PARENTAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH VERBAL RESPONSIVENESS AND EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

[1]NUR SHARINA CIK IBRAHIM, [2]SITI HAJAR MOKHTER, [3]MOKHTARUDDIN AHMAD

[1,2,3]Multimedia University (MMU), Cyberjaya, Malaysia
E-mail: [1]nursharina@mmu.edu.my, [2]sitihajar.mokhter@mmu.edu.my, [3]mokhtarrudin@mmu.edu.my

Abstract - This qualitative case study investigates the effects of parental communication and emotional dysregulation on youth verbal responsiveness and expressive language development, grounded in Attachment Theory, Emotional Suppression Theory and family communication patterns theory. Parental emotional dysregulation characterized by inconsistent, excessive, or inappropriate emotional expression may cultivate a destabilizing home environment, impeding the kind of socio-emotional and linguistic development that execute as the foundation for the future academic achievement. Using purposive sampling, five youths, aged 15 to 24, all of whom had prolonged exposure to parenting marked by emotional dysregulation, were selected from secondary schools and universities around Malaysia. The findings indicate that parenting conditions characterized by emotional unpredictability contribute to intergenerational emotional suppression and hinder the development of emotional literacyand facilitate the development of internalized suppression strategies. Emotional unpredictability in parenting situations appears to foster an atmosphere in which it is not safe to express emotions (whether positive or negative), and this extends to the children of such parents. Aligned with SDGs 3, 4, and 16, the study advocates for early, culturally responsive interventions that might counteract the trends identified in the research. Its recommendations include programs that boost the emotional literacyof both parents and children, systematic, trauma-informed approaches that help both vulnerable youth and their parents understand and counteract the expression and suppression of emotions.

Keywords - Parental Communication, Parental emotional dysregulation, youth communication, expressive language, verbal responsiveness, emotional development, thematic analysis, Attachment Theory, Emotional Suppression Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of language is paramount for emotional and social functioning. For example, an adolescence enduring a weak emotionally supportive home environment tends to have difficulties with verbal expression and social interaction.

As well as emotional regulation, the way in which parent and child communicate emotionally is important in the way they learn to understand and respond to the emotional cues of their peers. Parental communication patterns include habitual ways of talking to children either from open and supportive to controlling, dismissive or inconsistent (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). There are patterns that function as conduits for transmitting emotional norms, social expectations, and linguistic behaviors. Suppression may be reinforced by dysfunctional communication such as criticism, silence or emotional invalidation, which can also harm verbal confidence. Emotional dysregulation focuses on the affective inconsistency, whereas communication patterns refer to the way emotions are expressed, received and reacted upon in daily family interaction. This allows more holistic viewing of the relationship between expressive development and the psychosocial contributors in youth.

Parental emotional dysregulation is the failure of the parents to modulate and express emotions in a developmentally appropriate and consistent manner, disrupts the child's cognitive, affective, and communicative development.Despite comprehensively reviewing the literature revolving around parenting styles and their impact on behavioral and emotional development, few studies discuss the effects of parenting with emotional dysregulation on verbal and expressive language responsiveness. Addressing this gap will be this research focus by understanding the impact of parenting volatility during critical periods of youth development using qualitative case study methodology in the volatile parenting on youth phenomena.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental Communication Patterns and Emotional Dysregulation,and Impact on Child Communication

Parental emotional dysregulation is the condition in which parents are unable to appropriately manage, regulate, or express their own feelings. This leads to inconsistency in the way parents respond to their child's emotions. It is frequently linked to parental psychopathology, particularly depression, anxiety, and borderline personality disorder (Morris et al., 2021; Lacks et al., 2022). Such parents may be emotionally volatile, producing mood swings, emotional disengagement, or explosions, all of which can lead to a household environment that's erratically emotional and, therefore, emotionally unsafe. This kind of unpredictability compromises a child's ability to build a secure attachment. It also jeopardizes the emotional safety that is crucial for all expressive

communication. Children of emotionally dysregulated parents are more likely to develop internalized emotional responses and display hypervigilant and maladaptive coping strategies (Bariola et al., 2020; Khoury et al., 2021). This dysregulation also tends to facilitate long-term socioemotional patterns that expressive communication.

