IJBMC
International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture

Volume 13, Issue 6, Article e2026-1282
DOI: 10.61838/ijbmc.v13i6.1282

Article type:
Original Research

Predictors of Positive Emotion Regulation in Girls Aged 9–11: Mothers' Early Maladaptive Schemas and Parenting Styles

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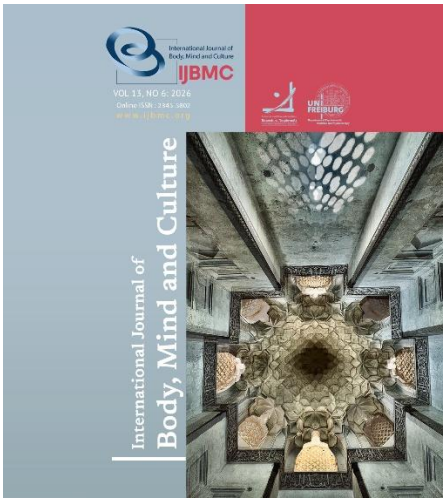

Article history:

Received 17 Mar 2026
Revised 22 Apr 2026
Accepted 01 May 2026
Published online 01 June 2026

How to cite this article:
Alavi, S. A., Khosropour, F., & Mohamadtehrani, H. (2026). Predictors of Positive Emotion Regulation in Girls Aged 9–11: Mothers' Early Maladaptive Schemas and Parenting Styles. International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture, 13(6), Article e2026-1282. https://doi.org/10.61838/ijbmc.v13i6.1282

ABSTRACT

Objective: Emotion regulation is a core developmental skill that enables children to manage emotional experiences and respond adaptively to environmental demands. Parental factors, particularly mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles, are associated with children's emotion regulation capacities.

Methods and Materials: This cross-sectional correlational study was conducted on 181 elementary school girls aged 9–11 years selected through multistage cluster sampling from schools in Kerman, Iran. Data were collected using the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ), Young's Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire (YEMS), and Baumrind's Parenting Style Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis in SPSS version 26.

Findings: The regression model was statistically significant ($R = 0.87$, $R^2 = 0.77$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.74$), indicating that mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles explained 74% of the variance in positive emotion regulation. Emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust, social isolation, failure, enmeshment/undeveloped self, and emotional inhibition were negatively associated with positive emotion regulation. Authoritative parenting was positively associated with positive emotion regulation ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.001$), whereas permissive parenting was significantly negatively associated ($\beta = -0.18$, $p = 0.001$).

Conclusion: The findings indicate that specific maternal early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles are significantly associated with children's positive emotion regulation. These results underscore the importance of maternal cognitive–emotional patterns and parenting practices for children's emotional development.

Keywords: Emotion Regulation, Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Early Maladaptive Schemas, Parenting Styles, Mothers.

Introduction

Children's emotional and social competencies play a crucial role in academic achievement and overall functioning in daily life (Thümmler et al., 2022). During childhood and early adolescence, difficulties in emotion regulation have been associated with a wide range of emotional and behavioral problems, particularly among girls, who appear to be more vulnerable to internalizing difficulties during this developmental period (Hen et al., 2022; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2023). Emotion regulation is therefore considered a fundamental developmental skill that enables children to identify, monitor, and manage emotional experiences in adaptive ways. These regulatory capacities allow individuals to cope effectively with environmental demands and respond appropriately in challenging situations (McCullen et al., 2023).

Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence the experience and expression of emotions in terms of intensity, duration, timing, and form, in accordance with personal goals (Kozubal et al., 2023). Children with more developed emotion regulation skills are better able to direct their emotional responses rather than react impulsively, thereby supporting psychological adjustment and well-being (Adynski et al., 2024). Importantly, emotion regulation strategies begin to develop early in life and are shaped through ongoing interactions with caregivers, making the family environment a central context for emotional development (Paley & Hajal, 2022).

One influential parental factor in this process is the presence of early maladaptive schemas (EMSs). Early maladaptive schemas are enduring cognitive–emotional patterns that develop in response to unmet emotional needs during childhood and are characterized by pervasive negative beliefs about the self, others, and relationships (Young, 1998). These schemas are relatively stable over time and guide individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors across interpersonal contexts. When activated, EMSs are associated with intense negative affect and maladaptive coping responses, reflecting underlying emotional needs that were insufficiently met in early relationships. Empirical evidence indicates that EMSs are linked to emotional distress, interpersonal difficulties, and various forms of psychological maladjustment (Emami et al., 2024).

