. As we delved further into the literature, it became evident that there is a greater emphasis on the mother-child dyad. While fathers are often grouped under the umbrella term "parents," they are rarely studied for their distinct contributions to a child's development (Lum & Phares, 2005; Gallegos et al., 2017; Silverstein, 2002).

Throughout history, mothers have been more likely to be reported as the child's primary caregiver, showing parallel trends in individualistic and collectivist societies. There have been historical expectations for mothers to nurture and remain emotionally engaged at all times, whereas fathers have typically taken the responsibility of providing and enforcing discipline (Rodrigo et al., 2014). However, this traditional gender-based division of roles has lessened as women have entered sectors previously dominated by men, such as education and the workforce (Lansford et al., 2021). This shift has led to a change in child-rearing practices, progressively evolving into a joint effort between mothers and fathers.

Recent studies suggest that the once firmly held differentiation between parental sensitivities and attachments may be more flexible than once thought (Lums & Phares, 2005). Research has indicated that both mothers and fathers can establish similar emotional bonds with their children. When both parents are actively engaged and offer support, children can form secure attachments, resulting in better developmental outcomes during their later years

as kids and teenagers (Lums & Phares, 2005; Kerns et al., 2000). Both mothers and fathers have been observed to engage in direct and indirect care of their children, ensuring that their needs are met and being available to them when needed. Nevertheless, attachment behaviors can be displayed differently, with mothers participating in positive engagement promoting emotional well-being. Conversely, fathers tend to contribute through interactive and stimulating play, which aids children in developing the skills to regulate their behavior and manage intense emotions when encountering distressing situations (Kotila et al., 2016; Hazen et al., 2010; Gallegos et al., 2017).

A deeper look into the father-child relationship revealed that those with a secure attachment showed better self-regulation and early displays of internalization practices during childhood (Volling et al., 2002). Additionally, adult men who recalled positive memories and models of fatherhood reported a negative correlation with avoidant attachment in future relationships and would decide to play a primary role in their child's upbringing (Kotila et al., 2016). Thus, the presence of an engaged father contributes to emotional development and lays the groundwork for perpetuating a cycle of positive emotional regulation across generations.

In the context of modern parenting practices, we may examine dual-earning families in the middle to upper socio-economic strata. Within this demographic, parents face the task of balancing their work responsibilities and role as caregivers. It is often difficult for mothers to relinquish their parental responsibilities and reduce their quality time, even if it means sacrificing their mental well-being (Bianchi et al., 2006; Kotila et al., 2013). On the other hand, fathers who are facing personal difficulties find it easier to emotionally withdraw from their children, thus continuing to occupy the helper role. As highlighted by Kotila,

Schoppe-Sullivan, and Kamp (2016), gender-based parenting persists despite the idealized notions of equally shared parenting. We may argue that societal expectations, or even the mere evolutionary gender roles, are so firmly ingrained in people, hence maintaining the pattern.

1.2.4 Social support

We have discussed family as a protective factor, present from an individual's first years of life and found in their immediate environment. However, as previously mentioned, as we move further out of the microsystem and the contextual environment becomes more complex through the years, examining the role of factors such as social support in emotional development becomes of greater importance. Social support is a multifaceted construct built around a social network encompassing family, peers, and community (Ozbay et al., 2007). As described by Trejos-Herrera et al. (2018), this construct can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) Acceptance: a structural dimension that refers to the quantity of one's social network and the frequency of social interaction, (2) Perceived Support: involving the belief that one's social network will offer assistance when required (Yu et al., 2020). From here on, our focus will mainly be on perceived social support, given its relevance in the literature regarding its role in ensuring effective development, enriching social adaptation, better cognitive coping strategies, and reducing both mental and physical health problems (Kwok et al., 2011; Berkman, 2000; Wang, 2018; Haber et al., 2007). Additionally, we must take into consideration that perceived social support is a subjective measure; therefore, it will depend on an individual's point of view, appraisal, and memories (Haber et al., 2007)

Social support plays a crucial role in developing emotion and behavioral patterns; as per Marroquin and Nolen-Hoeksema's (2015) social context hypothesis of emotion

regulation, an individual's environmental context can either promote or inhibit the use of regulation strategies. When surrounded by a rich social network, including high amounts of social support, the individual is more likely to be able to adapt to their emotions and display less internalizing problems. It is especially relevant when considering individuals in high-risk environments, as we see the importance of promoting social support in order to increase positive outcomes.

When assessing social support, like the other factors previously mentioned, it can be displayed differently across demographic groups. For example, social support is a pillar in collectivist societies, as they emphasize the importance of being part of a close-knit network to go through life successfully. A study containing a sample of 602 Latinos in the USA reported that having family, friend, and partner support decreases internalizing symptoms (Lerman et al., 2021). Furthermore, by delving into broader levels of support, we can distinguish the importance of community, recognizing a relationship between the degree to which an individual belongs and feels part of a society and their positive social outcomes. Communities possess collective resources, including trust among citizens and norms of reciprocity, which promote cooperation, harmony, and structure amongst all its members. Of note, looking deeper into sources of support in collectivist communities, we encounter that religion plays a definite role. Continuing to inspect Latin American countries, we can note how being part of religious groups promotes a sense of connectedness, belonging, and social security (Karam et al., 2023).

Looking at gender, we can observe how even though women are reported to be more exposed to stress, they are better at alleviating their effects than men. During times of distress, women count on better coping strategies and support; they seek and receive social

support from different sources and give it back (Taylor et al., 2000; Williams, 2008). Nevertheless, men still report seeking some social support, but they respond better to instrumental support (tangible aid and service in daily life) rather than emotional support (expressions of care, value and love) (Jiang et al., 2018; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010).

Finally, we should consider age when talking about social support. In line with our previous research on development, social support should be regarded depending on an individual's life stage. Parents are the primary source of support during childhood and early adolescence. In contrast, there is a significant shift in late adolescence as parents step back and peers become the most prominent influence. As an individual ages, the availability and frequency of social interaction changes, with elders becoming more reluctant to seek explicit social support compared to younger adults (Jiang et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it remains essential to continue building social support systems for all ages, as it proves to remain beneficial for all health aspects (Tremethick, 1997).

1.3 An overview of Emotion regulation in Latin America

1.3.1 Addressing the gap in the literature and introducing Latino societies

Throughout this research, it has become evident that emotion regulation literature still has a ways to go in some areas of the world, with most investigations coming from North America and Europe (Bass et al., 2015). Nevertheless, there have been some attempts to accomplish cross-cultural studies and include more diverse samples, given that it has been proven that culture plays a significant role in socio-emotional development, and what is seen as functional development in some countries can be deemed dysfunctional in others (Bass et al, 2015, 2016; Krys, 2022).

This thesis will refer specifically to the Latino culture, which refers to those individuals descended from Latin American Countries. For this purpose, we will reference Hofstedes' (1980) cultural dimensions theory, utilizing his six key dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, power distance, and short/long-term orientation. This theory will aid us in highlighting the ways Latino culture can influence its members' values and behaviors.

