




# The Causal Model of Cognitive Emotion Regulation: Maladaptive Early Schemas and Parenting Styles

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to predict adolescents' cognitive emotion regulation strategies based on the mothers' maladaptive early schemas and their parenting styles.

**Methods and Materials** This descriptive correlational study involved a randomly selected cluster sample of 406 high school students (comprising 200 girls and 206 boys) from Tabriz. Data were collected using three scales: Young's Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF), the short form of the Persian version of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for adults (CERQ-P), and the Family as a Social Context Scale by Skinner. The collected data were analyzed using correlational statistics and structural equation modeling.

**Findings:** The results confirmed the role of mothers' maladaptive early schemas and their parenting styles in the formation and application of their children's cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

**Conclusion:** The findings of this study indicated that when parents' schemas are adjusted, it leads to the selection of effective parenting methods, which in turn increases adolescents' use of positive cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

**Keywords:** Emotion, Cognitive Emotion Regulation, Maladaptive Early Schemas, Parenting Styles

## 1. Introduction

In the realm of emotion, various concepts can be discussed, with the most important being emotion regulation. According to Bridge, Marghi, and Reiff (2001),

emotion regulation is considered a set of processes that an individual may use to invoke, maintain, control, or change a positive or negative emotion. Dahl (2001) views emotion regulation as an individual's effort to manage emotions for a specific goal. Emotion regulation, as a complex and

multifaceted phenomenon, develops through the integration of numerous biological and behavioral processes (Thompson & Goodvin, 2007). These internal and external processes operate to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional actions, especially when there are obstacles to achieving goals. Internal and external processes can be viewed as the physiological, cognitive, behavioral, and social processes of humans that represent a person's unique responses in relation to themselves and their surroundings (Thompson, 1994).

Garnefski (2001) introduces strategies related to cognitive emotion regulation, identifying how individuals react and act in stressful situations (Garnefski et al., 2001). According to Garnefski and Kraaij (2006), cognitive emotion regulation strategies are self-awareness mechanisms used by individuals to cope with adverse conditions (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006). Many researchers believe that cognitive emotion regulation strategies have a special place in diagnostic and therapeutic activities in the field of clinical psychology. According to these researchers, individuals with emotional disorders use different strategies when dealing with adverse conditions. These strategies include self-blame, blaming others, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reappraisal, perspective-taking, and catastrophizing (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006).

The development and initiation of emotion regulation occur during childhood, which leads to the ability to control one's own and others' emotional information processing, contributing to both internal and external success in daily life (Crandall et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2007; Silk et al., 2003). Research has shown that emotion regulation has a positive effect on mental health and all aspects of an individual's life. Therefore, if individuals can regulate their emotions, they achieve a better quality of life. Recognizing the antecedents of cognitive emotion regulation seems essential. Research generally indicates that these patterns are largely learned and influenced by familial, social, and personality factors. According to researchers, cognitive emotion regulation strategies are significantly influenced by parental behaviors (Aghaziarati et al., 2023; Aghaziarati & Nejatifar, 2023; Azizi et al., 2023; Cavicchioli et al., 2023; Cui, 2023; Ruan et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have examined the role of family-related factors as contributors to individual vulnerability. The initial parent-child relationship plays a crucial role in the normal development of the child, and deviations from the development of dependency behaviors and lack of parental

support and care predispose children to major problems in properly controlling emotions in adulthood (Harris & Curtin, 2002).

One of the issues related to the initial parent-child relationship is early maladaptive schemas. Young (1999) proposed a schema-based model to explain the parent-child relationship and psychological and emotional pathology. In recent years, Young's model has been extensively used to address issues related to emotion and its regulation. He described schemas as pervasive and damaging emotional patterns that form early in development and recur throughout life (Young & Questionnaire, 2001; Young, 1999). These schemas are broad and pervasive themes composed of memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations about oneself and one's relationships with others (Thimm, 2010).