Parental communication patterns, it has been found, are important to a child's social-emotional and linguistic development in addition to emotional regulation. Koerner & Fitzpatrick (2002) state that there are two family communication patterns, conversation orientation (embracing open dialogue) and conformity orientation (pointing to submission, obedience, and silence). Raising children in households that conform largely to the group, and talk little to one another makes it less likely that the children will express personal opinions or emotional needs, thus leading to impaired development of a confident verbal identity. Similarly, dismissive or inconsistent communication (i.e., invalidating or ridiculing a child's input) is related to adolescents' emotional suppression and avoidant communication styles (Morelen et al., 2016; Williford et al., 2022). Children know that parental responses to their voices are not only about tone and content but repeated communication patterns that either voice its appreciation or gives guidance as to whether the child's voice is welcome, tolerated or discouraged. The repeated interaction in communicational environments where dialogue is avoided or punished can lead to what Vangelisti (1994) called verbal inhibition conditioning, where not only is silence protective, but it is pre conditionally so. These patterns, however, when combined with emotional dysregulation make for an emotional and expressive withdrawal in youth.

Early and sustained parental engagement plays an important role in the emotional modeling of children. This is crucial for the development of their expressive language and for verbal responsiveness (Denham et al., 2018). When some children seem to lag behind their peers in this aspect of development, or when they otherwise exhibit verbal restraint or a paucity of emotionally relevant vocabulary, they are often viewed through the lens of a parental emotional style that is either too permissive or too repressive (Eisenberg et al., 2020; Kim &Kochanska, 2022). More recent studies link the kind of emotional mask that is worn by many children from such homes to a kind of emotionally protective self-monitoring scaffolding that, ironically, can undermine the child's expressive capabilities at a crucially formative time (Zhang et al., 2021; Bird & Panksepp, 2020). While the studies were not designed with the expressive storytelling capabilities of home monologs in mind, they do raise the question of whether our findings might also help to illuminate the kinds of storytelling deficits that many of these children will subsequently exhibit.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research utilizes Attachment Theory and Emotional Suppression Theory to analyze the influence of parental emotional dysregulation on an adolescent's ability to verbally communicate and express themselves. Attachment Theory posits that interactions with caregivers in infancy mold individuals' internal working models that direct the relational behaviors across a lifetime (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). The theory of emotional suppression, particularly Gross's process model of emotion regulation, explicates how children in homes that are emotionally volatile often adopt suppression as a coping strategy (Gross & John, 2003).

The core piece of this research analysis is Attachment Theory and Emotional Suppression Theory, but this researchdraws further from Family Communication Pattern Theory (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, which examines how familiar family conversations, or the lack thereof, inform one's mode of verbal inclinations. This theoretical lens provides researcher a way to experiment with the interaction between how conversational versus conformity-based communication from youth parents influences youth expression through emotional regulation.

3.1 Integrated Conceptual Framework

The comprehensive conceptual framework provides a way to understand, step by step, how the parental communication pattern and emotional dysregulation impact the growth of children. It begins with parental communication patterns and emotional dysregulation, which affects the insecure attachment styles and emotional repression of the children. These early emotional experiences often cause expressive restraint in young people, which in turn results and affected in a reduction in linguistic reactivity in social and scholastic contexts. The Conceptual Model below provides an illustration of this relationship:

