

Research Paper: Parenting Style and Emotion Regulation in Mothers of Preschool Children



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the study was to compare emotion regulation among the authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles of mothers with preschool children.

Methods: The statistic community of this study was all the mothers in Tehran who had preschool children aged between 4 and 6 years. By convenient sampling, 8 kindergartens were selected, and the questionnaires were completed by mothers. The sample consisted of 270 mothers with preschool children. The participants completed the questionnaires, and the data were analyzed with MANOVA.

Results: Significant difference between the groups in terms of emotion regulation was observed. The authoritative mothers had the highest score in emotion regulation.

Conclusion: Our results indicated that emotion regulation played the main role in different parenting styles.

1. Introduction

Though our knowledge of parenting and its determinants have become more sophisticated, the role of emotion has been offered as a central focus (Dix, 1991). Even though emotion has conceptual importance, the empirical evidence on emotion in parenting is unknown. Emotions are thought to motivate an individual's behavior, preparing him/her for action (Izard, 1991). Negative emotions are evoked when conditions are at odds with the concerns of the individual. When any negative emotion is activated, the resultant action is inevitable. As emotions motivate parental practice, an understanding of subjective differences in mothers' emotions is substantial to the better understanding of their behavior. Parents' emotional

functioning has a substantial effect on children's development (Dix, 1991). The mothers of preschool children are faced with a great deal of negative child behaviors that can elicit the parent's 'negative emotions. Toddlers have several episodes of misbehavior, including crying and tantrums that can occur several times a day (Roberts & Strayer, 1987). The maternal emotional conditions caused by negative child behavior may result in ineffective parenting practice (Arnold & O'Leary, 1995).

Some research has focused on the developmental consequences of supportive and unsupportive parenting behaviors, but much less is known about the determinants that predict the manner in which parents respond to their children (Gudmundson & Leerkes, 2012). Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad (1998) proposed that parents'

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personal characteristics can influence their response to their children. Yet, in the last 15 years, only a few studies have focused on identifying the specific parental characteristics that predict their responses to their children. One of these characteristics is emotion regulation strategies, which refer to the process in which the individuals attempt to influence their own emotions, including when and how they experience and expressed them (Gross, 1998). Not only emotions influence one's own thoughts and behaviors, but also affect the "shape the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of others" (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008).

Therefore, understanding the emotional response in mothers challenged by negative child behavior has the potential to increase our knowledge of why some parents can direct their behavior in service of the developmental aims of their children more than other parents. Often, studies on parental emotion have focused on emotion expressed toward the child. Frequent or intense displays of negative maternal emotion are inconsistent with effective and positive parenting. But, only a few studies have focused on the emotion regulation strategies by parents. This distinction is necessary because expressed emotion has the potential to influence the child, whereas experienced emotion can only affect the child through its impact on the parents' manner. Too much emotion, too little emotion, or emotion inconsistent with parenting duties and child needs is thought to be abnormal (Dix, 1991). Understanding parents' emotion strategies in relation to parenting style and behaviors might be useful as parenting style is important in the development and modification of children's emotional problems (Kendziora & O'Leary, 1993). Due to the lack of research on parenting style and emotion regulation of mothers, this study aimed to compare emotion regulation in mothers and authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The hypothesis was that the emotion regulation strategies are different in mothers with different parenting styles.

2. Methods

A cross-sectional design was used in the present study. The population of this study included all the mothers in Tehran who had preschool children aged between 4 and 6 years. Using convenient sampling, 8 kindergartens were selected from Tehran, and the aim of the study was explained to the principals of the kindergartens. Then, two questioners (students of psychology) were trained to administer the questionnaires in the kindergartens. The principal of every kindergarten and questioners gave the questionnaires to mothers and asked them to complete them. All the participants (mothers) worked out of the

house and did not any severe mental illness. Then, individuals not satisfying these criteria were excluded from the sample. The purpose of the research was explained to each case. All of them were informed that participation was voluntary and that their responses would be confidential and remain secret. All questionnaires had ID numbers and were kept in a locked, secure location to which only the prober had access.

