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## Emotional Attachment Patterns and Parenting Styles as Predictors of Emotion Regulation among Arab Kindergarten Children

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### Abstract

The current study examines the contribution of emotional attachment patterns and parenting styles as predictors of emotion regulation among Arab kindergarten children. Emotion regulation is defined as the strategic ability to regulate the internal situation and the emotional expression within a broader framework of self-control (Cole, Zahn-Waxler, & Smith, 1994). The prevailing definition of self-control is the ability to comply, to initiate and terminate a task in accordance with the situation, to regulate the strength, the frequency and duration of verbal and motor activities, to delay gratification and to behave in a manner acceptable to society in the absence of external factors (Kopp 1982). The importance of this study stems from a lack of studies on this topic in the Arab sector. In addition, the research will contribute to the expansion of knowledge on the subject, and also to the development of workshops for kindergarten teachers and mothers that will deal with the subject of emotion regulation and its importance to children's development and their adjustment. The current study endeavors to find an answer to the following questions: Does a relationship exist between parenting styles and emotion regulation ability among kindergarten children? Does a relationship exist between emotional attachment styles and emotion regulation ability among kindergarten children?

Keywords: emotional attachment patterns; parenting styles; emotion regulation; kindergarten children

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## **1.Introduction**

### **1.Theoretical Background**

#### **1.2.Emotion regulation**

The term refers to the ability to comply with the order or request, to initiate behavior and/or to cease from it according to the circumstances, to adjust the intensity, the frequency, and duration of verbal and motor operations in social and educational environments, to delay gratification, to perform appropriate/acceptable social behavior in the absence of external monitoring, and to regulate emotional reactions (Fonagy & Target, 2002; Kopp, 1992; Thompson, 1994; Vaughn, Kopp & Krakow, 1984). A broader definition of the term adds the ability to monitor and regulate cognition, emotions and behavior, to strive to achieve a desired goal and/or to adjust and adapt to the social and cognitive demands of situations and circumstances. When it comes to emotion regulation, it often refers to aspects of intensity and the timing of the emotional response (Thompson, 1994).

#### **1.3.Emotional attachment patterns**

Attachment is the primary connection, specific to each individual, which is the primary contact image (usually the mother), and is expressed in the need of the infant to maintain physical intimacy with this image and in his anxiety which arises when disassociated from it. The attachment grants the infant the security to explore his environment and forms the basis for interpersonal relationships. In order that a secure connection may be created, the primary attachment figure is necessary – the mother, in whom may be found great sensitivity to the signs emitted by her infant: who consistently responds to the cries of the baby and to the sounds he makes, who expresses herself emotionally toward him, is given to holding him in her arms, adjusts her feeding schedule to his needs, and communicates with him face to face in accordance with his need for contact (Shimoni, 2006 [Heb]).

#### **1.4.Attachment styles**

Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, 1978, 1971, 1969) developed methods to evaluate and measure attachment by means of the Strange Situation. This procedure is based on a series of seven events, each of which lasting three minutes, in which the infants are viewed by a stranger, in the company of both the parent and the stranger and by themselves according to the following arrangement: parent and child enter a room, a stranger joins the parent and the child, the parent leaves the room, the parent returns to the room and the stranger exits, the parent exits, the stranger returns and finally the parent returns and the stranger leaves. The type of behavior displayed when the parent returns serves as the basic index for the attachment of the child to that parent. These researchers classified the children's behavior into three styles of behavior, and a fourth (D) was identified several years later.

Secure attachment style, Insecure–Avoidant attachment style, and Insecure–Anxious/Ambivalent attachment style. There is also empirical evidence that the emotional synchronization between the mother and infant helps to improve self-control. It was found that the synchronization of the mother's emotions with that of the child, between the ages of 3 to 9 months, is related to self-control at the age of two, even after controlling for the impact of such variables as temperament, IQ and style of maternal care, and that the temperament of the child affects the relationship between mother-child synchronization in infancy and the

development of self-control (Feldman, Greenbaum & Yirmiya, 1999). Based on these findings, the researchers claim that the mutual regulation of emotion in early childhood is important for the development of self-control. In addition to the dyadic connection between the child and his parent, it can be assumed that there is the contribution of the family environment and parenting styles as predictors of self-control in kindergarten children.