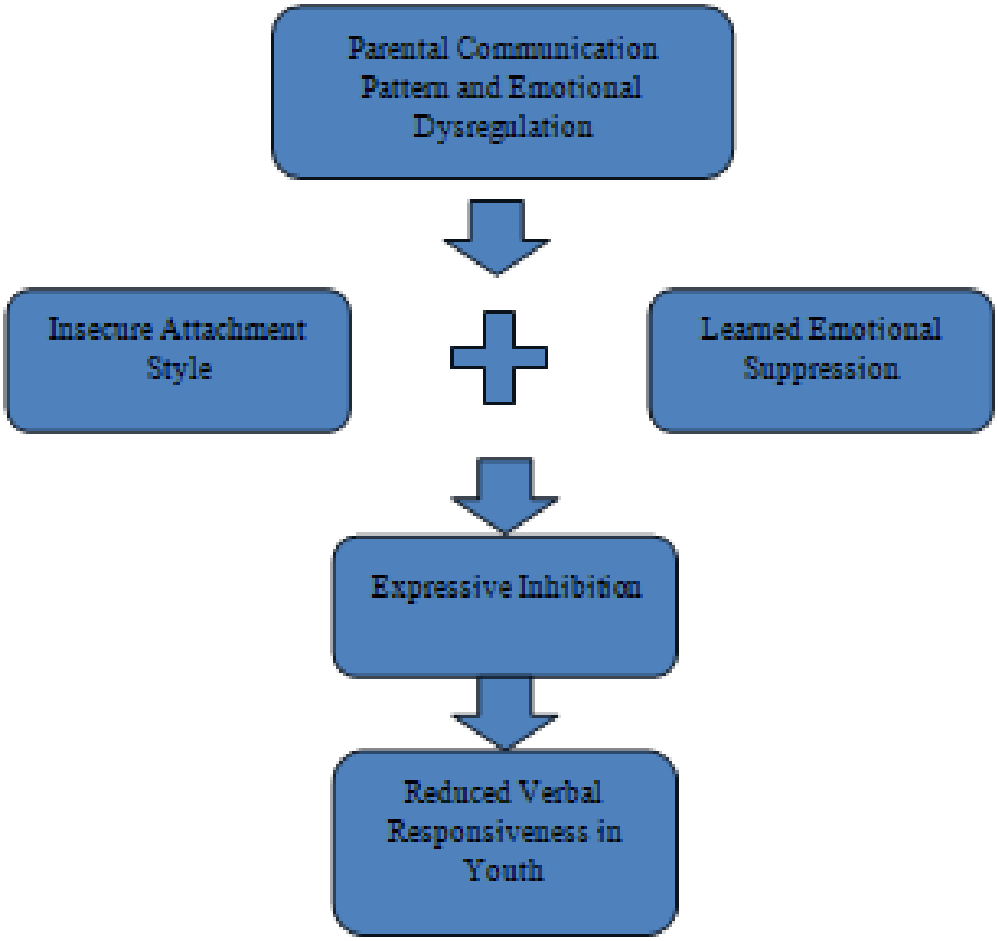

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

IV. METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the lived experiences of young people who exposed to parental communication pattern and emotional dysregulation and its effects on their verbal responsiveness and expressive language development, this study used a qualitative case study design, so the contextual, emotional, and linguistic subtleties can be thoroughly examined using the case study method (Yin, 2018).

4.1. Participant Selection

Five participants, ages 15 to 24, were chosen through purposive sampling from two public universities and two secondary schools in Malaysia. The following inclusion criteria were used to determine who could participate, that is (1) No developmental or speech impairments have been identified, (2) Prolonged exposure to emotionally unstable or inconsistent parents (as self-reported and confirmed by school counsellors, (3) Exhibited emotional reticence or expressive language issues in social situations. Prior to participation, institutional and parental approval was acquired. The university's research ethics committee gave its approval.

4.2. Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, the interviews were conducted in a private space away from the public. The interviews allowed for an in-depth and exhaustive exploration of the participant's home environment, their emotional interactions with parents, and the participant's critique of their own communication style. Participant identity was protected by conducting an interview which was then transcribed verbatim, recorded, and subsequently anonymized.

4.3. Data Analysis

Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were examined using the six-phase theme analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) that is getting acquainted with the facts, producing preliminary codes, finding themes, examining themes, identifying and characterizing themes, and writing the report. NVivo software was utilized to help with theme management and coding. To make sure the results were reliable and credible, peer debriefing and member checks were carried out.

V. FINDINGS

Three main themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the five participants' semi-structured interviews (cases A through E): (1) Verbal Inhibition and Avoidance, (2) Emotional Masking and Language Suppression, and (3) Delayed Expressive Development. The participants' internalized coping mechanisms in reaction to emotionally immature parenting is reflected in these themes, which have significant effects on their emotional health and communication styles.