According to this model, Latin America can be categorized as a collectivist culture; relationships are regarded as interdependent as there is a greater involvement of emotion between individuals. One concept that defines all social interactions is "*familismo*", which refers to the high positive regard towards family. This do not only include close blood relatives but also friends who are referred to as their "*hermanos*" or "c*ompadres*" who are considered part of their extended family. At the center of these interdependent relationships, we can find strong values of brotherhood, in which conflict is avoided and harmony between the group is promoted (Zubieta et al., 1998). One aspect that goes with being a collectivist culture is that there is a positive correlation with uncertainty avoidance, meaning that many Latin American countries score high in this dimension. Among the highest-scoring countries, we can observe El Salvador, Uruguay, and Guatemala (Zubieta et al., 1998). On the other hand, something that differentiates it from other collectivist cultures, such as Asian countries, is that we can observe that extended families are more predominant and detect less cohesion (Lewis, 1966).

In order to comprehend Latino culture, one dimension that requires a little more dissection is masculinity vs. femininity. It is very well known that Latin America functions predominantly around patriarchal values, with "*machismo*" and "*marianismo*" concepts

defining the sharp distinctions in gender roles. Let's take a closer look at these two concepts, "*machismo*" is the expectation of men to be strong and respected,   with their main purpose being becoming the head of the household.   While "*marianismo*" comes from the idealized traditional feminine model, women are regarded as weak and taught from a young age to be submissive and respectful.   They are sheltered and protected,   with their purpose being to become mothers and wives (Stevens & Soler, 1974).

Nevertheless, it is of note that Latino cultures score higher on femininity, as we can see in the example of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, and Brazil (Zubieta et al., 1998). In view of   this, even though we illustrated how men are favored,   and gender   roles   are differentiated, there is still some overlap in how both men and women place a great emphasis on emotion. Both roles are characterized by their need for emotional   expression, empathy, modesty, and the importance of emotional warmth over instrumentality (Zubieta et al., 1998). It takes one interaction with a Latino to notice their warm demeanor; "*simpatia*" which means sympathy, is ingrained in the social   structure. There is a need to be open and friendly, highlighting the positive emotions over the negative ones and being perceived as polite and well-mannered.

1.3.2 A case study on El Salvador

Looking back at the previous chapters, we note a gap in the literature, where smaller countries tend to be overlooked.   For this reason, in this thesis, we decided to focus on the "Pulgarcito de America ", better known as El Salvador. El Salvador is considered the smallest country in Central America, with an area of 8,124 square miles and a population of 6,321,042 people (MINED, 2020). Looking closer at the population, we can see that ethnicity comprises 90% mestizos, a mixture of indigenous and Spanish ancestry.   As observed in other Latin

American countries,   the population follows the Roman Catholic faith,   with around 83% practicing Catholics (Cordova, 2005). This is an interesting demographic to note, given that religion plays a central   role in the culture.   The Salvadoran belief system is based on the notion that God controls everything around them,   and it is everyone's duty to abide by the religious norms and values to be blessed with health and fortunes by the grace of God.

El Salvador shares a similar history as its neighboring Central   American countries, with many decades of cultural progress and high societal upheaval. Foreign influence can be evident starting from the migrations of   Mexican Toltecs, whose language, religion, and cultural traditions became intertwined with Salvadorans.   Nevertheless, it was not until the Spanish colonization that   indigenous societies had the most   dramatic transformation. New social and economic systems were introduced,   slowly transforming El   Salvador into an unequal agrarian society led by oligarchic families.   It was not until 1932, after the world market collapse, that "campesinos'" farm workers attempted the first   revolution against the oligarchs who held the power in government. This is the point in time we can regard as the catalyst of the government's first attempts at a reign of terror, especially on those residents of lower income in the countryside. Following the rhetoric of anticommunism, the government's National Guard executed around 10,000 to 30,000 "*campesinos*" and indigenous people.   It was an elimination of traditional   customs and the start of a new political framework led by military forces,   eventually resulting in the civil   war (Fuentes, 2007). By the 1970's,   the country had become a repressive dictatorship that often disregarded human rights, with both the left-wing guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary death squads caught in a cycle of political violence. Salvadorans recognized the early 1980's as the time when there was an escalation of systemic violence, kidnapping, mass executions, and rape. The civil war was 12 years of terrible crime and great loss, with 75,000 civilian deaths, over two million displacements of

people inside and outside the country,   and $1 billion in material losses (Cordova, 2005). It was not until the 1992 Peace Accords in Mexico City that the country could glimpse a livable future.

But why is this history relevant to the topic at hand? Well, colonization and war come with a great deal of long-term effects, which, as Carlos Cordova (2005) stated, included "the erosion of the social   fabric, exemplified by the breakdown of trust, security and solidarity" (p.17). A nation's collective trauma becomes ingrained throughout   the generations, shaping and transforming cultural practices, norms, understanding, and use of symbols. What for one generation is a functional survival practice, becomes a norm to the following generation, and as times change,   it can be later   deemed dysfunctional. We can see this through parenting practices during the war,   where parental   communication and availability faced dramatic transformations. Fathers became absent when they were recruited to fight or had to immigrate to find jobs,   while mothers remained home trying to keep their households afloat, adopting greater control practices and stricter rules to keep their children safe.

Despite all the tumultuous history, one cultural characteristic that remains unchanged in the Salvadoran society is   a strong sense of   family values and support   towards the community. One aspect that reflects this closeness is that even though the country is divided into 14 official   departments, Salvadorans consider a 15th. "*El departamento quince*" represents all the Salvadorans who live abroad and represents the idea of "*hermano lejano,*" meaning brothers who live   far away but   still contribute to the social   and economic development of the country. Showing that despite distance, there will always be a strong tie to their country of origin, and they will always be considered part of the family.

As illustrated in our previous section, El Salvador's culture is built on patriarchal values and attitudes like other Latin American countries. This can be observed in the strongly defined gender roles, which result from a socialization process in which both men and women take an active role (Welsh, 2001). Boys and men are expected to become the providers and protectors of their families. From an early age, it is instilled in them to be strong, meaning expressing emotions shows weakness (Hume, 2008). On the other hand, girls and women are brought up through the lens of "*marianismo*". Girls are taught that to be successful, their role in the family is to be submissive, caring, and selfless. Nevertheless, these views have slowly changed as the capital becomes more modern and progressive.

