



Maternal Early Maladaptive Schemas and Parenting Styles Associated with Maladaptive Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies in Girls Aged 9-11 Years

Shirin Alsadat Alavi^{1*}, Farshid Khosropour², Hasan Mohamadtehrani²

1. Ph.D Candidate in General Psychology, Zar.C., Islamic Azad University, Zarand, Iran
 2. Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Zar.C., Islamic Azad University, Zarand, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: shirin.alavi82@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies, including self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others, may place children at increased risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties. Maternal early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles are family-related factors that may be associated with these strategies. This cross-sectional correlational study was conducted among 181 girls aged 9-11 years and their mothers in the second educational district of Kerman, Iran. Participants were recruited from five elementary schools using multistage cluster sampling. The girls completed the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and mothers completed Young's Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire and Baumrind's Parenting Style Questionnaire. Maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation was calculated as the sum of the CERQ maladaptive subscales: self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and exploratory simultaneous multiple regression in SPSS version 26. Maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation was positively correlated with all maternal early maladaptive schemas and with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, and it was negatively correlated with authoritative parenting. The simultaneous regression model was statistically significant, $F(21, 159) = 34.04$, $p < .001$, $R = .904$, $R^2 = .818$, adjusted $R^2 = .794$. Variables with significant positive independent associations were mistrust / abuse, defectiveness / shame, failure, dependence / incompetence, vulnerability to harm or illness, subjugation, negativity / pessimism, punitiveness, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting showed a significant negative independent association. The findings suggest that girls' maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies are associated with both mothers' cognitive-emotional schema patterns and maternal parenting styles. Because of the cross-sectional design, school-clustered sampling, lack of covariate adjustment, and relatively large number of predictors, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory associations rather than causal or definitive predictive evidence.

Keywords: maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation; early maladaptive schemas; parenting styles; mothers; girls; cross-sectional study

1. Introduction

Children's social and emotional competencies are closely related to academic adjustment, peer relationships, psychological functioning, and everyday adaptation (Thummler et al., 2022). Middle childhood is a sensitive developmental period because children face increasing cognitive, social, and interpersonal demands. Girls aged 9-11 years are also approaching early adolescence, a period in which emotional awareness, peer comparison, family interaction, and self-evaluation become increasingly important. Difficulties in regulating negative emotions during this period may therefore have developmental significance, particularly because emotional and behavioral problems in children and adolescents have been linked to emotion-regulation difficulties and broader mental health outcomes (1, 2).

Emotion regulation refers to processes through which individuals monitor, evaluate, modify, tolerate, and express emotions in ways that are consistent with personal goals and situational demands (3-5). In the cognitive emotion regulation framework, individuals differ in the cognitive strategies they use after experiencing stressful or unpleasant events (6, 7). Some strategies, such as positive reappraisal or refocusing on planning, are generally considered more adaptive, whereas self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others are usually considered maladaptive or negative cognitive emotion regulation strategies (6). The present study focuses specifically on these maladaptive cognitive strategies rather than on general emotion regulation ability.

Family context is one of the most important developmental environments for children's emotional learning. Parenting behaviors provide children with repeated models of how emotions are interpreted, expressed, accepted, controlled, or punished. From early development onward, parents contribute to children's emotional competence by regulating arousal, responding to distress, and modeling emotional expression (8). Supportive parenting characterized by warmth, structure, acceptance, and guidance may help children label emotions, tolerate distress, and shift from repetitive negative thinking toward problem solving. In contrast, harsh control, criticism, emotional invalidation, or lack of adequate structure may

increase the likelihood of rumination, self-blame, catastrophizing, or external blaming (9-11).

Parenting styles are commonly conceptualized as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (12, 13). Authoritative parenting combines warmth and responsiveness with clear expectations and behavioral structure. Authoritarian parenting is marked by control, strictness, low emotional responsiveness, and obedience-oriented interaction. Permissive parenting is relatively warm but low in structure, monitoring, and consistent guidance. These patterns may create different emotional learning environments for children. Authoritative parenting may reduce maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation by offering both emotional validation and behavioral guidance, whereas authoritarian and permissive parenting may be associated with higher maladaptive regulation through different mechanisms: harshness and invalidation in the former, and insufficient guidance and boundaries in the latter.