Early maladaptive schemas form the basis of an individual's cognitions and interact with negative life events and psychological stressors. When the deepest cognitive structures, schemas, are activated, they generate levels of emotion that directly or indirectly lead to various forms of psychological and emotional disturbances, such as depression, anxiety, and interpersonal conflict (van der Linde et al., 2023). These schemas typically stem from unmet basic needs, especially emotional needs, during early life. When maladaptive schemas are activated, individuals often experience high levels of emotions, including intense anger, anxiety, depression, or guilt (Ammari et al., 2023; Hadiyan et al., 2023). Additionally, these schemas draw individuals toward events that align with their schemas, making changing these schemas difficult. Inevitably and paradoxically, schemas lead adults back to the adverse conditions of childhood, which are often harmful. Maladaptive schemas create biases in interpreting events. These biases manifest in interpersonal psychopathology as misunderstandings, distorted attitudes, incorrect assumptions, and unrealistic expectations in relationships. Since schemas persist throughout life, they affect how individuals relate to themselves and others (Ayranci, 2015; Stiles, 2004).

Considering the aforementioned points, early maladaptive schemas can directly and profoundly affect cognitive emotion regulation. They may also have an important indirect role by influencing parenting styles. Psychologists have long asserted that parental behavior significantly impacts the formation of a child's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions (Harris & Curtin, 2002). Among the family variables that have received considerable attention from researchers and experts are parenting styles and

parenting methods. The set of attitudes, actions, and verbal and non-verbal expressions of parents that define the nature of parent-child interactions in various situations are known as parenting styles. Skinner et al. (2005) classified parenting styles into six types: warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support, and coercion (Skinner et al., 2005).

There is a positive relationship between parental warmth and sensitivity towards children with emotion regulation and attentional control (Dennis, 2006), self-esteem (Hague, 1988; Baumeister, 2000), having intrinsic values for oneself (Baumrind, 1991), inner happiness (Chang & Shaw, 2016), and a positive relationship between coercion and violent behaviors in adulthood, especially with partners (Chang & Shaw, 2016; Laurin et al., 2015).

Considering the importance of cognitive emotion regulation in psychology and the significant role of family and parenting styles in creating emotional and behavioral disorders, and based on the prior research (Otterpohl & Wild, 2015; Turpyn et al., 2015), this study aims to explore the causal model of how mothers' early maladaptive schemas and their parenting styles affect their children's cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This descriptive correlational study employs structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM is a multivariate analysis technique that allows researchers to simultaneously test a set of regression equations and confirmatory factor analysis. In this study, early maladaptive schemas are considered exogenous latent variables, cognitive emotion regulation as endogenous latent variables, and parenting styles as mediating latent variables.

The statistical population includes all high school students enrolled in the academic year 2023-2024. The research sample consists of 480 male and female students from the first to third grades of high school in Tabriz, selected through multistage cluster sampling from eight schools. After several follow-ups, 412 completed questionnaires were returned from parents and children, and 406 questionnaires (200 girls and 206 boys) were ready for statistical analysis.

After obtaining permission from school authorities, classrooms were randomly selected across grades and disciplines. In each class, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured students of the confidentiality of their responses. Approximately two-thirds

of the students in each class were randomly selected to complete the questionnaires. Students were informed that they could contact the researcher via email in August 2024 to learn about the study results.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Early Maladaptive Schemas