Another value instilled early on in Salvadoran children is "*respeto*" meaning respect. They are taught to be obedient and always listen to their elders, highlighted by the amount of control that parents exhibit towards their children, with studies reporting a considerable proportion of parents adopting an authoritarian parenting style and frequently resort to physical punishment (Baumrind, 2012; Carbajal, 2010). Nevertheless, Salvadoran parents are known for their constant care and affection, as they prioritize forming a strong bond and demonstrate high parental support throughout their child's development (Suizzo et al., 2019). One particular aspect we must consider when looking at the rearing practices in El Salvador is how their socio-economic variables affect this process. El Salvador is considered a primarily underdeveloped country. It is reported to have a low Human Development Index of = .675, an inequality-adjusted index of = .548, and a gender inequality index of = .376 (United Nations, 2019). Additionally, it is most well known for its high percentage of reported violence, ranking as one of the highest homicide rates, with 18 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2021 (World Bank, 2023). It is in this context of high risk where values such as "*familismo*" and "*respeto*" become protective factors, as the constant

supervision, control, and need for closeness are essential to keep children safe (Mata, & Pauen, 2023); it is a way to provide structure and ensure certainty to a chaotic environment.

2. Methodology

2.1 The present thesis

Emotion regulation during development has been extensively studied throughout the literature. Nevertheless, there are some limitations concerning the inclusion of different ages and cultures. There has been discussion on the role of exogenous and endogenous factors as protective factors ensuring the effective development of emotion regulation. However, one aspect that has been overlooked is how third variables such as culture, ethnicity, and contextual background can influence such development.

The purpose of the current thesis was to present a cross-sectional study addressing the gap in Latin American literature, providing insight into the contextual factors that affect emotion regulation. Therefore, the aim was to assess the relationship between emotion regulation, family, and social support in Salvadoran adults and children. The study was based on self-reports administered to adults and children living in El Salvador. Interestingly, cultural and religious factors were also assessed to guide the understanding of relationships between the key variables.

More specifically, six research questions guided our study:

1. *Do emotion regulation, perceived family, and social support change as a function of age and gender?*

Based on the previously reported literature, we expected that women would have a higher perception of family and social support. Given that in El Salvador, women tend to be more open toward seeking and receiving support. In contrast, men are expected to keep their

emotions to themselves and be strong. On the other hand, there will be no significant changes between ages, given that values of "*familismo*" are present at all stages of life.

2. *Is there an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in children?*

Based on the previously reported literature, we expected a positive association between emotion regulation and family and social support in children. The more a child perceives to be supported by both their mother and father, the better they will be able to utilize coping strategies to deal with their emotions. Likewise, with social support, there will be a similar positive correlation. Given the age range of our sample children, they are starting to rely on their peers to understand how to regulate their behaviors.

3. *Is there an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in adults?*

Based on the previously reported literature, we expected a positive association between emotion regulation and social support. Regarding parental support, we predicted that there would be associations with maternal support but not paternal support. Given that Salvadoran households have been characterized by absent fathers, with mainly mothers taking the responsibility to care for and raise children, especially during the civil war.

4. *Is emotion regulation directly or indirectly linked with social or family support in children and adults?*

Here, based on the previously reported literature, we predicted that emotion regulation is directly linked with social and family support in children and adults. Having support serves as a protective factor, which, at the high-risk context our sample finds themselves in,

promotes the opportunity to develop the appropriate regulatory strategies that   diminish the chances of dysregulation.

2. 2 Participants

The sample consisted of people from El Salvador and was divided between two age groups: (1) adult sample and (2) children sample.

(1) Adult sample: The sample consisted of 90 adults, 33% female, with a mean age of 33.25 (*SD*=12.30). Participants were from western departments of El Salvador, including San Salvador, La Libertad, Cuscatlan, and Sonsonate. The majority of participants (*N*=54) rated as being of average SES,   while 30 reported high SES and only six low.   Most participants (n=72) were Christian; however, 13 also reported being atheist,   and 7 were part   of other religions.

(2) Children sample: A total of 112 children (56% girls) between the ages of 8 and 13 (*M*=9.68, *SD*=1.77) took part in the online survey. Participants were recruited from two main schools in El   Salvador, from second to sixth grades.   The first was a small-scale bilingual school in San Salvador,   with participants   from a diverse range of   upper, middle, and lower-middle-class families.   The second was a catholic school   located in Cuscatancingo, which had a range of lower-middle and class working families.   In neither of the recruiting schools did we encounter children experiencing severe economic disadvantage.

2.3 Procedure

Two questionnaires were developed,   (1) adult sample and (2) children sample. They were both done using Qualtrics *(www.qualtrics.com)*.   Due to the target   population, it was

necessary to formulate both into two language versions. The original format was set up with English scales, and the second version was translated into Spanish. For most of the formal scales, an already published reviewed translation was used, while a back-translation method was used for consent forms, cultural questions, and instructions. Additionally, as a final step, a peer review with a bilingual technique was implemented to ensure that it was both understandable and cross-culturally applicable to the target sample. Participants were given the option to choose what language they wished to answer in, as it was already pre-determined that a number of participants in the sample would be bilingual.

(1) Adult Questionnaire. This sample was collected through a snowball sampling method, in which the study was advertised through direct messages, social media, and word of mouth. Participants were asked to complete the online questionnaire and share the link with others that met the criteria. Recruitment took place over four months.

Participants were firstly presented with a consent page. Containing the objective of the study and their legal rights explained. After accepting the consent terms, they were allowed to proceed with the questionnaire. It took around 30-40 minutes to complete.

(2) Children's Questionnaire. A snowball sampling method was implemented, in which parents were reached out through social media, parent forums, schools, and teacher recommendations. Parents were presented with an informative form explaining the study's aims and the online procedure and asked for consent for their child to answer the questionnaire. Children were recruited into the study over four months. Both the parental consent and the child's assent were acquired.

Firstly, parents or guardians were presented with the information form, distributed directly to them or through the schools. Once they understood and accepted to participate, the link to access the questionnaire was given. The first page was a consent form directed to the parents, explaining the study's aims, their child's legal rights, and reassuring their child's well-being. Then, the child was expected to take over and start answering the questionnaire, which could be done with their parents' supervision if needed. It took around 30-40 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

2.4 Measures

All measures selected for the online survey were well-known and used cross-culturally. Both questionnaires measure the same variables and utilize the same scales. Although, in some cases, said questionnaires were modified to suit better the age range it was directed to, this will be explained in the corresponding individual cases.

Demographics

To understand the sample and account for confounds, demographic measures were taken. In order to have control variables, participants were asked their age, gender (women, men, non-binary, and other), country of birth, country of residence, length of residence, and their subjective income compared to other families.

Additionally, the cross-cultural meta-analysis by Spadaro et al. (in press) was utilized as a reference to examine cultural factors. From their society-level factors, we included the following: 1) institutional: to explore shared expectations, uncertainty, and moral standing in the sampled society. Asking the trustworthiness of formal institutions, including the armed forces, justice system, legal system, and police; for example, "How much confidence do you

have in the Armed Forces?" 2) religiosity: the degree to which participants believe and uphold religious practices, for example, "How important is religion in your life?" and 3) cultural beliefs: measuring trust and closeness to their culture and society, for example, "I assume that people have only the best intentions.".