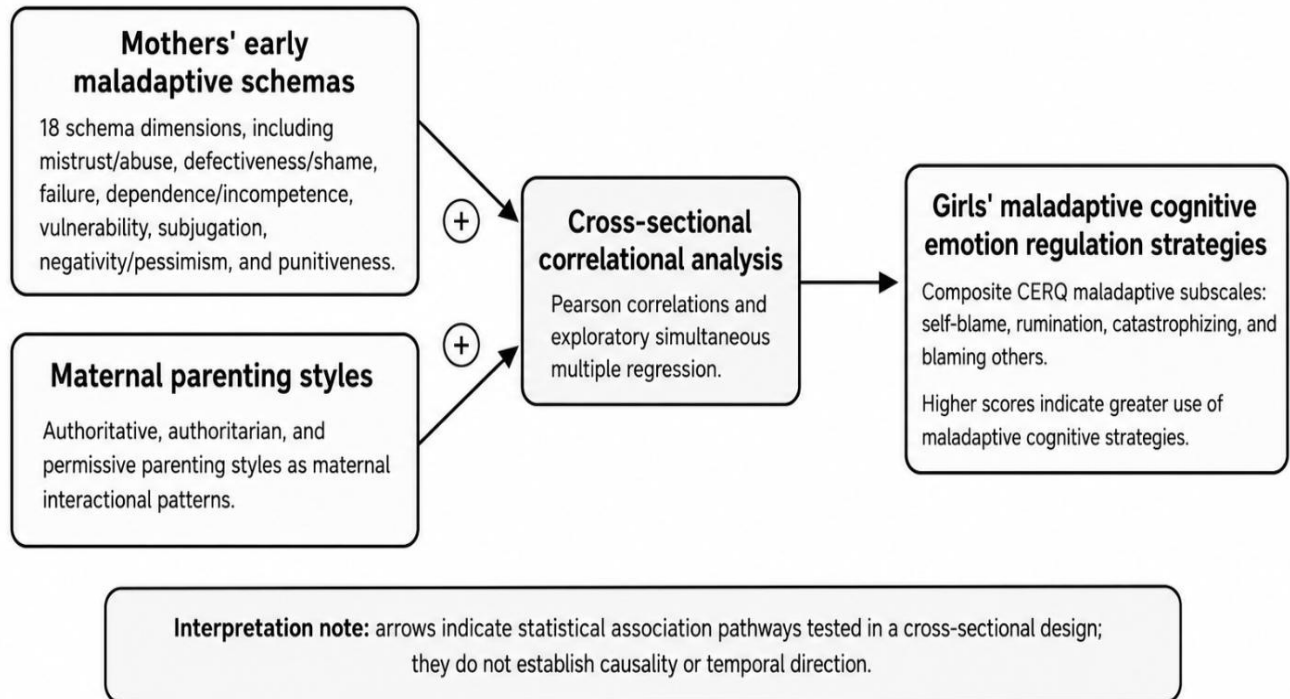
Another family-related factor that may shape the emotional climate of the family is the mother's early maladaptive schemas. Early maladaptive schemas are broad, stable cognitive-emotional patterns regarding the self, others, relationships, safety, competence, and emotional needs (14). They may influence how mothers interpret their child's emotional expressions and how they respond to distress, mistakes, dependency, fear, or anger. For example, mistrust/abuse and vulnerability schemas may lead to heightened threat perception, while punitiveness or defectiveness/shame schemas may increase critical or shame-based responses. These responses may indirectly affect the child's learning of cognitive emotion regulation strategies (15-17).

Although previous research has examined parenting, parental schemas, and child emotional outcomes (18, 19), fewer studies have considered maternal schema patterns and parenting styles together in relation to maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies in girls during middle childhood. Therefore, the present study examined whether mothers' early maladaptive schemas and maternal parenting styles were associated with maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies in girls aged 9-11 years. Because the study was cross-sectional, the aim was correlational and exploratory rather than causal or temporally predictive. The

conceptual framework of the study is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework for the association between maternal early maladaptive schemas, maternal parenting styles, and maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies in girls aged 9-11 years.



2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Design and Participants

This study used a cross-sectional correlational design. The target population consisted of girls aged 9-11 years enrolled in elementary schools in Kerman, Iran, and their mothers. The accessible population consisted of girls aged 9-11 years enrolled in elementary schools in the second educational district of Kerman. The analytic sample included 181 girls and their mothers. The mean age of the girls was 9.95 years (SD = 0.80; range = 9-11), and the mean age of the mothers was 35.38 years (SD = 2.28; range = 27-42). Because the study did not involve an intervention or longitudinal follow-up, all findings are interpreted as associations.