Young's Schema Questionnaire-Short Form (YSQ-SF), developed by Young and Brown (1999), consists of 75 items measuring 15 early maladaptive schemas (emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability, mistrust/abuse, social isolation/alienation, defectiveness/shame, failure, dependence/incompetence, vulnerability, enmeshment/undeveloped self, subjugation, self-sacrifice, unrelenting standards, entitlement/grandiosity, and insufficient self-control/self-discipline). Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale (completely true, mostly true, mostly false, completely false). The score for each schema is obtained by summing the scores of the five related items, ranging from 5 to 30. The first comprehensive study of the psychometric properties of this questionnaire was conducted by Schmidt et al. (1995), showing alpha coefficients ranging from 0.83 (for enmeshment/undeveloped self) to 0.96 (for defectiveness/shame) and test-retest reliability coefficients in a non-clinical population between 0.50 and 0.82. This questionnaire has demonstrated good convergent and discriminant validity with psychological distress, self-worth, cognitive vulnerability to depression, and personality disorder symptoms. The Persian version was translated and validated by Ahi in 2006, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.97 for females and 0.98 for males (Hadiyan et al., 2023).

#### 2.2.2. Cognitive Emotion Regulation

Developed by Garnefski in the Netherlands, this multidimensional tool identifies cognitive coping strategies after experiencing negative events or situations. It assesses individuals' thoughts following negative experiences and is applicable for individuals aged 12 and above (both normal and clinical populations). This questionnaire consists of nine subscales: self-blame, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, catastrophizing, and blaming others. Scores range from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always) on a 5-point scale. Yusefi (2006) assessed the validity and reliability of this scale in Iran, finding Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.87 for negative emotion regulation

strategies, 0.83 for positive emotion regulation strategies, and 0.81 for the total scale. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.76 (Khatibi et al., 2023).

2.2.3. Parenting Styles

To assess parenting styles, this scale by Family as a Social Context Scale Skinner, Johnson, and Schneider (2005) contains 48 items and six subscales representing six main dimensions of parenting: warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support, and coercion. This multidimensional tool has two forms: one completed by parents, reflecting their assessment of their parenting styles, and the other by children, reflecting their perspective on their parents' styles (Skinner et al., 2005). This study used the child-completed

form, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each dimension as follows: warmth (0.85), rejection (0.82), structure (0.79), chaos (0.78), autonomy support (0.82), and coercion (0.82). The overall alpha coefficient was 0.83, indicating good reliability. Content validity was achieved through translation and back-translation by experts.

2.3. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using correlational statistics and structural equation modeling.

3. Findings and Results

The descriptive statistics results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Emotion Regulation Dimensions*

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-blame	13.328	3.700
Acceptance	14.109	3.462
Rumination	14.682	3.215
Positive refocusing	15.437	2.996
Refocus on planning	16.386	2.727
Positive reappraisal	15.886	3.123
Perspective-taking	14.753	3.002
Catastrophizing	13.494	3.139
Blaming others	12.328	3.926
Warmth	34.770	18.368
Rejection	23.588	22.652
Structure	29.751	5.448
Chaos	21.611	5.922
Autonomy support	29.650	5.494
Coercion	24.601	6.134
Disconnection and rejection	22.209	4.330
Impaired autonomy and performance	31.227	5.644
Impaired limits	26.190	4.267
Other-directedness	22.017	5.071
Over-vigilance and inhibition	25.343	3.459

To examine the assumption of normality of score distributions, skewness and kurtosis indices can be used. When the values of these two statistics are between -1 and +1, the distribution is normal. According to the results, the

research variables are normal; therefore, using structural equations is permissible.

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients among the main variables of the study.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Matrix Among the Main Subscales of the Study*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
1	1																			
2	.231**	1																		
3	.397**	.421**	1																	
4	.041	-.022	.000	1																
5	.096	.082	.216**	.649**	1															
6	.061	-.014	.037	.643**	.620**	1														





For the analysis of the relationships in the conceptual model, the structural equation modeling (SEM) method was used. SEM is a method that examines and tests the interdependent and simultaneous relationships of multiple variables. In this study, the measurement model and the structural function model were used. The measurement model applies confirmatory factor analysis to determine the contribution of each item in measuring the latent construct, and the structural model relates to the relationships between latent factors. Overall, SEM provides more accurate estimates of causal relationships by incorporating measurement errors in the model. According to this model, early maladaptive schemas are the independent variable measured using five observed variables: disconnection and rejection, impaired autonomy and performance, impaired limits, other-directedness, and over-vigilance and inhibition. These schemas directly affect parenting styles and directly and indirectly influence cognitive emotion regulation. Parenting styles, the mediating variable, are measured using

observed variables: warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support, and coercion, and they directly impact cognitive emotion regulation. Therefore, the study's model includes three main latent variables measured by 18 observed variables.