Emotion-Regulation

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. In order to assess regulation strategies, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross and John (2003) was selected. This tool is frequently used to determine individual differences in the dispositional use of emotion regulation strategies, including cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The scale is composed of 10 items: four for expressive suppression ("I keep my emotions to myself") and six for cognitive reappraisal ("When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about."). The participants respond according to a 7-point Likert scale, where "strongly disagree" is the lowest point and "strongly agree" is the highest. Gross and John (2003) initially employed exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (EFA and CFA) to support the two-factor model (reappraisal and suppression). The scale has shown good applicability across cultures, having been reviewed and translated into 37 languages (Stanford University, 2022) and presenting a high degree of construct compatibility between cultural groups (Van Doren et al., 2021).

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) was initially used to assess emotion dysregulation in a variety of populations, which include adolescents, older adults, non-clinical, and diverse ethnic samples (Weinberg & Klonsky, 2009; Victor & Klonsky, 2016). While the DERS has demonstrated great psychometric properties, its length may present problems retaining

participants' attention and answer quality. For this reason, it was decided that the DERS-SF (Kaufman et al., 2015) would be a better fit to do a multidimensional assessment of emotion regulation and dysregulation. This scale is composed of a total of 18 items, while maintaining the original structure it is divided into six sub-scales each containing three items: Strategies ("when I'm upset, I believe that I will end up feeling very depressed"), Non-acceptance ("when I'm upset I become embarrassed for feeling that way"), Impulse ("when I'm upset I become out of control"), Goals ("when I'm upset I have difficulty getting work done"), Awareness ("I pay attention to how I feel [reverse coded]") and Clarity ("I have no idea how I'm feeling"). Using a 5-point likert scale, the answers were assessed with "almost never" as the lowest and "almost always" as the highest point. The scores were collected by the individual sub-scales and the scale as a whole, with higher values suggesting higher difficulties in emotion regulation. The DERS-SF has been proven to maintain its great psychometric properties, with good and convergent reliability, invariance of the factor structure across genders, and invariance among adolescents and adults (Charack et al., 2019; Gouveia et al., 2022; Hallion et al., 2018).

Social support

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Zimet et al. (1988) developed the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), intending to measure an individual's perception of their reception of external social support. The scale consists of 12 items, assessing three subscales: Family ("My family really tries to help me"), Friends ("I can count on my friends when things go wrong"), and Significant others ("There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows"). It is measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The MSPSS has shown good

applicability as it has been administered in diverse age, ethnic, clinical and non-clinical samples (Cheng & Chan, 2004; Wang et al., 2017).

Family support

Lums Emotional Availability of Parents. In order to examine the role of parents in terms of emotions, Lums Emotional Availability of Parents scale was used (LEAP; Lum & Phares, 2005). LEAP is a measure based on the concept of emotional availability and parental responsiveness. It explores both mother and father relationships, assessing three dimensions of emotional availability: Sensitivity (the parents' capacity to understand their child's emotional state accurately), Responsiveness (the parents' aptitude in appropriately addressing their child's emotional state), and Supportiveness (the parents' ability to provide their child emotional support). The scale consists of 15 items, interpreting the participants' perception of parental verbal exchange and non-verbal acknowledgment "My mother/father asked questions in a caring manner", "My mother/father show they care about me". It is answered based on a 6 point Likert scale, with "never" being the lowest point and "always" the highest point. The scoring is done with the mean response of the parent, with a high score being interpreted as a higher parental emotional availability.

2.5 Data Analysis Plan

Data was first observed by running a series of descriptive statistics for each study variable. In addition, descriptive statistics on cultural and religious variables were performed. Subsequently, the following specific analyses were performed to answer the four research questions.

1. In order to assess if emotion regulation, perceived family and social support change as a function of age a number of t-tests were performed comparing the two age groups on different variables

2. In order to assess if an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in children exists, a number of correlations between variables were performed.

3. In order to assess if there is an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in adults again, several correlations were performed.

4. In order to assess if emotion regulation was directly or indirectly linked with social or family support in children and adults, three regression analyses were performed: one for adults, one for children, and one for the two groups together, including age as a variable, hence directly comparing the two groups.

3. Results

3.1 Religion and attachment in El Salvador

Before answering our research questions, we performed several descriptive statistics to understand participants' characteristics in terms of religiousness and trust in their own country.

As previously described, 90% of adults were Christian. Of these, on a scale from 1 to 5, religiousness had a mean score of 3.36 ($SD = 1.33$). Moreover, concerning connection with El Salvador, the trust in the armed forces was 39.44 ($SD = 29.61$, Range = 0-100), the confidence in the legal system was 32.89 ($SD = 24.96$, Range = 0-90), the confidence in the government was 33.44 ($SD = 28.45$, Range = 0-100), the confidence in the police was 32.33 ($SD = 25.57$, Range = 0-90), and the confidence in corruption control was 26.78 ($SD = 24.96$, Range = 0-80).

Figure 2.

Bar chart of mean percentage of trust participants report on the six institutions of El Salvador.
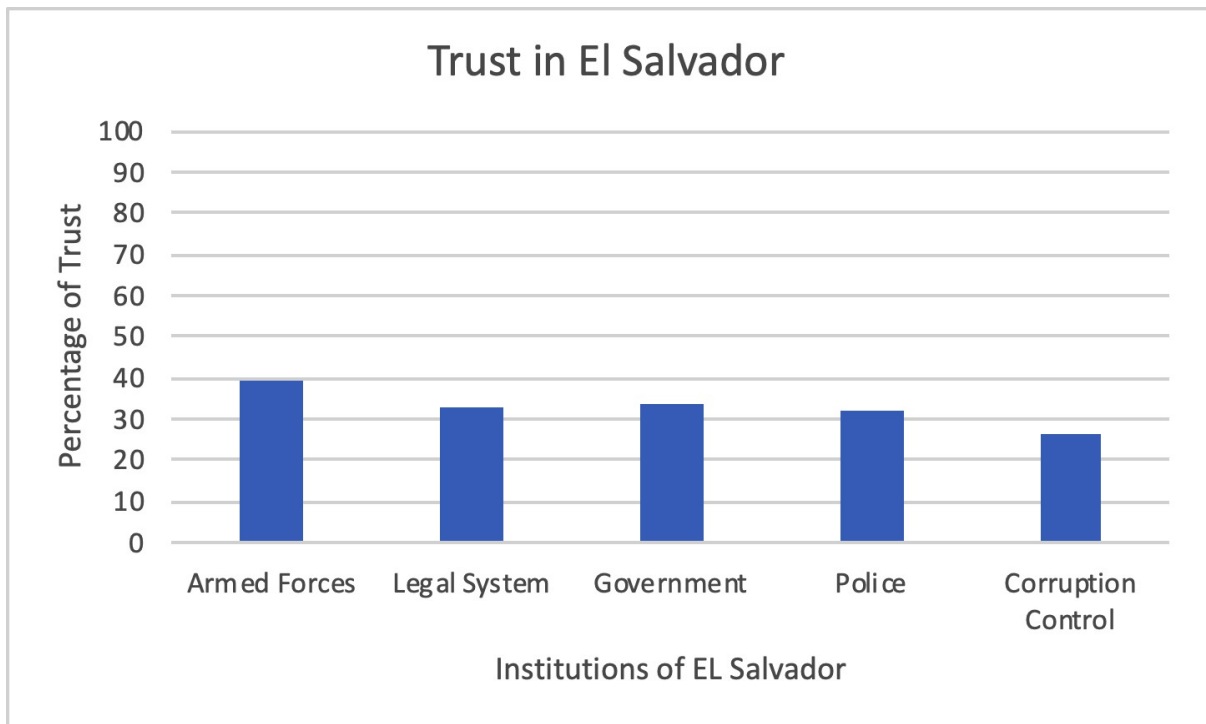
In *Figure 2.*, we can notice that all five measures score low, with none of them going above half the scale (>50). Therefore, on average, there is no trust in El Salvador's government, including its armed forces, legal system, police, and corruption control. However, it is worth mentioning that there is considerable variability between the population, given the wide range, which means that there still are people who do place their confidence in the country's government.