2.2. Sampling and Recruitment

A multistage cluster sampling method was used. First, the second educational district of Kerman city was selected. From a list of eight private and six public elementary schools in this district, five schools were randomly selected. After permission was obtained from school principals, eligible students were identified. Written informed consent was obtained from mothers before participation. The final sample size of 181 was determined according to the available population of eligible students and Morgan's sample size table. Given the number of predictors in the regression model and the absence of school-level modeling, the regression analysis was treated as exploratory and the stability of individual coefficients should be interpreted cautiously.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were: female sex, age between 9 and 11 years, enrollment in elementary schools in the second educational district of Kerman, living with the biological mother, and provision of written informed consent by mothers. Exclusion criteria were: diagnosis of a psychological disorder according to school health records, cognitive, speech, or learning difficulties that could interfere with questionnaire completion, incomplete questionnaires or withdrawal from the study, and major family disruption during the study period, such as parental divorce or parental death. The child outcome questionnaire was completed by the girls under research supervision, while all maternal questionnaires were completed by mothers. Fathers were not included as informants.

2.4. Measures

Maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies. The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) developed by Garnefski et al. (2001) was used to assess cognitive emotion regulation strategies (6). The instrument includes nine cognitive strategies. In the present study, the outcome variable was operationalized as a composite score based on four maladaptive subscales: self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others. To resolve scoring ambiguity, the composite score was defined as the sum of the relevant items/subscale scores rather than the item mean. Higher scores indicated greater use of maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies. The child outcome questionnaire was completed by the girls under research supervision. The Persian version has shown acceptable reliability in previous research, and Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .88. Because the present study did not conduct a separate age-specific validation or factor analysis of the CERQ in girls aged 9-11 years, measurement interpretation should remain cautious.

Maternal early maladaptive schemas. Mothers' early maladaptive schemas were assessed using the 90-item Young Early Maladaptive Schema Questionnaire based on schema therapy theory (14). The questionnaire assesses 18

early maladaptive schemas across five broader schema domains. Schema-level subscale scores were used in the analyses. Higher scores indicated stronger endorsement of each schema. Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .91 for the overall scale.

Maternal parenting styles. Parenting styles were measured using Baumrind's Parenting Style Questionnaire (13). The questionnaire assesses authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles. Higher scores indicate stronger endorsement of the relevant parenting style. Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .80.

2.5. Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic and study variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine bivariate associations between maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation and the predictor variables. A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was then conducted with 18 maternal early maladaptive schemas and three parenting styles as independent variables associated with maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation. Assumptions were assessed before regression analysis. Skewness values ranged from -0.319 to 0.178, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.857 to 0.067, suggesting no severe deviation from normality. Multicollinearity was evaluated using tolerance and variance inflation factor values; VIF values ranged from 1.25 to 2.25 and tolerance values ranged from 0.44 to 0.79. Outliers were screened before the main analyses. School-level clustering, additional covariates, and a full inter-predictor correlation matrix were not modeled; therefore, the regression coefficients should be viewed as exploratory rather than confirmatory.

3. Findings and Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics

A total of 181 girls aged 9-11 years and their mothers participated in the study. Mothers' educational level and employment status are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic	Category	n (%) or M (SD)
Girl age	Years	9.95 (0.80)
Mother age	Years	35.38 (2.28)
Mother education	Diploma or lower	24 (13.3)
Mother education	Associate degree	18 (9.9)
Mother education	Bachelor's degree	123 (68.0)
Mother education	Master's degree	14 (7.7)
Mother education	Doctoral degree	2 (1.1)
Mother employment	Employed	89 (49.2)
Mother employment	Homemaker	92 (50.8)

3.2. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation, maternal early maladaptive schemas, and

parenting styles are presented in Table 2. The mean score for maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation was 44.02 (SD = 10.40).

Table 2

Means and standard deviations of study variables

Variable	n	M	SD
Maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation	181	44.02	10.40
Emotional deprivation	181	14.90	3.26
Abandonment	181	14.55	3.36
Mistrust/abuse	181	15.19	3.15
Social isolation	181	15.51	3.10
Defectiveness/shame	181	14.86	3.41
Failure	181	14.83	3.34
Dependence/incompetence	181	15.27	3.43
Vulnerability to harm or illness	181	15.50	3.18
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	181	14.88	3.28
Subjugation	181	14.45	3.48
Self-sacrifice	181	14.43	3.82
Emotional inhibition	181	15.42	3.46
Unrelenting standards	181	14.69	3.33
Entitlement	181	14.94	3.41
Insufficient self-control	181	15.03	3.20
Approval-seeking	181	14.76	3.14
Negativity/pessimism	181	15.24	3.60
Punitiveness	181	14.79	3.76
Authoritative parenting	181	23.96	6.60
Authoritarian parenting	181	27.09	6.85
Permissive parenting	181	26.04	6.60

