

ROLE OF PARENTS' COGNITIVE REAPPRAISAL AND EXPRESSIVE SUPPRESSION STRATEGIES ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EMOTION REGULATION

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To investigate the role of parent's cognitive reappraisal (CR) and expressive suppressive (ES) strategies on their children's emotion regulation

Design of the study: *The current study is conducted using a correlational research design*

Place and duration of the study: *The study concluded in 2023, and it was carried out in Karachi, Pakistan.*

Sample and Method: *100 parents (50 fathers & 50 mothers) in the age bracket of 28 to 55 years through the snowball sampling method were included. Parents were required to have at least one child aged between 5 to 10 years. The first hypothesis proposed that parents' CR and ES would predict emotional lability/negativity in their children. The second hypothesis further posited that parents' CR and ES would predict children's emotion regulation. These proposed relationships between analyzed components were studied by utilizing Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ, Gross & John ,2003) and (Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC, Shields & Cicchetti,1995).*

Results and Conclusion: *Findings show ES significantly predicted children's emotional lability, whereas CR did not. Nonetheless, both parental strategies were significant predictors of children's overall emotion regulation.*

Keywords: *Parental Cognitive Reappraisal (CR); Parental Expressive Suppression (ES); Children's Emotional Lability; Children's Negativity; Children's Emotional Regulation*

INTRODUCTION

Emotional functioning is crucial to children's psychological development and is closely linked to mental health issues. Emotional lability and emotional regulation provide a glimpse into the child's emotional world and its development. Emotional regulation refers to adaptive and controlled reactions in response to situations, while lability refers to the experience of extremely strong, intense, rapid, and negative emotions (Rosen et al., 2015).

Since children's behavioral manifestations prominently reflect either their emotional regulation or their emotional lability, it is crucial to comprehend this development in children. These developments begin from the time emotion development starts. Emotions being an essential component of life and are crucial to survival (Ellsworth, 1994), they signal what is important in our environment by enhancing the input of sensory information to help aid in decision-making (Gross, 1988). These decisions subsequently translate into behavioral actions that may be either useful or harmful to the individual. Therefore, regulating emotions becomes vital for survival (Wilms et al., 2020).

When individuals are unable to manage their emotional experiences, they may get overwhelmed or constantly overanalyze the environment or even fail to analyze in the presence of an actual threat; both situations can lead to results that are unhelpful. In contrast, those who can maintain effective regulation of their emotions are better equipped to make adaptive and productive choices. This ability to properly manage and respond to the situation comes when the emotions are managed, which is known as emotion regulation (Thompson & Parker, 2009; Giombini, 2015). Emotion regulation is defined as a process of adjusting or reevaluating conditions in order to control the level of emotional experiences (Morris et al., 2007). This process has an array of strategies that are further divided into maladaptive and adaptive strategies. This division is based on how well the strategy regulates emotions and meets the requirements and demands of the situation (Young et al., 2019).

The model that best explains the emotion regulation strategies is represented as a process model (Gross, 1998b). This model explains that

emotions follow a process, like attention, appraisal and response indicating that once an emotion-eliciting stimulus is presented it is detected, evaluated and then ultimately leads toward response either behavioral or psychological in nature (Gross & Thompson, 2007). According to Gross (1998, a) the response which is adaptive or either maladaptive can be changed by what strategy the individual uses and at what stage of this process. The strategies, which occurs before the development of emotion, are termed as antecedent focused strategies, and the strategies that occurs later the emotion-generative process are referred as response-focused strategies (Gross & Munoz, 1995).

The strategies in antecedent-focused include situation selection, modification, attentional deployment, and cognitive transformation. For example, the first strategy implies situation selection prior to responding to an event or situation (Webb et al., 2018). The person using this strategy would choose whether to approach the situation in order to experience a positive or helpful result or to escape it because of undesirable negative emotions, ensuring a proactive approach (Thuillard & Dan-Glauser, 2021). For instance, someone who is anxious about others' judgments may skip a social gathering because they predict that participating would lead to emotional strain. In another instance, if he goes to a party, he uses humor to reduce others' criticism or may stand in a corner to limit interactions and reduce opportunities for others to judge him. This would be called situation modification, where the individual is modifying the situation itself (Van Bockstaele et al., 2020). Moreover, attentional deployment, as the name suggests, refers to the emotion-generating process's attention domain (Calvo & Lang, 2004). To regulate the reaction, the attentional deployment method redirects the focus to or from the object of attention, which modulates the emotional aftermath (López-Pérez et al., 2017). This strategy example includes distraction, rumination focus, suppression of thoughts, and dissociation.