5.1. Verbal Inhibition and Avoidance

A clear and consistent theme that emerged from all five participants was their deliberate and protective use of silence, or even withdrawal from verbal interaction, as a mechanism of household survival. They described what, in hindsight, sounds like a chaotic and certainly unsafe environment, where parental emotional volatility, wrath, or unpredictability created a communicative space that often felt like a minefield. Case A stated that silence was acquired as a skill for survival: "I just knew that if I said the wrong thing, it would explode. So, I stopped speaking unless I was asked." This narrative illustrates not just avoidance but also a hypervigilant adaptation that tightly regulates when and how one might safely make verbal noise in the presence of dangerous people. Similarly, Case B adopted a strategy of invisibility, particularly in family interactions: “I tried to be invisible. Speaking up felt dangerous.” Her silence during family dinners reflected internalized fear rather than an instance of social passivity. It was not that she was too intimidated to speak; she had simply learned long ago that family would prefer her not to. Case D expanded on the fear of voice projection that had been internalized: "Even if I had a strong opinion, I couldn’t voice it. I got used to hiding behind nods and short answers.” This suggests not just a conflict-laden home but a diminished sense of self in a context where to develop an identity could invite disharmony. The sole male participant in this study, Case E, elucidated the ways in which parental reactivity constrained his intellectual development: "My dad was so reactive. If I said something he didn’t agree with, he’d shout. Eventually, I just stopped trying."Such a household may not only produce emotionally and verbally inhibited children who lack confidence in expressing themselves but also those who lack confidence in thinking critically.

In every situation, silence was not just the lack of speech but a protective response to parenting that felt emotionally unsafe. A dominant theme across all five participants was the strategic use of silence or withdrawal of speech as protective communication in response to homes that felt unstable. They had learned to regulate their speech patterns to navigate a criticism- and emotional outburst-laden environment. In all five narratives, silence appeared as a purposeful and strategic response, not the result of a personality or introversion, but an outcome of emotional dysregulation in the parent-child unit. These findings highlight the extensive reach of the consequences of emotionally unsafe environments: a limited vocabulary and an avoidance of verbal engagement that leads to a diminished outcome in self-expression, either in scholarly settings or in public. Participants also remembered their experiences with disruptive communication patterns and sarcastic comments and emotional volatility that conditioned their avoidance of initiating conversations.

5.2. Emotional Masking and Language Suppression

A key, recurrent theme was the long-standing suppression of emotional expression. This was described by participants as both an external imposition from their parents and an internal mandate sustained over years of emotional invalidation. Such silencing of emotions often serves as a prelude to the far more dangerous lack of words for even the most basic feelings such as words like "sad" or "angry." (Taylor.,1997). Participants reported both the lack of any words and the lack of confidence in any words one might chance to utter. They described living in households where showing emotion was not just frowned upon but was actively ridiculed or dismissed. Case C reflected: "If I looked upset, my mum would say 'stop being dramatic.' After that, I stopped showing anything." This statement mirrors the process of emotional invalidation (Linehan, 1993), where a child's emotional experience is denied or belittled, leading to self-doubt and detachment. As a result, Case C seems to have unconsciously adopted emotional numbing, which involves maintaining a distance from affective cues and learning to dissociate internal feelings from verbal expression.Case B depicted a dissonant aspect of self-presentation: "I was smiling on the outside but crying inside. I didn’t know how to say I was not okay." Her account illuminates the phenomenon of expressive incongruencea misalignment between internal emotional states and external behaviors. This masking reflects Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of dramaturgy, in which the impression that individuals manage makes for good social or familial harmony, even at the cost of personal emotional integrity. Case E, the only male participant, experienced emotional suppression through the lens of gender expectation: “Crying or talking about feelings wasn’t allowed. I learned to pretend.”His words highlight a trap of intersectional identities of how toxic masculinity and emotionally immature parenting can intersect to limit expressive freedom. Boys, and particularly boys of color, may not only be socialized to perceive vulnerability as a weakness but also taught that real men never cry. Emotional suppression, in this case, was shaped by family beliefs about manhood and the cultural beliefs of a society that prizes stoicism in its

males. Parental responses such as 'Don't start with your drama' or 'You're too sensitive' were not just emotionally invalidating, but also reflective of a communication pattern that normalized the emotional dismissal.