3.2 Age difference in Emotion regulation, perceived family and social support

In order to assess if emotion regulation, perceived family, and social support change as a function of age a number of t-tests were performed comparing adults and children.

In terms of emotion dysregulation, the overall scale of the DERS did not reveal any difference for the two groups, $t = -1.02$, $p = .31$. As reported in *Figure 3.*, the means were however overall higher for adults ($M = 41.30$) than for children ($M = 38.95$).

Figure 3.

*Bar chart of DERS mean score by subscales comparing children and adults.*
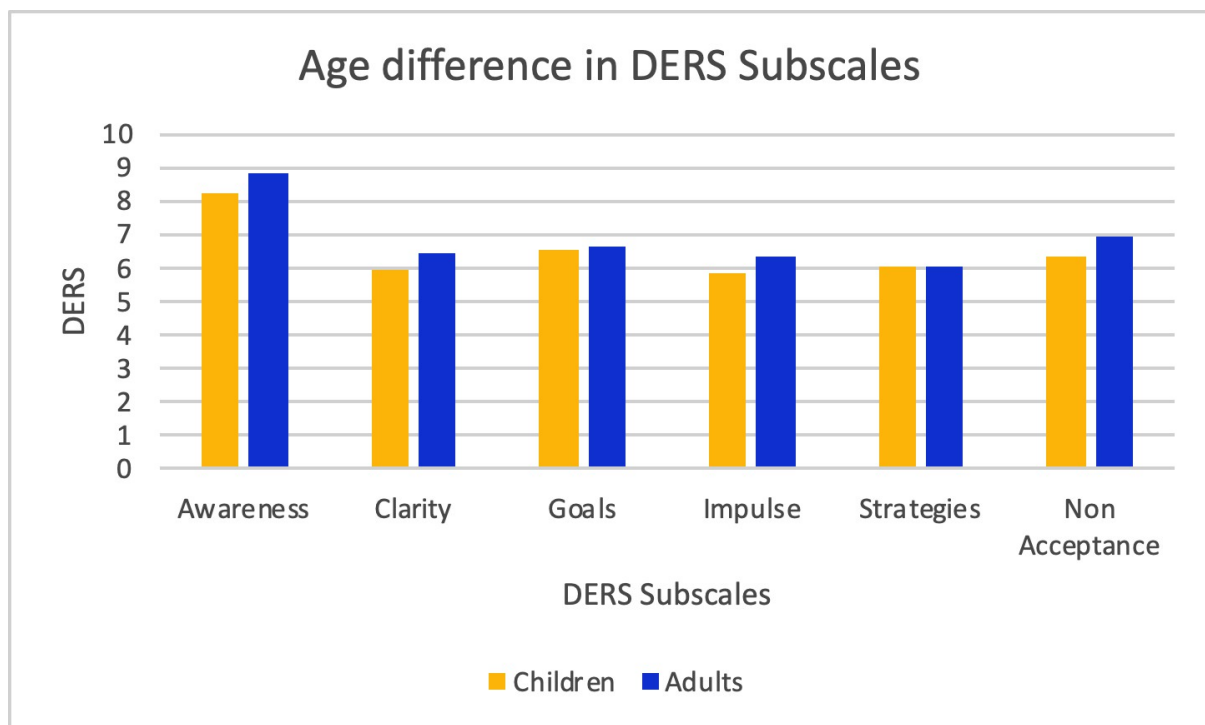
In order to better understand the emotion dysregulation, the different subscales of the DERS were compared. As per *Figure 3.* we can see that there are no statistically significant differences between the ages among the scales, nevertheless, there are some qualitative variations reporting higher dysregulation in adults than in children.

In relation to the emotion regulation questionnaire the two sub-scales showed no significant differences between the children and adult sample. With cognitive reappraisal having a $t = -1.44$ and $p = .15$ and expressive suppression $t = -1.28$ and $p = .2$.

Furthermore, taking a look at the t-test regarding social support we note that overall there is a significant difference between ages, $t = -16.11$ with a $p < .05$. Reporting a mean of 3.56 for children and 19 for adult samples. Taking a closer look at this scale it's important to note their differences, given that the range for children was 0-7 while adults was 0-28.

Figure 4.

Bar chart of Parental Warmth comparing children and adults.
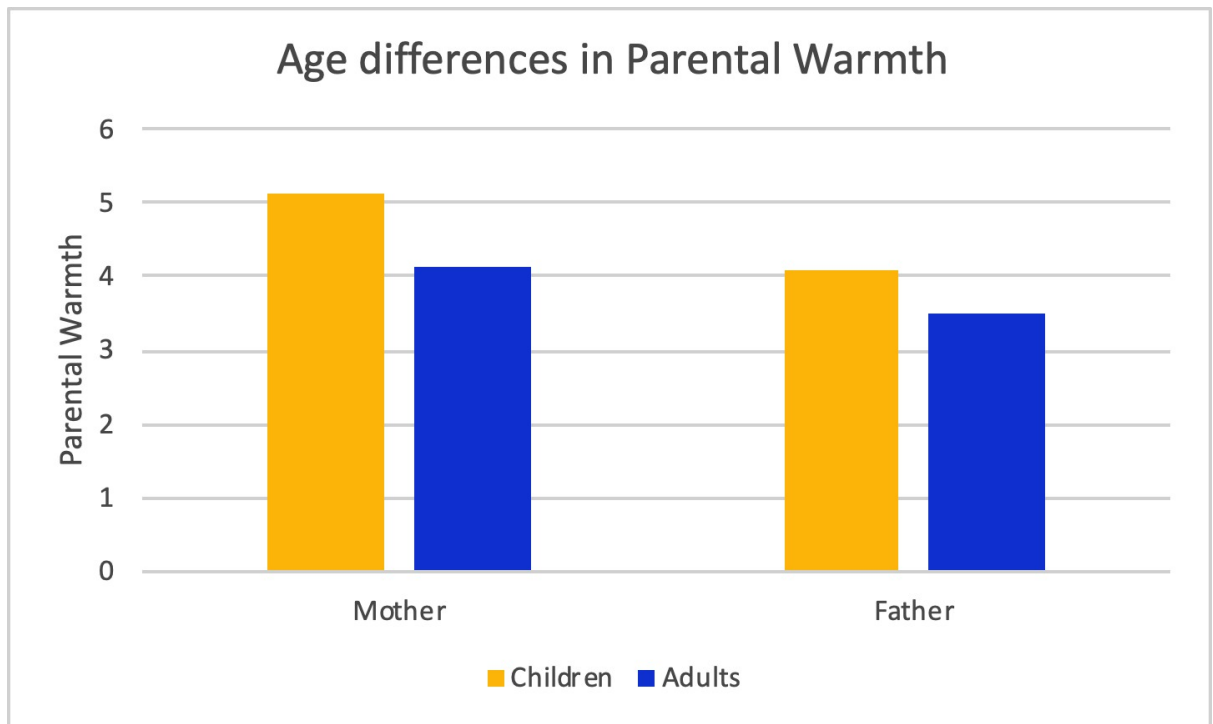
Looking into familial support, as per *Figure 4.* we can point out that overall, children reported more parental warmth than adults. It had a significant difference, especially when looking at mother support, reporting a $t = 4.6$, $p < .05$ with children $M = 5.12$ and adult $M = 4.15$. Likewise, father support reported a $t = 2.3$, $p < .05$ with children $M = 4.1$ and adult $M = 3.5$. Overall, the older adults report less support from parents.