Mothers' early maladaptive schemas may be particularly relevant for children's emotional development, as they can shape caregiving behaviors and emotional responses within the parent–child relationship. Previous research suggests that maternal EMSs are associated with less adaptive emotional interactions, which may, in turn, relate to children's difficulties in regulating emotions (Çalışkan, 2017). From an intergenerational perspective, maladaptive cognitive–emotional patterns in parents may be transmitted to children indirectly through parenting practices and emotional socialization processes, thereby influencing children's emotion regulation capacities (Bridgett et al., 2015; Li et al., 2019).

In addition to parental schemas, parenting styles represent a well-established framework for understanding variations in child development. According to Baumrind's typology, parenting styles are commonly categorized as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1973). High levels of warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate behavioral control characterize authoritative parenting. In contrast, authoritarian parenting emphasizes control and discipline with low emotional warmth, and permissive parenting involves high warmth but low levels of structure and regulation. Research consistently demonstrates that authoritative parenting is associated with more adaptive emotional outcomes in children, including greater use of effective emotion regulation strategies, while authoritarian and permissive styles are often linked to poorer emotional regulation and adjustment (Morris et al., 2017; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022).

Although a substantial body of literature has examined the role of parenting styles in children's emotional development, fewer studies have examined the combined contribution of mothers ' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles to children's positive emotion regulation. Moreover, existing research has often emphasized general emotion dysregulation or adolescent samples, with limited attention to late childhood, a developmental stage marked by increasing emotional awareness and regulatory demands. This gap is particularly evident in non-Western cultural contexts, including Iran, where family dynamics and parenting

practices may differ from those examined in prior studies.

In the present study, positive emotion regulation is defined operationally as the use of adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies, such as positive reappraisal, acceptance, and refocusing, as conceptualized within the cognitive emotion regulation framework and measured by the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Garnefski et al., 2001). Early maladaptive schemas are defined as enduring negative cognitive–emotional patterns formed in response to unmet emotional needs during childhood, which influence individuals' perceptions, emotions, and interpersonal behaviors across the lifespan (Young, 1998). Parenting styles refer to consistent patterns of parental attitudes and behaviors toward child-rearing and are commonly classified as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, based on Baumrind's well-established typology (Baumrind, 1973). The study focuses specifically on elementary school girls aged 9–11 years, a developmental period in which emotion regulation skills are particularly important for psychological adjustment and academic functioning. By examining both mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles within a single model, this study aims to address gaps in the literature regarding intergenerational influences on positive emotion regulation in childhood.

Based on theoretical frameworks and previous empirical findings, it was hypothesized that higher levels of mothers' early maladaptive schemas would be associated with lower levels of positive emotion regulation in their daughters. Additionally, it was hypothesized that an authoritative parenting style would be positively associated with positive emotion regulation. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles would be negatively associated with positive emotion regulation.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design. The study aimed to examine the associations between mothers' early maladaptive schemas, parenting styles, and positive emotion regulation in girls aged 9–11 years in Kerman city. Given the non-experimental nature of the design, all findings are interpreted as associations rather than causal relationships.

Sampling and Recruitment

A multistage cluster sampling method was used. First, the second educational district of Kerman city was randomly selected. From a list of 8 private and 6 public elementary schools in this district, five schools were randomly chosen. After obtaining permission from school principals, eligible female students were identified. Written informed consent was obtained from mothers before participation. A total of 181 girls aged 9–11 years were included in the final sample.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were as follows: Girls aged 9–11 years; Enrollment in elementary schools in Kerman city (second educational district); Living with their biological mother; and written informed consent from mothers.

Exclusion criteria included: Diagnosis of a psychological disorder based on school health records; Presence of cognitive, speech, or learning difficulties that could interfere with completing the questionnaires; Incomplete questionnaires or withdrawal from the study; and Major family disruptions during the study period (e.g., parental divorce or death).

All parental questionnaires were completed exclusively by mothers, who served as the sole parental informants in this study. Fathers were not involved in data collection.

Sample Size

Sample size was determined using Morgan's sample size table based on the total number of students enrolled in the selected elementary schools. According to this table, a minimum sample size of 181 participants was required to achieve adequate statistical power. Accordingly, 181 students who met the inclusion criteria were included in the final analysis.