Case A and Case D likewise illuminated the ways in which conversations centered on emotion were either dismissed or redirected with comments meant to minimize the situation: "You're going to be fine," or "Don't make such a fuss." Over time, this led to a "self-censorship." phenomenon. Participants anticipated being dismissed and thus refrained from even trying to initiate conversations centered on emotion. As Case D noted in another part of her narrative: "I don't even try anymore. What's the point?"Weaving together these accounts reveals emotional silencing as a learned and normalized practice within the home that has indelible, though largely unrecognized, consequences. It is a practice that robs children of the fundamental right to have their feelings acknowledged and validated. When Emotional Neglect is normalized, they learn not to feel, and they lack the vocabulary for complex emotions. They were not taught to recognize feelings in others, and they feel discomfort during conversations that require emotional vulnerability. And the way you process this verbal shutdown is corrosive to both interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. At its core, emotional masking by the participants wasn't just about not shedding tears or expressing anger; it was a kind of psycholinguistic shutdown, where affect their true feelings where they could not find safe passage through words. This kind of silencing threatens the development of not just emotional intelligence but also the ability to form authentic connections with other people.

5.3. Delayed Expressive Development

A theme that emerged from the data, although more subtly, was the forestalled evolution of expressive competence, particularly as it pertains to verbal and emotional articulation in our participants during childhood and adolescence. This delay was not attributed to any cognitive or linguistic deficits; rather, it seemed bound up with a pervasive psychosocial inhibition that in large part stems from the familial atmospheres that fail to validate children's emotions. Although all the participants shared the experience of emotional suppression, two of them, Cases A and Dsharpened an understanding of the pronounced impact this had, both on their academic lives and in society at large. When Case D is quiet at home, it follows her to school. She explains: "Teachers said I was too quiet. But I was just afraid of saying something wrong, even in school." Her narrative tracks with what developmental psychologists identify as a form of selective mutism or situational anxiety. This kind of internal pressure can make a child who is otherwise capable of speech go silent in certain contexts. For Case D, the emotional threat landscape wasn't just limited to home. It extended into the classroom, which for many children is the next best thing to a haven. For Case D, the internalized threat of negative evaluation pushed her further down the road of silence, a place where many children find themselves when the world feels unsafe and unwelcoming.A also highlighted trouble with verbal expression, particularly in public situations, which made it hard to communicate: "My peers would articulate themselves so well. I'd blank. It was as if my words didn't convey the feelings I had deep inside." This would suggest a break between internal thought and external verbalization where a phenomenon often observed in people who are highly emotionally aroused and who have poor expressive coping skills (as in Gross, 1998, a classic study). A also seems to have experienced what this research might term emotional-cognitive dissonance, in which unprocessed emotional residue gets in the way of fluency and narrative construction, especially when one is under the kind of gaze that feels supervisory. Case C described a persistent problem of: "Now, even I find it hard to put into words the complex emotions I experience. I need time to process them and translate them into words." This leads not just to a signal delay but also to a massive backload of unsent signals piling up, waiting to be dispatched and understood. Signals with emotional content, that isbecause the nature of the developmental delay involves emotional signalling. It stems from years of having to send and process emotional signals in a way that was not always sent with linguistic or signal clarity. This delay in processing is a huge signal-emotional backlog. Researchers Barrett and her collaborators (2001) have spent considerable time looking into the connection between language and the development of emotional expression.

Although Cases B and E did not indicate overt expressive delays, both acknowledged the persistence of self-censorship and emotional filtering in group settings: "I always have to think twice before I speak. It's like my brain runs a filter before the words come out." (Case B) "Even when I have something to say, I rehearse it in my head, sometimes until it's too late to say it." (Case E). These accounts reflect the internalization of audience monitoring (Schlenker & Leary, 1982), a cognitive habit in which the speaker has duct tape over the mouth and the brain is constantly running a risk assessment of the potential negative outcomes of disclosure. Furthermore, most of the participants also described communication in their household as one-directional, often involving commands rather than dialogue. This form of directive communication appeared to hinder the development of expressive competence.