3.3 Association between variables in adults

In order to assess if there was an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in adults a number of Pearson correlations were performed. In order to describe the correlations found we will keep referring to *Figure 5*.

Figure 5.

Correlation matrix for all scales in adults

Looking at the data distribution, overall, the DERS scale is normally distributed, as are all of its six subscales. On the other hand, social support is not normally distributed as it is skewed to the left, showing how the sample reported has higher levels of support. In a similar fashion, mother support has some skewness to the left, revealing how most of the adult sample felt highly supported by their mothers. On the contrary, fathers have an atypical distribution, as the sample is split in half with extreme values on both the low and high end. This means that some of the sample reported very low levels of support from their fathers while a number of the sample did feel very supported by their fathers.

Moving into the correlations, we can note that all the subscales of the DERS (awareness, clarity, goals, impulse, non-acceptance, and strategy) are highly correlated within the whole scale. In like manner, given that the subscales awareness, clarity, goals, impulse, non-acceptance, and strategy are all part of the same measure, they are correlated with each other. None of the subscales are correlated with gender, and only awareness is correlated with age, $r = .22*$.

Likewise, we could not find a correlation between age and support. However, when looking specifically at mother support, we report a negative correlation with age ($r = -.04$), indicating that the older you are, the less supported you feel by your mother. Furthermore, we find a positive correlation between support and mother, which further supports the hypothesis that there is a higher perception of support coming from mothers. It is interesting to note that there is a negative correlation between mother support and awareness, as the more you perceive support from your mother, the less you report awareness in terms of regulation. Regarding fathers, there are not many correlations that could be related to the distribution of

the data. We do note a negative correlation with awareness, which, as with mothers, when adults perceive more support from fathers, the less they report awareness.

Moreover, looking at the subscales of the ERQ, we find that cognitive reappraisal shows many correlations with the whole DERS scale and its individual subscales. All of the correlations are negative, letting us know that when there is a decrease in cognitive reappraisal, there will be more emotional dysregulation. Additionally, it shows how these two scales interact and how they worked on identifying the factors that affect effective emotional regulation in our sample.

3.4 Association between variables in children

In order to assess if there was an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in children a number of Pearson correlations was performed. As it can be seen in *Figure 6*.

Figure 6.

Correlation matrix for all scales in children.

To start, we should first note that at first glance, there are more correlations in the children sample compared to the adult sample, which could be indicative of age differences within the population regarding reporting perceptions of support and emotional distress; we will further explore the potential reasons for this in the discussion. Continuing with the data distribution, DERS shows a normal distribution. Mom support shows skewness to the left, showing that most of the sample is located on the higher endpoint. While for the fathers, we note a slightly similar trend as we did in adults, where we have some extreme values on both the low and high end. Nevertheless, it is not as extreme as it shows a more significant skewness to the left.

Examining the correlations, as with the adult sample, we can report a positive correlation between DERS and all of its subscales, and similarly, all of the six subscales correlate with each other. Further demonstrating how well the scale works within itself and the internal reliability of the scale. Overall, the DERS does not correlate with either age or gender, but looking closer at the subscales, we note two correlations. First, awareness positively correlates with age, meaning the older the child gets, the more aware they become of their dysregulation. Second, we find that impulse has a negative correlation with gender. This result is particularly interesting as these are the only variables correlating with age or gender.

In regards to the ERQ subscales, there is a different trend in children compared to adults, given that there is a significant positive correlation between expression suppression and DERS. Likewise, we can find similar results for four out of the six subscales, clarity (r = .20), impulse(r = .26), non-acceptance (r = .22), and strategy (r = .26). The positive correlation tells us that the higher the expression suppression, the more they report being

dysregulated. This is interesting, seeing as for the adult sample, we saw that cognitive reappraisal was a highly reported regulatory strategy. In contrast, in the children sample, we see that expressive suppression is the only regulatory strategy significantly affecting their reported emotional regulation.

Examining the scale of support, there are negative correlations with DERS and all of its six subscales. Except for awareness, it significantly correlates negatively with clarity, goals, impulse, non-acceptance, and strategy. This means that when children report higher levels of social support, they report less dysregulation, which would indicate that having support is essential for effective emotional regulation. Additionally, we observe no significant correlation with the father, but maternal support is significantly negatively associated with DERS within four subscales (awareness, impulse, non-acceptance, and strategy).

3.5 Emotion regulation, social and family support in children and adults

To assess if emotion regulation was directly or indirectly linked with social or family support in children and adults, three regression models were performed. Based on the correlation table we selected the overall scale of the DERS as a dependent variable, given that it is a good index of children and adults' emotion regulation, thus indicating participant self-reported dysregulation.

As a first step, two separate models were performed, one for children and one for adults including gender, social and parental support as predictors. We also tested for possible interactions but since they were non significant they were not included in the final model.

Table 1.

Linear regression for DERS in children.

	B	SE	t	p
Gender	-1.19	2.37	-.50	.61
Social Support	-3.70	.87	-4.24	5.34 e-05
Mother Support	-3.56	1.16	-3.08	.01
Father Support	.36	.79	.45	.65
R^2	.21			

As it can be seen in *Table 1.*, children's emotion regulation is influenced by social support and mother warmth. Meaning that the more support a child perceives from both their parents and social environment the less dysregulated they will be.