Instruments

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Garnefski et al., 2001): The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) was developed by Garnefski et al. (2001). The CERQ is a 36-item self-report instrument designed to assess nine cognitive emotion regulation strategies: self-blame, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, catastrophizing, and blaming others. Items are rated on a Likert-type scale. In the present study, positive

(adaptive) emotion regulation was operationalized as a composite score derived from five adaptive subscales: acceptance, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reappraisal, and putting into perspective. Composite scores were calculated by averaging item scores across these subscales. The Persian version of the CERQ has demonstrated acceptable reliability, with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.62 to 0.91. The Persian version of this scale was validated, with reliability ranging from 0.62 to 0.91. Cronbach's alpha in the current study: 0.88.

Young's Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire (Young et al., 2003): Mothers' early maladaptive schemas were assessed using the 90-item long form of the Young Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire (YEMSQ), as described within the schema therapy framework (Young et al., 2003). This self-report instrument assesses 18 early maladaptive schemas (e.g., emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust/abuse, defectiveness/shame) organized into five schema domains: Disconnection and Rejection, Impaired Autonomy and Performance, Impaired Limits, Other-Directedness, and Overvigilance and Inhibition. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "completely untrue of me" to "describes me perfectly". In the present study, schema-level subscale scores were used in the analyses, with each schema score calculated as the mean of its corresponding items. The Persian version of the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.50 to 0.82 across schemas. Cronbach's alpha in the present study: 0.91.

Parenting Style Questionnaire (Baumrind, 1973): The Parenting Style Questionnaire, designed by Diana Baumrind (1973), includes 30 items measuring three distinct parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. It uses a Likert-type scale to assess parental behaviors and attitudes toward their children. The scale was translated into Persian and subjected to factor analysis, resulting in the removal of some items. The reliability of the scale, measured by test-retest methods, ranged from 0.69 to 0.92, depending on the parenting style. Cronbach's alpha in the present study: 0.80.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate associations among mothers' early maladaptive schemas, parenting styles, and positive emotion regulation. A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the associations between 21 predictors (18 early maladaptive schemas and 3 parenting styles) and positive emotion regulation. Given the relatively large number of predictors relative to the sample size, the regression model was considered exploratory, and standardized regression coefficients were interpreted with caution. The assumptions of regression analysis were evaluated before the analysis. Normality of distributions was assessed using skewness and kurtosis indices. Multicollinearity was examined using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values, which were within acceptable ranges, indicating no severe multicollinearity. All analyses focused exclusively on positive emotion regulation as the outcome variable.

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Kerman's Ethics Committee (IR.IAU.KERMAN.REC.1401.055). Written informed consent was obtained from the students' parents, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation in the study.

Findings and Results

Demographic Characteristics

The final sample consisted of 181 girls aged 9–11 years, with a mean age of 9.95 years (SD = 0.80). Mothers' ages ranged from 27 to 42 years (M = 35.38, SD = 2.28). Regarding educational level, 13.3% of mothers had a high school diploma or lower, 9.9% held an associate degree, 68% had a bachelor's degree, 7.7% had a master's degree, and 1.1% held a doctoral degree. In terms of employment status, 49.2% of mothers were employed, whereas 50.8% were homemakers.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for positive emotion regulation, early maladaptive schemas, and parenting styles are presented in Table 1. Overall, scores on early maladaptive schemas clustered around mid-range values, indicating moderate endorsement of schema-related beliefs in the sample. Mean scores for parenting styles suggested variability across authoritative,

authoritarian, and permissive dimensions. The mean score for positive emotion regulation indicated a moderate-to-high level of adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies in the sample. Mean scores across the early maladaptive schema dimensions clustered around mid-range values, suggesting moderate endorsement of schema-related beliefs rather than distinctly high or low schema intensity. Given the lack of universally accepted cut-off scores for early maladaptive schemas in non-clinical samples, schema scores were interpreted descriptively as continuous variables rather than categorized as high or low. With respect to parenting styles, mean scores indicated variability across the authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive dimensions, reflecting differences in mothers' reported parenting practices. None of the parenting style dimensions showed extreme mean values, suggesting that parenting behaviors in the sample were distributed across a range of styles rather than concentrated at very high or very low levels.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Positive Emotion Regulation, Early Maladaptive Schemas, and Parenting Styles (N = 181)