3.3. Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlations showed that maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation was positively associated with all maternal early maladaptive schemas and with authoritarian

and permissive parenting styles. It was negatively associated with authoritative parenting (Table 3). Because all reported correlations were moderate in size and the sample size was 181, all bivariate associations reported in Table 3 were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3

Bivariate correlations with maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation

Predictor	r	p
Emotional deprivation	.49	< .001
Abandonment	.32	< .001
Mistrust/abuse	.50	< .001
Social isolation	.35	< .001
Defectiveness/shame	.54	< .001
Failure	.57	< .001
Dependence/incompetence	.45	< .001
Vulnerability to harm or illness	.39	< .001
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	.41	< .001
Subjugation	.48	< .001
Self-sacrifice	.36	< .001
Emotional inhibition	.43	< .001
Unrelenting standards	.33	< .001
Entitlement	.48	< .001
Insufficient self-control	.42	< .001
Approval-seeking	.46	< .001
Negativity/pessimism	.50	< .001
Punitiveness	.49	< .001
Authoritative parenting	-.34	< .001
Authoritarian parenting	.62	< .001
Permissive parenting	.45	< .001

3.4. Multiple Regression Analysis

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles were independently associated with girls' maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(21, 159) = 34.04, p < .001$. The multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .904$, and the coefficient of determination was $R^2 = .818$. The adjusted R^2 was .794, indicating that the independent variables explained approximately 79.4% of the variance after adjustment for

model complexity. Because the model included 21 variables and did not include covariates or clustered standard errors, the individual coefficients should be interpreted as exploratory and require replication.

As shown in Table 4, variables with significant positive independent associations included mistrust/abuse, defectiveness/shame, failure, dependence/incompetence, vulnerability to harm or illness, subjugation, negativity/pessimism, punitiveness, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting. Authoritative parenting was the only variable with a significant negative independent association.

Table 4

Simultaneous multiple regression for maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-16.45	3.92	--	-4.19	< .001
Emotional deprivation	0.11	0.13	.03	0.82	.409
Abandonment	0.04	0.12	.01	0.38	.703
Mistrust/abuse	0.49	0.13	.15	3.62	< .001
Social isolation	0.03	0.13	.01	0.24	.711
Defectiveness/shame	0.40	0.13	.13	3.05	.003
Failure	0.44	0.13	.14	3.25	.001
Dependence/incompetence	0.53	0.11	.17	4.50	< .001
Vulnerability to harm or illness	0.47	0.12	.14	3.82	< .001
Enmeshment/undeveloped self	0.02	0.12	.00	0.18	.856

Subjugation	0.33	0.12	.11	2.73	.007
Self-sacrifice	-0.12	0.10	-.04	-1.18	.239
Emotional inhibition	-0.03	0.13	-.01	-0.27	.786
Unrelenting standards	-0.13	0.12	-.04	-1.09	.276
Entitlement	0.24	0.12	.08	1.92	.056
Insufficient self-control	-0.16	0.14	-.05	-1.18	.239
Approval-seeking	0.20	0.14	.06	1.47	.141
Negativity/pessimism	0.35	0.12	.12	2.88	.005
Punitiveness	0.28	0.11	.10	2.50	.013
Authoritative parenting	-0.27	0.06	-.17	-4.43	< .001
Authoritarian parenting	0.28	0.07	.18	3.73	< .001
Permissive parenting	0.23	0.06	.14	3.60	< .001

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized coefficient. Model summary: R = .904, R² = .818, adjusted R² = .794, F(21, 159) = 34.04, p < .001. Higher scores indicate greater use of maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

4. Discussion

The present study examined maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies in girls aged 9-11 years in relation to mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles. The results showed that several maternal schemas and parenting styles were significantly associated with children's use of self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and blaming others. The findings should be interpreted as exploratory correlational evidence, not as proof that maternal schemas or parenting styles caused the girls' emotion regulation patterns.

The strongest positive independent associations were observed for authoritarian parenting, dependence/incompetence, mistrust/abuse, failure, vulnerability to harm or illness, and permissive parenting. These findings suggest that girls may report greater use of maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies when the maternal emotional environment is characterized by higher perceived threat, incompetence, failure expectations, mistrust, or harsh and insufficiently supportive parenting patterns. This interpretation is consistent with schema theory, which proposes that early maladaptive schemas shape individuals' interpretations of emotional events, interpersonal behavior, and perceived safety or competence (14).