The same regression model was also estimated for adults. All possible interactions were tested as well, but those that were non significant were not included in the final model.

Table 2.

Linear regression for DERS in adults.

	B	SE	t	p
Gender	-1.14	2.99	-.38	.70
Social Support	-.25	.19	-1.25	.21
Mother Support	-.34	1.02	-.34	.74
Father Support	-.32	1.03	-.32	.21
R^2	.03			

As reported in *Table 2.,* for adults there was no significant effect of either parental or social support on emotion regulation.

As a subsequent step a final model was computed, this time including the age group. Given that the scales for social support were not comparable across samples only parental warmth and the interaction with the age group were included in the model.

Table 3.

Linear regression for DERS comparing children and adults.

	B	SE	t	p
Gender	-.87	1.94	-.45	.66
Father Support	.25	.86	.29	.78
Mother Support	-3.81	1.26	-3.03	.01**
Age group	-15.41	7.52	-2.05	.04*
Father*Age	-.64	1.32	-.49	.63
Mother*Age	3.22	1.56	2.03	.04*
R^2	.06			

As shown in *Table 3.* there was a significant interaction between age group and maternal warmth. To better explore the interactions we plotted them in *Figure 7.* and *8*.

Figure 7.

Interaction between age group and maternal warmth.
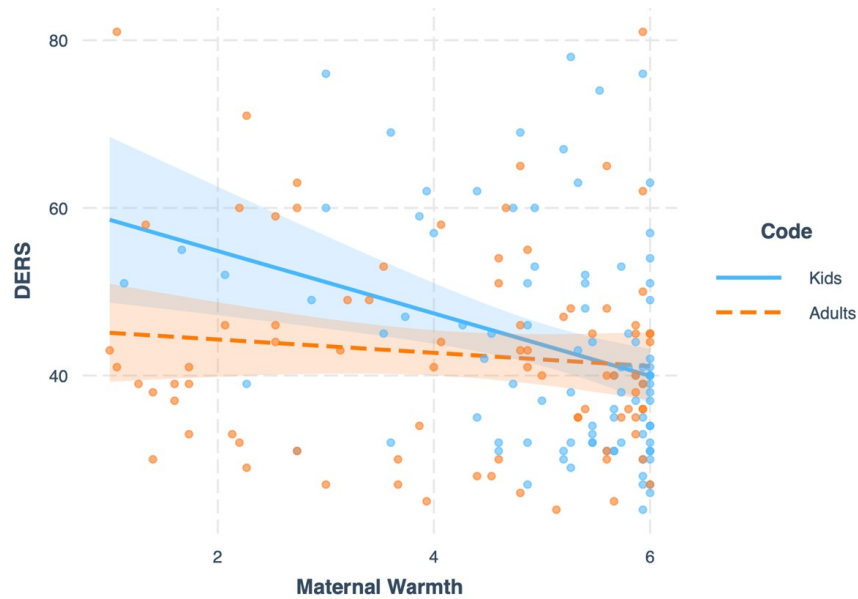
As shown in *Figure 7.*, among adults there is no effect of maternal warmth on emotion regulation, however, for children higher maternal warmth is associated with less emotion dysregulation than lower one.

No effect is seen for father warmth (see *Figure 8* below). For both children and adults paternal warmth is either not available or when it is, it doesn't reduce or increase emotional dysregulation.

Figure 8.

Interaction between age group and paternal warmth.
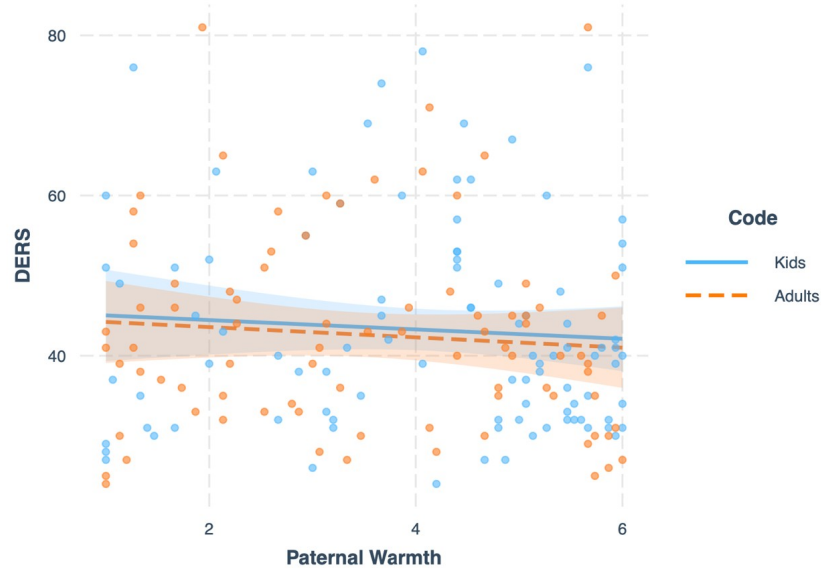
4. Discussion

4.1 General discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to research emotion regulation in a group of Latin American people. Specifically, we focused on Salvadoran children and adults, investigating cross-sectionally the contextual factors, including societal and familial support, which may influence emotion regulation in the two generations.

We began our analysis by looking closer at our sample and its context. Many authors argue that contextual factors have proven to have a bidirectional relationship with emotion. Within this macrosystem, we have culture, which significantly influences how people learn and apply strategies to regulate (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Mesquita, 2001, 2004; Matsumoto, 1990). As anticipated, our adult sample was 90% Christians, noting how religion played a big part in their lives, similar to other Latin American countries. In the future, investigators must consider religion's intrinsic and extrinsic influence when planning prevention programs that promote healthy regulation strategies for this sample. According to the literature and our findings, religions will yield better outcomes by fostering positive values, comfort, regulation strategies, and providing a supportive community.

By looking at *Figure 2*, we better understood the country's internal dynamics, revealing that overall, people harbor low levels of trust in their government. This sentiment aligns with the country's history, characterized by years of political and economic instability, primarily stemming from the civil war. Consequently, it is understandable that the population

carries deep-seated apprehensions towards those in positions of   authority, who, in their experience, have often exploited and caused more harm than good in various circumstances.

Once we better understood our sample as a whole, we started considering all of our variables. Hence, moving into addressing our four main hypotheses.

4.1.1 Emotion regulation,   perceived family, and social support as a function of age and gender.

Regarding our first hypothesis, which investigated if emotion regulation,   perceived family, and social   support changed as   a   function of   age and gender,   we built   upon Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) concept of *person*. Investigating the potential influence of both age and gender as variables impacting our sample's ability to regulate. However, our findings did not reveal any significant effects in the ERQ or DERS scales. There was only a subtle qualitative variation, with adults tending to report higher levels of dysregulation. This outcome was unexpected, given the distinctive social contest in which our two samples grew up. Adults experienced their formative years during the civil war, while our children sample was born in a more stable socio-political   environment, which could have significantly affected parental behaviors.