The fit indices of the developed model are presented. In examining the fit of the main model, in addition to previous fit indices, Parsimony-Adjusted Normed Fit Index (PNFI), Parsimony-Adjusted Comparative Fit Index (PCFI), and Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) were used. As shown, the indices CMIN/DF, PNFI, PCFI, GFI, NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA with values of 2.271, 0.707, 0.748, 0.924, 0.902, 0.903, 0.924, 0.905, 0.923, and 0.037, respectively, all confirm the model's goodness of fit. After reviewing the fit indices, the relationships between variables and their significance were examined. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the regression weights of observed and latent variables.

**Table 3**

*Regression Weights of Independent and Dependent Variables*

Relationship	Regression Weight	Standardized Regression Weight	Standard Error	Critical Ratio (C.R)	Significance Level
Early Maladaptive Schemas -> Parenting Styles	-8.861	-0.496	4.069	-2.183	0.029
Early Maladaptive Schemas -> Cognitive Emotion Regulation	1.815	0.545	0.866	2.095	0.036
Parenting Styles -> Cognitive Emotion Regulation	0.132	0.171	0.017	1.888	0.041

Based on the results presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**, early maladaptive schemas of mothers have a negative impact on parenting styles at the 95% confidence level. Early maladaptive schemas of mothers positively influence cognitive emotion regulation at the 95% confidence level. Finally, parenting styles positively influence students' cognitive emotion regulation at the 95% confidence level.

**4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study aimed to propose a model of academic engagement considering classroom perception and the mediating role of motivational beliefs. The results of the measurement model indicated that the observed variables adequately represent the latent variable, and the model has a good fit. Regarding the structural model and the overall model, the results showed that the model had a good fit. Moreover, early maladaptive schemas have a direct and

indirect relationship with cognitive emotion regulation. Based on the fitted model, the standardized parameters of the tested model received acceptable values, with the path coefficient between early maladaptive schemas and cognitive emotion regulation being 0.54, between early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles being 0.49, and between parenting styles and cognitive emotion regulation being 0.17. The factor loadings received acceptable values, indicating that parenting styles mediate the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and cognitive emotion regulation. Additionally, the fit indices showed satisfactory values. The RMSEA index was 0.037, which is less than 0.05, and other goodness-of-fit indices, including NFI, AGFI, and GFI, were greater than 0.90, indicating the model's good fit.

The findings from this model showed that among the seven subscales forming the latent variable of cognitive emotion regulation—self-blame, acceptance, rumination,

planning, perspective-taking, catastrophizing, and blaming others—rumination had the highest weight in determining the latent variable of cognitive emotion regulation. Following this, catastrophizing, self-blame, acceptance, blaming others, planning, and perspective-taking, respectively, had the highest to the lowest weights in determining the cognitive emotion regulation variable. The results obtained using structural equation modeling showed that the exogenous variables of early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles have a significant direct effect on cognitive emotion regulation. Additionally, the results showed that the relationship between early maladaptive schemas and cognitive emotion regulation is mediated by parenting styles. In this model, all regression weights are statistically significant. Concerning the direct relationship between early maladaptive schemas and cognitive emotion regulation, the findings are consistent with previous studies (Dadomo et al., 2016; Dadomo et al., 2018; Fassbinder et al., 2016; Schaich et al., 2020; Sepehri & Kiani, 2020; Simons et al., 2018; Talee-Baktash et al., 2013; Yousefi, 2015).