Cognitive change, being final strategy within antecedent-focused approaches, which requires altering a person's patterns of thinking with respect to a situation in order to modify its psychological and affective outcomes. Among the different types of cognitive change, cognitive reappraisal is considered the most important. It works by changing the interpretation of a situation, thereby shifting the emotional response attached to it (Davis et al., 2011). Reappraisal focuses on adjusting the thoughts surrounding an event so

individuals can perceive and handle its emotional demands more effectively (Gross, 2008). For example, after experiencing a significant financial setback, a person might reframe their thoughts about the situation to reduce its emotional intensity.

Following the earlier strategies, response-focused strategies work on the same principle but with different timing, since their purpose is to adjust the emotional response after an emotion is generated (Gross, 1998b). This adjustment is known as response modulation, and it can be in the form of either inhibiting or amplifying the reaction. There are many areas where this modulation can take place, like in the form of facial expressions, physiological reactions, and verbal tone. When we talk about children, facial expressions are the most important aspect where children pick cues from and expressive suppression defines to the suppressing of facial expressions. It is often regarded as a maladaptive emotion management method; however, some cultural research paints a slightly different image. As one research explains, in societies that emphasize group cohesion, expressive suppression is considered more conforming to social norms in comparison to freely expressing emotions (Soto et al., 2011). However, when members of a collectivistic community lived in an individualistic culture, the outcomes were different. As in another study, Turkish immigrants residing in Germany who habitually engaged in expressive suppression had better mental health results than German natives, implying how relevant and important a part culture and cultural norms play in making the same strategy as adaptive or maladaptive (Arens et al., 2013).

There is a dire need to understand the significant role of cultural effects. However, for children regulation is dependent on external sources, as they do not possess a completely established self-regulatory mechanism until a certain age (Kim-Spoon et al., 2013). For instance, early in infancy, when a kid screams and is calmed by a caregiver, they experience their first exposure to emotion management. Parents are the main agents at this point, and their own emotional control aids in controlling the child's emotional states and lays the groundwork for the child's future emotional regulation abilities (Southam-Gerow, 2013). Studies repeatedly demonstrate that parents' ineffective regulation reflect in their

parenting style explored by Meza-Cervera et al., (2022), degree of responsiveness to the child's needs (Boutelle et al., 2009), general family emotional environment and their demonstration of regulatory behaviors (Morris et al., 2007) all these impact the child's social, cognitive, or emotional development (Antonucci et al., 2004) (Varga, 2011). Together, results shed light on the central role of parents' use of strategies such as emotion regulation in shaping children's emerging emotional competencies within broader cultural contexts.

To summarize, there are a variety of ways and strategies to manage the emotions. However, what strategy individuals predominantly use, especially when they enter into parenting, has far-reaching consequences not only for their own self but also for the emotional growth of their children (Pala et al., 2023). Therefore, this research seeks to explore how parents' use of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression relates to children's emotion regulation, specifically emotional lability and overall regulation, in the Pakistani cultural background. For this study following hypotheses were included:

1. There would be a predictive association between parents' cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression with emotion lability/negativity in their children.
2. There would be a predictive association between parents' cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression with emotion regulation in their children.

METHOD

Participants

An equal representation of 50 fathers and 50 mothers were taken for this study making it total of 100 participants, with ages ranging from 28 to 55 years (Mean = 37.5 years, SD = 5.48) through snowball sampling method.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for the participants were that those parents were taken as part of the study who have at least one child in the age bracket of 5-10 years, and parents must be living together with their spouse and with their children as well.

Najeeb and Khanum

Personal Information Form

A Personal information questionnaire was utilized to collect information regarding participant's characteristics, which included age of child (whom they consider while filling the questionnaires), age of parents, level of education, employment, family structure, marriage duration, child's birth order, and history related to a physical /neurological/ psychological disorder within parents or their children.