### **1.5. Parenting styles**

Parenting styles are methods for raising children that include elements of control and supervision of the children's behavior and actions, and support and care on the part of parents (Baumrind, 1971). Specific attitudes and behavior patterns that parents demonstrate influence their children's lives. Parents should provide a suitable environment for children to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, control of their behavior and the ability to develop meaningful relationships with others outside the family circle (Feldman & Eidelman, 2008). Parents who develop positive relationships with their children have a strong influence on their children's development. Positive relationships contribute to the building of trust, regulating of emotions, social problem solving, acquiring self-confidence, achieving higher grades in school and creating more positive relationships with peers (Gail, 2003). The beliefs that parents acquire with regard to modes of parenting are influenced by several factors: the parent's history as a child, prior everyday life experiences, social cultural factors, personal experience as a parent, the personal goals of the parent and opinions appearing in the popular literature on parenting (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007). Child-rearing and parenting and parenting styles in particular, is one of the issues that has attracted the attention of researchers from different populations. Many researchers have argued that parents have an influence on the behavior and development of children (Feldman & Eidelman, 2008). Researchers have tried to develop structural models that combine different types of parental control and support in order to create a qualitative distinction between parenting styles. Of these, the approach that most distinguishes itself is that of Baumrind (1971). In his approach, parenting style is defined as child-rearing methods that include elements of control and supervision of children's behavior and their actions, and acts of support and caring on the part of the parents, and he proposes a model of parenting styles, based on different types of parental control and distinguishes between three different types of parenting styles. Authoritarian parenting style, Authoritative parenting style, Permissive parenting style

Emotion regulation in young children is very important for the further development of the child later in life and is influenced by many factors in the child's environment. However, no reports appear in the professional literature of research dealing with this issue among kindergarten children in Arab society. Therefore, this study attempts to complete the gap and examines the nature of the relationship between parenting styles and forms of emotional attachment and emotion regulation among kindergarten children in Arab society. Previous studies indicated that a positive correlation exists between overall adjustment and its components and the parents' authoritative parenting style and greater control of children over their behavior. Hence, therefore, it is assumed that the more the parenting style may be characterized as being authoritative the more developed will be the child's emotion regulation.

### **1.6. Research hypotheses**

The differences in emotion regulation of the child can be attributed to parenting style, so that the more the parenting style of the parent is authoritative, the more developed will be the child's emotion regulation as compared with other parenting styles.

The differences in emotion regulation of the child can be attributed to type of attachment, so that the more secure the child's attachment, the more developed will be the child's emotion regulation, and the less secure the child's attachment, the less developed will be the child's emotion regulation.

## **2.Method**

### **2.1.Participants**

This study encompasses approximately 150 children aged 3-4, students in government preschools in the north of the country, along with their mothers. The sample was selected from a convenience sample of ten public preschools. 150 Arab mothers participated in the study. 46.3% were between the ages of 20 to 30, (42.9%) of the participants were between the ages of 31 to 40, and the remainder (10.9%), were between the ages of 41 to 50. A small portion of the participants (2.8%), had an elementary education, less than half of the participants (37.2%), had a high school education, over half of the participants (56.6%), had a college education, and the remainder (3.4%), had some other form of education.

### **2.2.Tools**

#### **2.2.1.Personal Information Questionnaire**

Mother's age, mother's education, child's gender, child's birth order, and number of children in the family.

#### **2.2.2.Parenting Style Questionnaire**

Mother's self-reporting questionnaire which was taken from the article by Abu Talib (2012), on the subject of parenting styles. The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher. She developed a series of questions in accordance with the existing literature, and after that, the questionnaire was reviewed by judges. The questionnaire includes 49 items. In the present study, the internal consistency value for general parenting styles was  $\alpha = .65$ , for permissive parenting style  $\alpha = .61$ , for uninvolved parenting style  $\alpha = .64$ , for authoritative parenting style  $\alpha = .81$ , for authoritarian parenting style  $\alpha = .78$ .

#### **2.2.3.Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERC- Emotion Regulation Checklist)**

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Shields & Cicchetti , 2001) is a parental reporting questionnaire consisting of 24 items encoded using a 4-step Likert scale (1 – rarely, 2 – sometimes, 3 – often, 4 – always). In the present study the measure of reliability for emotion regulation in general is  $\alpha = .72$ .

#### **2.2.4.Emotional Attachment Questionnaire (AQSQ - Attachment Q-Sort Questionnaire)**

The AQSQ Questionnaire is a parental reporting questionnaire developed by Robinson (1995), adapted and condensed from Q-sort (Waters & Dean, 1985) which measures the attachment between the mother and her child and rates it on a scale of 1-9, (1 – not at all typical of my child, 5 – sometimes typical of my child, 9 – very much not typical of my child). The questionnaire contains 12 items and is intended for use with children aged one to four.