DISCUSSIONS

A widespread motif among all participants was the calculated wielding of silence and the withdrawal of speech as a learned survival tool in households where emotional volatility was the norm. Their testimonies signalled that to speak openly was often to invite punishment or some form of emotional rejection, thus leading them to wield silence as a protective shield. Speech had become perilous. For some of the participants, like Case A, remaining mute was a strategy for conflict avoidance; for Case B, achieving invisibility during family interactions was the safer route. But the danger of speech was only part of the problem; the other part had to do with the inevitable fallout from any family dynamics that rendered speech a risky endeavor. This behavioural pattern aligns with Attachment Theory's conceptof insecure attachment such as avoidant attachment styles. When children are repeatedly face with rejection, punishment, or coldness in response to emotional expression, they learn to minimize attachment, including any expression to avoid further distress, and their silence becomes a survival strategy. This behavioral pattern reflects not only insecure attachment to the children but also high-conformity communication environments, where they are socialized to believe that voicing disagreement or emotion is inappropriate or dangerous.

In addition to silence, the participants also discussed the emotive act of masking and the lessening of real emotions. They stated that they did not have the emotional vocabulary or the parental backing necessary to unload their real emotions in a safe way. A Theory of Emotional Suppression explains that these environments drive people to adopt fewer response strategies and more avoidance strategies in the face of bad outcomes. For example, at Case B, it was said that "smiling was safer than being sad." At Case E, it was stated that emotional expression was unwelcome at home. These narratives reflect a disturbing trend of emotional dissonance where inauthentic expression is preferred for survival. Such repeated invalidation becomes part of a larger communication script within the family, where selective silence and emotional masking become the expected norms.

This early silencing has a long-term effect, resulting in a delay in expressive development, especially in formal and emotionally charged contexts. Participants such as Cases A and D reported having intense anxiety when it came to speaking, despite being capable of it. Case C, on the other hand, noted the opposite and instead acknowledged that he was good at speaking and even earned awards for it. He just happens to not be able to translate his emotions into words. All three either struggle with or have struggled with delayed expressive development because the internal models they work with, developed by their early relational experiences, tell them their voices and emotions are unwelcome. As Emotional Suppression Theory suggests, the continual silencing of unwelcome emotions stunts the fluent and self-advocating expression of all emotions, even those that are pleasant and appropriate in the given context.

The three themes of verbal inhibition and avoidance, emotional masking and language suppression, and delayed expressive developmentalso correspond to the Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP Theory). Children growing up in families with high conformity and low conversation orientation learn to mind rules over conversation while avoiding mutual dialogue. Participants adopted defensive silence as a learned response when faced with punishment or conflict within their high-conformity and low conversation orientation family environments. A lack of honest discussions without emotional support prevents children from learning proper emotional expression through natural reinforcement and modeling processes. Children who do not have spaces to talk openly and receive emotional validation will fail to learn proper communication through healthy expressive development. The limitations of expressive development emerge in those participants whose emotional expression suffers due to their ability to communicate cognitively yet not expressively, specifically in formal and emotionally sensitive situations. FCP Theory creates a substantial theoretical foundation that explains how initial family interactions form long-term emotional expression inhibition across generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therapists and intervention programs must target the emotionally underdeveloped parents who lack the basic skills needed to effectively raise children. These parents most often come from families where they, too, were raised by unfit or subpar parents. So, in effect, we are dealing with several generations of emotionally underdeveloped people. Identifying students who are emotionally silent, such as those with anxiety around speech or those who are emotionally flat, falls to the school counselors and educators who work directly with them. Facilitating early referrals to the mental health professionals who can help these students is a critical step in enabling them to reach their potential. Workshops to help students communicate more expressively and providing safe outlets for them to explore their emotions are even more necessary for those coming from homes embroiled in conflict. Subsequent research should entail samples of larger size and more equal gender representation to authenticate and extend these findings. Studies that are either longitudinal or cross-cultural, or preferably both, are required to determine how emotional suppression that occurs early in life affects the quality of

communication, the nature of interpersonal relationships, and the kinds of emotional patterns that are passed across generations. Multilevel interventions are necessary to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These initiatives should be aligned with: SDG 3 (Health & Well-Being) SDG 4 (Quality Education) SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions) Interventions should include of trauma-informed education, emotional literacy training for educators andinclusive parental mental health policies These efforts work in concert to enhance communicative competence and psychosocial resilience in vulnerable populations.

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