

# Predicting Tendency Toward Risky Behaviors Based on Emotion Regulation Difficulties and Mentalization in Children of Divorce: The Mediating Role of Post Traumatic Growth and the Moderating Role of Family Communication Patterns

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the paragraph discussing risky behaviors, the manuscript combines heterogeneous constructs such as “cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviors, aggression and violence, as well as suicidal thoughts or attempts” under a single latent category without theoretical differentiation. The authors should clarify whether these behaviors were conceptualized as a unidimensional construct or whether differential pathways were expected for internalizing versus externalizing risky behaviors.

The rationale for selecting only “children of divorce” as the target population remains underdeveloped. The manuscript repeatedly asserts that this group is uniquely vulnerable, but it does not sufficiently distinguish the psychological mechanisms in divorced families from those in other adverse family conditions such as parental conflict without divorce, bereavement, or family violence. A clearer justification for population specificity is necessary.

The conceptualization of mentalization requires refinement. The sentence “This ability is recognized as an important transdiagnostic factor in mental health” is theoretically broad but insufficiently integrated into the proposed structural model. The manuscript should explain more explicitly why mentalization was hypothesized to predict risky behaviors specifically through post-traumatic growth rather than through emotion regulation or attachment-related pathways.

The literature review insufficiently addresses the overlap between emotion regulation and mentalization. Because both constructs involve affective understanding and regulation capacities, the possibility of multicollinearity or conceptual redundancy should be theoretically discussed before model testing. The authors should explain why these variables were treated as distinct predictors rather than components of a higher-order socio-emotional functioning construct.

The statement “family communication patterns may play a moderating role in the relationships between difficulties in emotion regulation, mentalization, post-traumatic growth, and tendencies toward risky behaviors” introduces moderation hypotheses too broadly, yet only two interaction terms were statistically tested. The discrepancy between the theoretical framework and tested model should be clarified.

The manuscript reports acceptable skewness and kurtosis values and a non-significant Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for all variables. However, with a sample size of 300, reliance on K–S testing alone is insufficient. The authors should additionally report Mardia’s coefficient or robust estimation procedures to support multivariate normality assumptions for path analysis.

Table 2 presents strong intercorrelations among predictors, yet the manuscript only briefly reports VIF values below 1.61. Because emotion regulation difficulties, mentalization, and family communication patterns are theoretically overlapping constructs, the authors should provide a more detailed discussion of discriminant validity and potential suppression effects within the structural model.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The sampling procedure raises concerns regarding representativeness and external validity. The manuscript states that participants were recruited using purposive sampling through “active social media networks in Babol.” This recruitment method likely biased the sample toward adolescents with internet access and higher digital literacy. The authors should discuss how online recruitment may have systematically excluded more vulnerable subgroups.

The ethical procedure is inadequately described given the involvement of minors aged 15–18 years. Although the manuscript states that “informed consent was obtained from all participants,” there is no mention of parental consent, legal guardianship procedures, or institutional ethical approval code. This omission is particularly problematic considering the sensitive nature of risky behavior questions.

The manuscript reports that “missing data were minimal and were corrected using mean substitution.” Mean substitution is widely recognized as a statistically weak approach because it reduces variance and may bias correlations. The authors should justify this decision and preferably reanalyze the data using more robust methods such as multiple imputation or expectation-maximization algorithms.

The justification for the final sample size is incomplete. The manuscript cites Cohen (1988) and mentions a “medium effect size (0.15)” but does not specify the statistical model, number of predictors, or estimated parameters used in the power analysis. Since structural equation and moderation models require larger samples, the adequacy of  $N=300$  should be explicitly justified.

The psychometric section lacks evidence of construct validity within the present sample. Although previous studies are cited for reliability and validity of the instruments, the manuscript does not report Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, composite reliability, or confirmatory factor analysis results for the current participants. This omission weakens confidence in the measurement model.

The reporting of the Mentalization Questionnaire is inconsistent. The manuscript refers to the “Mentalization Questionnaire (MZQ)” but later cites “Mentalization Scale (MentS)” in the references. The authors should clarify whether the instrument used was the MZQ or MentS, as these are distinct measures with different psychometric properties.

The Results section reports that “all scores fell within the  $\pm 3$  standard deviation range, and no significant outliers were detected.” However, multivariate outliers were not assessed. Since path analysis is sensitive to multivariate non-normality, the authors should report Mahalanobis distance statistics or another multivariate screening procedure.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.