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) (Gross & John, 2003)

This measure was originally designed by Gross and John (2003) assess parent's emotion regulation strategies. It has two subscales measuring cognitive reappraisal strategy and expressive suppression strategy and comprised of total 10 items. All questionnaire items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=7). The total score for a subscale were derived by adding individual item scores within the subscale. Scores of scales shows adequate internal reliability for both subscales i.e., reappraisal ($\alpha = .79$) and suppression ($\alpha = .73$).

Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC) (Shields & Cicchetti,1995)

ERC measure is constructed by Shields and Cicchetti (1995), which measures emotion regulation in children aged 5–12 years based on parent reports. It contains 24 items, each item assessed on a 4 option Likert scale ranging from Never=1 to Almost Always = 4. It has two subscales: Emotional Lability/Negativity and Emotion Regulation. 6 items are reverse-scored, while the remaining 17 are scored in the positive direction. The overall emotion regulation composite demonstrates strong internal reliability ($\alpha = .83$).

Procedure

Prior to the collection of data, the study was reviewed and approved by Advanced Studies and Research Board (ASRB), University of Karachi and before data collected it was approved by Ethical Research Board (ERB), Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Karachi and) to ensure that the study complies with ethical requirements. Once the study was approved data collection started through snowball sampling strategy. The first step in data collection was

taken by approaching participants who were easily accessible, after securing their consent; participants were requested to complete forms that has individual particular characteristics, ERQ, and ERC scale. Parents having multiple children in the desired age range, had been instructed to consider only the youngest child. Once participants completed it, they were thanked for their participation and time. It was also requested to refer other parents who fit the research criteria. Using these references, the researcher contacted future subjects and followed the same approach.

Throughout the data collection process, all ethical guidelines were strictly observed; including researcher integrity and responsibility, and the participants' rights including they may have right to withdraw from research at any point, assuring their confidentiality, and respect for their dignity.

Scoring and Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis (SPSS, V-23) was conducted to comprehend descriptive statistics and test research hypotheses. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to achieve the objective of current study

RESULTS

Table 1

Summary Descriptive Statistics for Sociodemographic Variables (N = 100)

Sociodemographic Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall age	37.57	5.48
Mother's Age	34.62	3.65
Father's Age	40.52	5.44
Marriage Duration	11.86	4.71
Children's Age	7.14	1.70

Table 2

The Prevalence (Frequency) and Proportions (Percentages) Of The Respondents' Sociodemographic Attributes (N= 100)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>
Academic Qualification		
Bachelors	45	45
Masters	52	52
MPhil/PhD	03	03
Total	100	100
Family Setup		
Joint	55	55
Nuclear	45	45
Total	100	100
Employment Status		

Permanent Employee	58	58
Un-employed	30	30
Self-employed Business	12	12
Total	100	100
Birth order of Child		
First born	47	47
Middle born	18	18
Last born	35	35
Only child	9	9
Total	100	100

Table 3

Multiple Regression of Children's Emotional Lability (EL) on Parental Cognitive Reappraisal (CR) and Expressive Suppression (ES)

Variables	Unstandardized		Standardized		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>			
Constant	32.21	3.58			9.00	.00
CR	-.14	.10	-.14		-1.41	.16
ES	.30	.12	.24		2.51	.01

Note. $R^2 = .07$ for Model $p < .05$

Table 4

Multiple Linear Regression of Children's Emotion Regulation (ER) on Parental Cognitive Reappraisal (CR) and Expressive Suppression (ES)

Variables	Unstandardized		Standardized		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Coefficients		Coefficients			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>			
Constant	20.68	2.16			9.58	.00
CR	.23	.06	.34		3.68	.00
ES	-.17	.07	-.23		-2.42	.01

Note. $R^2 = .16$ for Model $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The preliminary findings of the current research are aligned with past studies result, strengthening evidence that parents' emotional regulation has a major influence on their children regulating mechanisms. The strong association observed between parents' expressive suppression, children's poor emotion regulation and heightened emotional lability is consistent with prior findings describing expressive suppression as an ineffective regulatory strategy that frequently results in adverse developmental outcomes (Milojevich et al., 2020). This outcome may be attributed to the fact that children whose parents use expressive suppression strategy become emotionally unavailable and their ability to responds sensitively is reduced so as their emotional support. This restricts children to receive essential guidance about regulation (LeBlanc et al., 2017) because when parents consistently repress their emotions, they may unknowingly indicate to their children that emotions are inappropriate or invalid. This invalidation process has been documented in prior work showing that parental suppression can lead children to interpret their own feelings as inappropriate, contributing to emotion avoidance and inefficient regulating practices (Shipman et al., 2007).