Mistrust/abuse, vulnerability to harm or illness, and negativity/pessimism may be particularly relevant to the emotional climate of the family. Mothers with stronger threat-related schemas may respond to the child's distress with heightened worry, suspicion, or negative anticipation. Such responses may teach the child to interpret negative events as dangerous, uncontrollable, or personally

threatening. In turn, the child may become more prone to rumination, catastrophizing, or blaming others when dealing with unpleasant experiences. Similar mechanisms have been discussed in studies on parental schemas and intergenerational emotional adjustment (16, 17).

Schemas such as defectiveness/shame, failure, dependence/incompetence, subjugation, and punitiveness may also influence how mothers respond to children's mistakes, dependence, anger, or sadness. A mother with stronger punitiveness or defectiveness/shame schemas may be more likely to interpret negative emotion as weakness, disobedience, or failure, and may respond in ways that increase self-blame or shame in the child. A mother with stronger dependence/incompetence or failure schemas may unintentionally communicate uncertainty or low expectations, which may strengthen the child's negative self-evaluation. These pathways are theoretically plausible, but longitudinal and observational studies are needed to test them directly.

Parenting styles showed a clear pattern. Authoritarian and permissive parenting showed positive independent associations with maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation, whereas authoritative parenting showed a negative independent association. Authoritarian parenting may contribute to maladaptive regulation by emphasizing obedience, control, and criticism rather than emotional understanding. In such a context, children may learn to suppress negative emotion, blame themselves, or interpret emotional distress as unacceptable. Permissive parenting may operate differently: although it may involve warmth, insufficient boundaries and limited emotional coaching may leave the child without effective strategies for stopping rumination or catastrophizing. In contrast, authoritative

parenting combines warmth, structure, and guidance, which may help children identify emotions, tolerate distress, and use more adaptive cognitive strategies (9, 10, 13).

The high explained variance of the regression model requires caution. Although the reported R^2 indicates that the selected variables were strongly associated with the outcome, the model included 21 variables measured through questionnaire data. This increases the risk of overfitting, shared method variance, and instability of individual regression coefficients. Therefore, the model should be viewed as a preliminary exploratory association model that needs replication in larger and more diverse samples, preferably using longitudinal designs, multi-informant data, clustered or multilevel methods, and control variables such as socioeconomic status, maternal mental health, school type, and child temperament.

5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that maladaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies in girls aged 9-11 years are associated with both mothers' early maladaptive schemas and maternal parenting styles. Higher levels of selected maternal schemas and higher authoritarian or permissive parenting were associated with greater use of maladaptive cognitive strategies, whereas authoritative parenting was associated with lower use of such strategies. These results support the relevance of family-based and schema-informed perspectives for understanding children's emotional functioning, but they do not establish causal direction or stable temporal prediction. Future studies should test these pathways using longitudinal, multi-informant, covariate-adjusted, and model-based approaches.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causality and temporal direction. Second, maternal schemas and parenting styles were measured only through maternal self-report, which may introduce social desirability bias and shared method variance. Third, the sample was limited to girls aged 9-11 years from schools in one educational district of Kerman; therefore, generalization to boys, other age groups, and other regions should be made cautiously. Fourth, the analysis did not model school-level clustering despite the

multistage cluster sampling procedure. Fifth, the regression model included a relatively large number of variables in relation to the sample size, and the high R^2 may partly reflect overfitting or overlap among related constructs. Sixth, potential confounders such as socioeconomic status, maternal mental health, child temperament, family structure, and school type were not entered as covariates. Seventh, the study did not report a separate age-specific validation or factor analysis of the CERQ for girls aged 9-11 years, so future studies should verify the measurement structure of the child outcome in this age group. Future studies should use longitudinal designs, include fathers and teachers as informants, examine mediating mechanisms such as parenting stress and attachment security, and use structural equation modeling or path analysis to test a theoretically specified model.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed substantially to the study and to manuscript development, and all approved the final version.

Declaration

This manuscript was edited for English language, structure, formatting, and reporting consistency. The authors remain responsible for the scientific content, data, and interpretations.

Transparency Statement

The data are not publicly available because they contain participant-level information from children and families. De-identified data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to ethical restrictions.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Kerman Branch (IR.IAU.KERMAN.REC.1401.055). Written informed consent was obtained from mothers before participation. Child participation was voluntary.

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