The sample consisted of 272 mothers with preschool children (the range of age is between 4 -6) who participated in this study. The sample size computed by this formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{d^2}$$

Variance=0.5; Confidence interval: %0.95; $Z_{0.05}=1.649$; $d=0.05$

According to this formula, the sample size was 271.9≈272. After the administration of questionnaires, the result of parenting styles analysis showed that 157 mothers had an authoritative parenting style. All of the mothers were employee. The mean age for mothers was 35.2915 years with SD=4.46532 and that for children was 5.0336 years with SD=0.86598. The measurements used in this study were the Parenting Style Questionnaire and The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.

The Parenting Style Questionnaire (Kiff, Lengua, & Zalewski, 2011) was developed by Baumrind (1991). This scale comprises 30 items, i.e. 10 items for each of the following domains permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting styles. The validity of the test was 0.78 (Baumrind, 1991). The reliability of the test was calculated by Cronbach's alpha in the present study. The values of Cronbach's alpha for permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative styles were 0.855, 0.921, and 0.962, respectively.

Gross and John's emotion regulation questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) is a 10-item questionnaire designed to measure the participants' tendency to regulate their emotions. This scale was developed to assess individual differences in emotion regulation strategies including expressive suppression and reappraisal. The participants answered each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The validity of the test was 0.89 (Gross, 2002). Alpha reliabilities were 0.79 for reappraisal and 0.73 for suppression. Test-retest reliability was 0.69. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha of the test was 0.809. The hypothesis of the study was analyzed by MANOVA using SPSS-20.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics for all scales were derived by calculating the mean and standard deviation. Then, MANOVA test was administered, and its results are presented in Table 2. Finally, by Tamhane's T2 test, the dyadic comparisons of groups in emotion regulation strategies were administered (Table 3).

According to Table 1, the authoritative mothers had the highest mean in reappraisal (M=25.0773, SD=6.80267) and suppression (M=14.5193, SD=3.95938). The authoritarian mothers had the lowest mean in reappraisal (M=12.7409, SD=3.73415) and suppression (M=8.8662, SD=2.40927).

According to Table 2, there were significant differences between groups with respect to reappraisal ($f_{(2,267)}=125.955, P\leq 0.001$) and suppression ($f_{(2,267)}=79.113, P\leq 0.001$).

The results of dyadic comparison showed that the differences between the groups are significant ($P\leq 0.001$) in all of the emotion regulation components except that the differences between the permissive and authoritative in suppression (MD=0.7107, $P>0.05$) and between the permissive and authoritarian in suppression (MD=-0.7107, $P>0.05$) are not significant.

4. Discussion

The current study examined the role of emotion regulation (reappraisal and suppression) in parenting style in Iranian mothers who have different parenting styles. We found a direct relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles. Maternal parenting high in authoritarian and permissive styles had low scores while the authoritative mothers had high scores in both emotion regulation strategies. These results indicate that emotion regulation strategies were non-functional in authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. On the other hand, the use of suppression and cognitive reappraisal in authoritative parenting style is high. The literature showed that if the use of emotion regulation strategies was compatible with the situation, then this strategy is normal. So, the high scores in two emotion regulation strategies in authoritative parents are congruent with literature.

A few studies reported a link between parental emotion regulation and parental caring behaviors (Cassidy, 2006; Dix, 1991). An important component of effective and positive caregiving is the parents' ability to regulate his/her own positive and negative emotions (Dix, 1991). According to Cassidy (2006) and also Jones and Prinz (2005), maternal insensitivity parenting style can be created by failures of maternal emotion regulation. This idea comes from the notion that parents who have problemat-

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for maternal emotion regulation strategies in three parenting styles

Descriptive Statistics				
	Parenting Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Reappraisal	Permissive	15.5965	4.19477	46
	Authoritarian	12.7409	3.73415	67
	Authoritative	25.0773	6.80267	157
	Total	20.4008	8.03285	270
Suppression	Permissive	9.5769	2.92315	46
	Authoritarian	8.8662	2.40927	67
	Authoritative	14.5193	3.95938	157
	Total	12.2744	4.36160	270

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Table 2. The result of MANOVA test of comparing parenting styles in emotion regulation strategies

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Parenting style	Reappraisal	8426.458	2	4213.229	125.955	0.000	0.485
	Suppression	1904.152	2	952.076	79.113	0.000	0.372