These results obtained from the data further emphasize the relevance of social learning mechanisms in emotional development. It also reveals that children pick up regulating strategies by watching, imitating, and internalizing the emotional behaviors and techniques of their parents (Bariola et al., 2011). As a result, even though these kids still have high emotional arousal, their lack of exposure to adaptive techniques makes it difficult for them to control strong emotions, which raises the risk of dysregulation (Lozada et al., 2016). This is consistent with Gross's process model, which explains that repressing emotions doesn't lead to positive outcomes because it keeps children from learning how to express their feelings appropriately, leading them to believe that emotions shouldn't be expressed, which is a precursor to problems in later life (Juszko & Szczepańska-Gieracha, 2020).

In contrast, cognitive reappraisal is often seen as an adaptive method. However, this study did not reveal a significant link between parents' use of reappraisal and their children's emotional lability. This is in contrast to neuroimaging data from Buhle et al. (2013), which showed that regular reappraisal use lowers amygdala activation, supporting reduced negative affect and emotional reactivity. The current findings' lack of significance raises the possibility that this association is moderated by additional contextual or individual factors. For example, recent research highlighting the role of moderating variables in children's emotional experiences suggests that factors like children's temperament, family stress, or broader environmental influences may interact with parental strategies to shape children's emotional outcomes (De Raeymaecker & Dhar, 2022).

Additionally, it's possible that parental reappraisal has more indirect effects on children's emotional lability that aren't immediately apparent. Cognitive reappraisal may have an impact through more gradual techniques, such as encouraging parental warmth, lowering conflict, or improving emotional communication, whereas expressive suppression directly affects the emotional environment of parent-child interactions. Unless parents clearly model the cognitive stages involved in reappraisal, children may not quickly learn this strategy simply through observation. This might partially explain the absence of significant relationships in the current investigation.

As a conclusion, the current study demonstrates the interdependent nature of parent and child emotional regulation. Focusing on parents' regulatory strategies, and identifying that decreasing suppression and increasing cognitive

reappraisal strategies, can make significant progress in fostering healthier emotional development and resilience in children and work towards fostering better emotional outcomes for children (Milojevich et al., 2020; LeBlanc et al., 2017; Bariola et al., 2011; Shipman et al., 2007; Lozada et al., 2016; Buhle et al., 2013; De Raeymaecker & Dhar, 2022). It also highlighted that in order to treat emotionally dysregulated children it is very much necessary to aim at the bigger picture, which leads to a family centered approach. Moreover, increasing parent's awareness and simultaneously training parents to reduce maladaptive techniques such as expressive suppression and to improve adaptive strategies like reappraisal may help considerably in improving the emotional atmosphere of the home and increasing children's regulating skills.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the findings of this study would be helpful for clinicians who work with children. Therefore, family context-focused interventions can help in understanding and managing children's emotional challenges, particularly at the parental level. Interventions can be designed at lowering parental expressive suppression which will have beneficial effects on reducing children's experience of intense negative emotions. Third, the study's findings will be useful in educating parents to use the cognitive reappraisal strategy, as through utilization of this strategy they can better manage their own emotions and simultaneously model a more appropriate way to teach their children how to regulate themselves. Additionally, culturally customized interventions can be created to encourage parents to refrain from utilization of expressive suppression in order to support emotionally regulated individuals.

Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations of this study were that there were only 100 participants who were taken as a sample, and this reduces the potential to generalize the findings of this study on the population, as the sample size was small. Moreover, only parent's perspective was considered in order to comprehend their children's emotion regulation. It is recommended for future researchers to increase the sample size and incorporate children's perspectives about their parents and their own emotional regulation as well. Also, in current study the focus was on

psychological regulation of parents however, future research can also examine the differences between fathers and mothers' demographic variables to observe its relation with studied variables. Therefore, clearer, generalizable findings can be obtained.

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Najeeb and Khanum

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Najeeb and Khanum

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