Nonetheless, when examining support, we did uncover significant age-related differences. Notably, social support was higher   in adults,   while children reported more parental support. This is consistent with previous literature that underscores the pivotal role of caregivers' involvement during childhood, with shifting dynamics as individuals mature, leading to greater reliance on peer support among adults.

Regarding gender, we were surprised to observe the absence of a significant effect across any of the variables. We initially expected defined gender differences in line with common patterns in many Latino societies. Where women are more inclined to express their emotions openly, while men exhibit greater emotional restraint (Welsh, 2001). Leading us to assume that the lack of difference might be due to our small sample size or, in a better scenario, a sign of progressive changes within the country. It would serve to study whether these results could be attributed to women taking a more active role in the community and men adopting greater flexibility in regulating emotions. To this extent, our expectations were partially supported, given that those results that were not completely significant still showed a pattern similar to those in the literature.

4.1.2 Emotion regulation, perceived family, and social support in children.

Our second hypothesis, which tested the presence of an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in children, was confirmed. Children who perceived to have greater support were more inclined to report lower emotional dysregulation. We paid particular attention to familial support, recognizing the correlation between positive parental availability and fewer externalizing problems (Eisenberg et al., 2005). While our findings underscored the importance of caregivers in general, they highlighted the pivotal role of maternal warmth. Salvadoran mothers are notably hands-on, prioritizing their children's comfort, offering unwavering support, and demonstrating constant affection. Simultaneously, they are willing to employ discipline when necessary for their children's education. This creates boundaries and structures the child's life while giving them the safety that they will always have someone rooting for them.

Expectedly, the warmth provided by fathers had a comparatively smaller effect. Nevertheless, we initially anticipated a more substantial paternal influence than the adult sample. Based on the reported SES, there was the assumption that our children sample mainly consisted of dual-earning families and, hence, a modern family structure with shared parental responsibilities. However, even though El Salvador has undergone a structural shift, where women take greater economic responsibilities, cultural values remain firmly ingrained in the society. Gender-based responsibilities within the family are upheld. Mothers remain the primary caregivers of their children, and fathers are starting to become more involved, but more is needed for there to be significant reports. For this reason, it is essential to advocate for fathers to become more involved in their children's lives, as it leads to better outcomes for the child and the family structure.

4.1.3 Emotion regulation, perceived family, and social support in adults.

Our third hypothesis investigated if there was an association between emotion regulation and perceived family and social support in adults. Data revealed that adults who sensed having social and family support reported better emotion regulation. As predicted, parental warmth was unrelated to any of the investigated variables. However, it was of note the atypical distribution, suggesting that, despite generally lower levels of paternal warmth, there were instances where individuals felt their fathers were present. This could be attributed to the enduring influence of *familismo* in Salvadoran men, where even though they don't take the bulk of the caregiving responsibility, being there for their children remains a significant value.

On the contrary, it remained unmistakable that mothers consistently play a primary role in people's lives, irrespective of the circumstances, be it during times of war or post-war.

They consistently prioritize ensuring the well-being of their children. Maternal warmth proved to be essential in the later development of emotion regulation, as it proved to help develop regulatory strategies. In line with existing literature (Crone & Dahl, 2012; Defoe et al., 2015; Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014), we observed a shift from our children sample, who reported a preference for expression suppression, to adults who exhibited a more diverse repertoire, with a notable inclination towards cognitive appraisals as a coping strategy.

It is worth highlighting that adults displayed fewer correlations in contrast to the children sample. We attribute this pattern to the lower response rate among adults, potentially stemming from their reluctance to answer personal questions of this nature. Particularly in El Salvador, while people are known for their emotional expressiveness, they still exhibit collectivist tendencies where individuals often suppress personal or negative emotions. Given that our questionnaire posed emotionally probing questions, respondents might have been more hesitant to be candid. In future research, it would be interesting to revisit the methodology by including more qualitative measures, where we might build a relationship with the participants and get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

4.1.4 Emotion regulation directly linked to perceived family, and social support in children and adults

The fourth and final hypothesis assessed if emotion regulation was directly or indirectly linked with social or family support in children and adults. Several key findings emerged. Results suggest that the relationship between emotion regulation and social and family support differs between children and adults. For children, parental and social support, particularly maternal warmth, are directly linked to lower emotional dysregulation. In contrast, adults do not significantly associate support with emotion regulation. As previously

discussed, one reason is the fact that adults tend to under-report their emotional effects and feel that reporting dysfunction either makes them look bad or will make them feel like a burden.

Additionally, these findings lead us to understand how age plays a crucial moderating role, with maternal warmth significantly impacting children's emotion regulation but not affecting adults. Father warmth, conversely, does not appear to influence emotion regulation in either group significantly. These results highlight the complexity of the relationship between emotion regulation and support, emphasizing the importance of considering age-specific dynamics in understanding these connections. Understanding these dynamics allows us to start thinking about potential interventions that can be done in El Salvador. Professionals can collaborate with the community to promote parental education in subjects such as sensitive parenting skills, to ensure the early development of emotion regulation strategies that will lead to higher social competence later in life.

4.2 Limitations

In this final section, we will outline some of our limitations and prospective directions for future research. It is noteworthy that, owing to the need for more research concerning Salvadoran samples regarding emotion regulation in our current knowledge, we found ourselves compelled to make certain constraining assumptions about our theoretical and methodological approach. This entailed contextualizing our sample within the broader scope of Latino communities.

One of the main limitations we encountered was our small sample size. This stemmed from time and resource constraints, preventing us from reaching as many participants as

planned. Specifically, in our children sample, difficulties in obtaining parental consent led us to collaborate with only two main schools, which limited the quantity of data collected and reduced the diversity within our   sample population. Our participants mostly belonged to middle to upper socio-economic strata in urban towns, so the results may be specific to our sample. To ensure the generalizability of our results,   future research should aim to recruit people from all 14 departments, including both prominent cities and rural areas. This could be particularly beneficial in understanding how the differential impact of the civil war on rural communities may have influenced parental warmth and availability.

Another factor contributing to our   smaller sample size was   the length of   our questionnaire. Lengthy surveys can pose challenges in terms of   participant retention and attention span. To address this issue, we could explore using abbreviated versions of all the scales or consider administering them in two separate   sessions, as the order of the questionnaire administration does not affect the results. Additionally, incorporating attention checks would ensure response accuracy and help identify potential outliers in our data.

4.3 Conclusion

In summary, it is evident that having a support   network plays a protective role in fostering the   development of effective regulatory strategies   for individuals, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being. However, we should not be satisfied with this broad conclusion; instead, we strive to delve deeper into the intricacies.   This involves exploring individual characteristics, cultural expectations, historical context, and socio-economic influences. Acknowledging that encompassing all these factors in a single model   may be daunting, we can progressively expand our understanding by studying various samples. With

that said, we hope that the present thesis can represent El Salvador, enriching the existing literature and moving closer to representing our diverse and dynamic world.

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