Variable	M	SD
Positive Emotion Regulation	67.59	12.68
Early Maladaptive Schemas		
Emotional Deprivation	14.90	3.26
Abandonment	14.55	3.36
Mistrust/Abuse	15.19	3.15
Social Isolation	15.51	3.10
Defectiveness/Shame	14.86	3.41
Failure	14.83	3.34
Dependence/Incompetence	15.27	3.43
Vulnerability to Harm or Illness	15.50	3.18
Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self	14.88	3.28
Subjugation	14.45	3.48
Self-Sacrifice	14.43	3.82
Emotional Inhibition	15.42	3.46
Unrelenting Standards	14.69	3.33
Entitlement/Grandiosity	14.94	3.41
Insufficient Self-Control	15.03	3.20
Approval-Seeking	14.76	3.14
Negativity/Pessimism	15.24	3.60
Punitiveness	14.79	3.76
Parenting Styles		
Authoritative	23.96	6.60
Authoritarian	27.09	6.85
Permissive	26.04	6.60

Note. *Positive emotion regulation reflects the composite score of adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies. Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the respective constructs.*

Assumptions

Pearson correlation analyses indicated that positive emotion regulation was significantly associated with several early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles. The magnitude of bivariate correlations was generally small to moderate, indicating meaningful associations without evidence of severe redundancy among variables. Importantly, although the overall regression model yielded a high multiple correlation coefficient (R = 0.87), this reflects the combined multivariate association of the predictors with the outcome rather than strong bivariate correlations between individual variable pairs. The assumptions for multiple regression analysis were thoroughly examined and met. Normality of the variables was supported by acceptable skewness and kurtosis values. Outliers were assessed using box plots, and no extreme values were identified. Multicollinearity was evaluated using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) indices, which were within acceptable ranges, indicating no severe multicollinearity. The Durbin–Watson statistic indicated that the residuals were independent across models, supporting the assumption of error independence.

Regression Analysis for Positive Emotion Regulation Model

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the associations between early maladaptive schemas, parenting styles, and positive emotion regulation. As shown in Table 2, the overall model was statistically significant, $F(21, 159) = 25.56$, $p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .87$, with $R^2 = .77$ and an adjusted $R^2 = .74$, indicating that approximately 74% of the variance in positive emotion regulation was explained by the set of predictors. Given the non-experimental, cross-sectional design, these findings are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. Several early maladaptive schemas were negatively associated with positive emotion regulation, including emotional deprivation (β = −.15, p= .001), abandonment (β= −.10, p= .021), mistrust/abuse (β= −.11, p= .013), social isolation (β= −.09, p= .035), failure (β= −.12, p= .014), enmeshment/undeveloped self (β= −.20, p= .001), and emotional inhibition (β= −.19, p= .001). Among these, enmeshment/undeveloped self and emotional inhibition showed the largest standardized coefficients. Regarding parenting styles, authoritative parenting was positively associated with positive emotion regulation (β= .15, p= .001). By contrast, permissive parenting was negatively associated with positive emotion regulation (β= −.18, p= .001). Authoritarian parenting did not show a statistically significant association in this model. Other schema variables were not significantly associated with positive emotion regulation and are reported in Table 2 without further interpretation, consistent with the model's exploratory nature.

Table 2

Regression Results for the Positive Emotion Regulation Model

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Regression	22340.50	21	1063.83	25.56	< .001	.87	.77	.74
Residual	6616.91	159	41.61					
Total	28957.41	180						

Table 3

Unstandardized and Standardized Regression Coefficients for Positive Emotion Regulation

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Emotional Deprivation	−0.61	0.18	−0.15	−3.35	.001
Abandonment	−0.39	0.19	−0.10	−2.33	.021
Mistrust/Abuse	−0.47	0.18	−0.11	−2.51	.013
Social Isolation	−0.39	0.18	−0.09	−2.13	.035
Defectiveness/Shame	−0.22	0.18	−0.05	−1.20	.229
Failure	−0.46	0.18	−0.12	−2.47	.014
Dependence/Incompetence	−0.19	0.16	−0.05	−1.23	.220
Vulnerability to Harm/Illness	0.04	0.16	0.01	0.27	.787
Enmeshment/Undeveloped Self	−0.78	0.17	−0.20	−4.33	.001
Subjugation	−0.10	0.16	−0.03	−0.65	.516
Self-Sacrifice	−0.05	0.14	−0.01	−0.37	.707
Emotional Inhibition	−0.70	0.17	−0.19	−3.99	.001
Unrelenting Standards	−0.05	0.17	−0.01	−0.33	.741
Entitlement/Grandiosity	−0.25	0.17	−0.06	−1.47	.142
Insufficient Self-Control	−0.06	0.19	−0.01	−0.35	.720
Approval-Seeking	−0.32	0.19	−0.08	−1.71	.088
Negativity/Pessimism	−0.06	0.16	−0.01	−0.40	.687
Punitiveness	−0.05	0.15	−0.01	−0.35	.722
Authoritative Parenting	0.30	0.08	0.15	3.64	.001
Authoritarian Parenting	−0.18	0.10	−0.09	−1.74	.083
Permissive Parenting	−0.35	0.08	−0.18	−3.98	.001