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Table 3. Dyadic comparisons of groups in emotion regulation strategies (Tamhane's T2 test)

Dependent Variable	(A) Parenting Style	(B) Parenting Style	Mean Difference (A-B)	Standard Deviation	Significant Level
Reappraisal	Permissive	Authoritarian	2.8556*	0.76853	0.001
		Authoritative	-9.4808*	0.82297	0.000
	Authoritarian	Permissive	-2.8556*	0.76853	0.001
		Authoritative	-12.3364*	0.70913	0.000
	Authoritative	Permissive	9.4808*	0.82297	0.000
		Authoritarian	12.3364*	0.70913	0.000
Suppression	Permissive	Authoritative	0.7107	0.52191	0.442
		Authoritative	-4.9424*	0.53442	0.000
	Authoritarian	Permissive	-0.7107	0.52191	0.442
		authoritative	-5.6530*	0.43184	0.000
	Authoritative	Permissive	4.9424*	0.53442	0.000
		authoritarian	5.6530*	0.43184	0.000

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ic emotion regulation may experience negative, dysregulated affective responses to different events; a parenting challenge, such as exposure to a child's distress, may develop such an event. Any resulting emotion dysregulation can lead to parent-centered responses, rather than responses focused on the demands of the child (Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001; Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002). In other words, parents with difficulty in emotion regulation may be more focused on soothing their own discomfort than that of their child and may use negative parenting strategies, such as minimization and punishment, to stop the child's distress (Fabes, et al., 2002).

Studies examining parenting style and disciplines have found that poorer emotion regulation strategies (such as suppression and reappraisal) (Lorber & O'leary, 2005) and greater negative emotional arousal in parenting tasks (measured with self-report as well as with physiological measures) are linked with over-reactive discipline (Lorber & O'leary, 2005).

In consistent with this result, another study showed that physically abusive parents had difficulties in emotion regulation (Howes, Cicchetti, Toth, & Rogosch, 2000). Marziali, Damianakis, and Trocmé (2003) conceptualized emotion dysregulation as a key element of maltreating caregivers' problematic psychosocial behaviors. Maltreating caregivers usually miscode and inappropriately react to others' emotions as a result of their faulty cognitive interpretation of their own and others' emotions (Marziali et al., 2003). Such caregivers may incorrectly appraise the meaning and function of their children's emotions, resulting in over reactive, and

potentially punitive, or under reactive (e.g. ignoring the situation) emotional reactions (Marziali et al., 2003). Shipman and Zeman (2001) compared 25 maltreating mothers to a control group of 25 non-maltreating mothers of children between the ages of 6-12 years. Maltreating mothers reported less understanding of their children's emotions and used less effective strategies when attempting to help their children manage emotionally difficult situations (Shipman & Zeman, 2001).

Also, Lorber and Smith Slep (2005) did a study on how the mothers' negative emotions predict harsh and lax discipline style. Mothers and children interacted in a structured task. Mothers viewed videotapes of their interactions with children and rated their experienced emotion. Harsh discipline was linked with mother's greater negative emotion intensity and greater dependence of mother's emotion on children's negative emotion. Lax discipline was linked to greater emotion dependence on negative child affect and lower serial predictability but not with negative emotion intensity.

Martin, Clements, and Crnic (2002) explored the emotional states of mothers when interacting with their children and examined the links among maternal emotion, family distress, and parenting sensitivity. Results showed that mothers experienced and expressed many positive and negative emotions during play with their toddlers; however, mothers' expressed and experienced emotions were uncorrelated. When a child presented a positive emotion, mothers have more positive emotion. Mothers' emotional experiences during interactions with their children moderated the links between family distress and sensitive parenting behaviors. These findings

support a theory that the parenting is determined by multiple factors such as child, parent, family and emotion factors. This study enhances our knowledge of the crucial role of emotion regulation in the parenting style of Iranian mothers. Indeed, the authoritative mothers used emotion regulation techniques more than authoritarian and permissive mothers.

The results of the present study should be interpreted considering some limitations. First, this study was administered on mothers only, and a similar work about fathers is needed. Second, similar to other studies in this context, we only used self-reporting questionnaires. Future studies should use other ways for gathering data from multiple sources, for example, using observational methods.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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