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Investigation of the Mediating Roles of Children's Emotion Regulation and Emotional Lability/Negativity in the Relationship between Parents' Coping with Children's Negative Emotions and Their Behavioral Problems

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Extended Abstract

Aim

Mental health issues affect approximately 10 to 20 percent of children and adolescents worldwide (Kieling et al., 2011), leading to long-term negative economic and social impacts on society (Rivenbark et al., 2018). Among the most common mental health concerns in young people are externalizing behavior problems, characterized by negative behaviors that cause distress and harm to others, adversely affecting the individual's environment and those around them (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). One predictor of externalizing behavior problems is difficulty with emotion regulation (McLaughlin et al., 2011). Environmental factors also play a significant role in the development of emotional and behavioral issues in children. Parental responses to their children's emotions, in particular, have been shown to significantly influence the development of both internalizing (Alati et al., 2020) and externalizing (Davis et al., 2021) disorders. Research indicates that parental strategies for managing children's negative emotions are associated with children's emotion regulation abilities and emotional instability, both of which are linked to various internalizing and externalizing disorders. This suggests that children's emotion regulation abilities and their emotional lability/negativity may mediate the relationship between parental responses to children's emotions and the development of emotional and behavioral problems. Consequently, the hypothesis of the present study was that parental strategies for coping with children's negative emotions are directly and indirectly related to children's behavioral problems through their emotion regulation abilities and emotional lability/negativity.

Methodology

This study employed a correlational design. The statistical population included all boys and girls aged 7 to 12 years old attending schools in Karaj, Iran, in 2019. From this population, 360 boys and girls were randomly selected from District 3 of the Karaj Department of Education through a multistage random sampling method. The sampling process was as follows: first, District 3 was randomly chosen from among the four educational districts in Karaj; next, three boys' schools and three girls' schools within District 3 were randomly selected. Finally, three classes from each school were chosen at random, and questionnaires were distributed to the parents of the students.

The initial sample consisted of 360 participants, but eight questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses. The inclusion criteria were: enrollment in elementary school, an age range of 7 to 12 years, and parents' literacy. The exclusion criterion was lack of parental consent to participate in the study. Eleven parents did not respond to the questionnaires, resulting in data from 341 participants being analyzed. Written consent for participation was obtained from the parents. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997), Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC) (Shields &

Cicchetti, 1997), and Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES) (Fabes et al, 1990) were completed by the mothers. SPSS software version 26 and the PROCESS macro were employed to conduct multiple regression analysis on the data.

Findings

The statistical analysis revealed a significant relationship between supportive and non-supportive parental strategies in response to children's emotions, emotion regulation, emotional lability, and externalizing behavior problems. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis showed that children's emotion regulation mediated the relationship between supportive parental strategies and children's externalizing behavior problems. Additionally, children's emotional lability/negativity mediated the relationship between both supportive and non-supportive parental strategies in response to children's emotions and their externalizing behavior problems.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of parental strategies in managing children's negative emotions in predicting children's externalizing behavior problems and the mediating roles of children's emotion regulation and emotional lability/negativity. Consistent with studies in other cultures (Jin et al., 2017; Harrell et al., 2015), the findings indicated a significant relationship between supportive and non-supportive parental strategies in response to children's emotions and children's emotion regulation, emotional lability, and externalizing behavior problems. This result can be explained through Gottman's meta-emotion philosophy (Gottman et., 1997), which suggests that parents who use supportive strategies are attuned to emotions in themselves and others, value the appropriate expression of emotions in their children, and use problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies to help children manage their emotions. In contrast, parents who dismiss their children's emotions tend to suppress these emotions as quickly as possible, signaling that unpleasant emotions are insignificant. The way parents respond to their children's negative emotions can serve as a model, influencing the development of emotion regulation skills or emotional distress and lability. Thus, children's emotion regulation abilities and emotional lability/negativity can mediate the relationship between parental responses to children's emotions and their externalizing behavior problems. It is recommended that both individual and environmental variables be considered when conceptualizing children's behavior problems.

Keywords: Behavioral Problems, Emotion Lability/Negativity, Emotion Regulation.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to all ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent from participants and their parents, ensuring the confidentiality of information, voluntary participation, and following general research ethics principles.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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