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the associations between mothers' early maladaptive schemas, parenting styles, and children's positive emotion regulation. Consistent with previous studies by Zreik et al. (2025), Awiszus et al. (2022), Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2022), and Çalışkan (2017), the findings indicate that maternal early maladaptive schemas are meaningfully related to children's emotional outcomes. Given the cross-sectional design, these findings are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

The regression analysis revealed several early maladaptive schemas that were negatively associated with positive emotion regulation, including emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust/abuse, emotional inhibition, and failure. Among these, enmeshment/undeveloped self and emotional inhibition showed the largest standardized coefficients, suggesting stronger associations with lower use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that maladaptive schemas may be linked to emotional maladjustment by constraining flexible emotional processing and expression (Shi et al., 2024). Importantly, not all schemas were significant predictors, highlighting the need to focus on specific schema patterns rather than assuming uniform effects across all domains.

With respect to parenting styles, authoritative parenting was positively associated with positive emotion regulation. This finding is consistent with prior literature suggesting that parenting characterized by warmth, acceptance, and appropriate structure is associated with more adaptive emotion regulation in children (Tan et al., 2020; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). Rather than implying a causal influence, the present results suggest that authoritative parenting tends to co-occur with higher levels of adaptive emotion regulation strategies in children.

In contrast, permissive parenting was significantly and negatively associated with positive emotion regulation in the regression model. This pattern suggests that lower levels of structure and limit-setting are related to reduced use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. This finding is consistent with broader literature emphasizing that an emotionally supportive climate alone, without adequate guidance and boundaries, may be insufficient for the development of effective emotion regulation (Li et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Notably, authoritarian parenting was not significantly associated with positive emotion regulation in the present model.

Taken together, these findings indicate that both maternal schema-related cognitive–emotional patterns and parenting styles are associated with children's emotion regulation capacities. The results underscore the relevance of considering specific maladaptive schemas—particularly those related to emotional inhibition and blurred boundaries—as well as parenting practices that balance warmth with structure. However, because the data are correlational, it is also possible that children's persistent difficulties with emotion regulation contribute to increased parental stress or to the activation of maladaptive schemas, pointing to potentially bidirectional processes that cannot be disentangled in the current study.

The findings of this study indicate that mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles are associated with children's positive emotion regulation. Specifically, schemas such as emotional deprivation, abandonment, mistrust/abuse, and emotional inhibition were related to greater difficulties in adaptive emotion regulation. Conversely, authoritative parenting was positively associated with emotion regulation, whereas permissive parenting was negatively associated.

These results suggest that maternal emotional–cognitive patterns and parenting behaviors are meaningfully linked to children's emotional regulation capacities. While no causal conclusions can be drawn, the findings are consistent with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the role of parental emotional frameworks and parenting practices in children's emotional development.

Research Limitations and Suggestions

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design limits conclusions about causality and directionality. Second, all parental variables were assessed via self-report measures completed only by mothers, which may introduce shared method variance and social desirability bias. Third, the sample was limited to girls aged 9–11 years from Kerman, which restricts generalizability to other age groups, genders, and regions.

In addition, selection bias may have occurred because participation depended on school consent and parental willingness to complete questionnaires. The relatively large number of predictors relative to the sample size may also affect the stability of individual regression coefficients. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include multiple informants (e.g., fathers, teachers), and examine additional variables such as parenting stress, attachment security, and parental mental health as potential mechanisms underlying these associations.

From an applied perspective, the findings suggest that parenting-focused and schema-informed interventions may be relevant avenues for supporting children's emotion regulation; however, such implications should be viewed as hypothesis-generating rather than as evidence of intervention effectiveness.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude and appreciation to all participants.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently, with personal funding, and without financial support from any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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