The overall research model also showed that mothers' early maladaptive schemas negatively impact parenting styles. The relationship between mothers' early maladaptive schemas and parenting styles has been confirmed in many previous studies (Ayrancı, 2015; Rezaeian Bilondi et al., 2016; Shahamat et al., 2010; Thimm, 2010; Zabeti & Jafari, 2018). The impact of mothers' early maladaptive schemas on parenting styles is direct. Moreover, the effect of mothers' early maladaptive schemas on subscales of parenting styles varies, as these schemas positively impact parenting styles of rejection, chaos, and coercion, while negatively impacting parenting styles of autonomy, regulation, and warmth.

Mothers' early maladaptive schemas positively influence cognitive emotion regulation. The relationship between mothers' early maladaptive schemas and cognitive emotion regulation has been confirmed in many previous studies (Akbari et al., 2020; Dadomo et al., 2016; Sepehri & Kiani, 2020; Simons et al., 2018; Talee-Baktash et al., 2013; Vaseghi et al., 2022; Yakm et al., 2019; Yousefi, 2015; Zabihollahzadeh et al., 2019). Mothers' early maladaptive schemas directly and indirectly affect students' cognitive emotion regulation. Generally, mothers' early maladaptive schemas have a direct positive impact and an indirect negative impact on students' cognitive emotion regulation. Since the direct effect is significantly greater than the indirect effect, the overall impact is positive. The impact of mothers' early maladaptive schemas on subscales of cognitive emotion regulation is also notable, with all impacts

being positive. Mothers' early maladaptive schemas have the greatest to the least impact on rumination, catastrophizing, self-blame, acceptance, blaming others, planning, and perspective-taking, respectively.

Ultimately, parenting styles have a positive impact on students' cognitive emotion regulation. The relationship between parenting styles and cognitive emotion regulation has been confirmed in many previous studies (Cui, 2023; Hosseini & Davari, 2021; Karaer & Akdemir, 2019; Keleynikov et al., 2023; Mahdiyar et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2007; Nathania et al., 2022; Qiu & Shum, 2022; Speidel et al., 2020; Van Lissa et al., 2019). Parenting styles directly affect students' cognitive emotion regulation. Examining the impact of parenting styles on subscales of cognitive emotion regulation indirectly showed that all impacts were positive, with the most significant to the least impact on rumination, catastrophizing, self-blame, acceptance, blaming others, planning, and perspective-taking, respectively.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

The findings of this research provide a deeper understanding of students' experiences in educational environments. These findings offer valuable information for individuals, families, educators, and counseling centers. For instance, based on these findings, parents and educators can arrange educational environments so that individuals feel free to choose goals, perform behaviors, and comply with educational norms and standards. This sense of independence can help provide opportunities for success and timely feedback, facilitating cognitive emotion regulation, positively impacting mental health. Therefore, parents are expected to emphasize participatory, caring, and supportive behaviors, such as giving choices, providing opportunities for success, offering informational feedback, reducing psychological pressures, not forcing children to accept their demands, encouraging independent thinking, affirming competency, and allowing participation in decision-making. Based on the findings, it is recommended that courses be held to inform counselors about family factors influencing cognitive emotion regulation. These courses can enhance their psychological treatment of various problems. Additionally, structured parenting workshops and autonomy support can be taught to parents. For example, parents can foster positive family communication, such as dialogue, free thinking, freedom of expression, encouraging independent thinking, affirming competency, and allowing participation

in decision-making, to create favorable outcomes, including cognitive emotion regulation, for their children.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the sample was limited to female students with conduct disorder in Kermanshah, reducing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data collection was conducted using questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias.

Therefore, future studies should consider including students from other grades and cities and also include male students. Moreover, controlling for factors such as parental mental health and genetic predispositions to conduct disorder, which could influence the study results, is recommended for future research.

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### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

### 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.

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### Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally.

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