Cronbach's alpha for this measure in Lamont's (2010) was .70. In the present study the measure of reliability for types of attachment in general is  $\alpha = .63$ .

### 2.3. The research process

In the first phase of the study all the questionnaires were translated into Arabic. The study was carried out in 11 government preschools in the North district during the 2014-2015 school year. The research was conducted following the receiving of all relevant permission certificates, from the Chief Scientist of the Ministry of Education and the parents. Each child received a letter for the parents briefly explaining the subject of the study and its purpose. The questionnaires returned by the mothers were collected by the kindergarten teachers. Only 50% of the respondents returned their questionnaires and therefore the number of kindergartens in the sample was increased.

### 3. Findings

Correlations between the study variables were then calculated, as presented in Table 1

**Table 1. Correlation of study variables (N= 150)**

	Emotion Regulation (1)	Attachment Patterns (2)	Permissive Parenting Style (3)	Indifferent Parenting Style (4)	Authoritative Parenting Style (5)	Authoritarian Parenting Style (6)
(1)	-					
(2)	.43***	-				
(3)	.17*	-.02	-			
(4)	-.29 ***	-.16	-.01	-		
(5)	.41***	.20*	.46***	-.22**	-	
(6)	-.39 ***	-.20*	-.17*	.54***	-.38***	-
	*p<.05	** p< .01		*** p< .001		

Table 1 presents statistically significant correlations between emotion regulation and different parenting styles: According to the results, negative correlations were found between emotion regulation and indifferent parenting style and authoritarian parenting style. On the other hand, positive correlations were found between emotion regulation and permissive parenting style and authoritative parenting style. In addition, a statically significant positive correlation was found between emotion regulation and attachment patterns.

**Table 2. Stepwise regression for predicting adjustment (N= 150)**

Regulation	Child's	Emotion
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Step 1: Control variables	.004	
Child's gender	.06	
Child's birth order	.02	
Step 2: Variables	.25	
Attachment patterns	.31**	
Permissive parenting style	-.008	
Indifferent parenting style	-.103	
Authoritative parenting style	.32***	
Authoritarian parenting style	-.22**	
N	149	

\*\*p<.05      \*\*\* p< .001

Stepwise regression analysis was carried out to test the research hypotheses. The first hypothesis focused on the relationship between the child's emotion regulation and parenting styles (the findings indicate that a statistically significant positive correlation exists between emotion regulation and permissive parenting style) ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ). Using regression analysis to predict emotion regulation in Table 2, it was found that the contribution of permissive parenting style was not significant in explaining the variance in emotion regulation ( $B = -.009, SE = .10, \beta = -.008$ ). Also, the findings indicate that a statistically significant negative correlation exists between emotion regulation and the indifferent parenting style ( $r = -.29, p < .001$ ). Using regression analysis to predict emotion regulation in Table 2, it was found that the contribution of indifferent parenting style was not significant in explaining the variance in emotion regulation ( $B = -.13, SE = .11, \beta = -.103$ ). In addition, the findings indicate that a statistically significant positive correlation exists between emotion regulation and the authoritative parenting style ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ). Using regression analysis to predict emotion regulation in Table 2, it was found that the contribution of the authoritative parenting style was not significant in explaining the variance in emotion regulation ( $B = .35, SE = .10, \beta = .32$ ). In addition, the findings indicate that a statistically significant negative correlation exists between emotion regulation and the authoritarian parenting style ( $r = -.39, p < .001$ ). Using regression analysis to predict emotion regulation in Table 2, it was found that the contribution of the authoritarian parenting style was not significant in explaining the variance in emotion regulation ( $B = -.20, SE = .09, \beta = -.22$ ).

To test the second hypothesis that focused on the relationship between the child's emotion regulation and attachment patterns – Table 1 shows that a statistically significant correlation exists between emotion regulation and attachment patterns ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ). Using regression analysis to predict emotion regulation in Table 2, it was found that the contribution of the attachment pattern was significant in explaining the variance in emotion regulation ( $B = .33, SE = .12, \beta = .31$ ).



## 4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the contribution of emotional attachment patterns, and parenting styles, as predictors of emotion regulation among Arab kindergarten children. This study focuses for the first time on this issue in the context of Arab society in Israel. The basic hypotheses were: the more the parenting style of the mother may be characterized as being authoritative, the more developed will be the emotion regulation of the child as compared to other parenting styles. In addition, the researcher hypothesized that a relationship will be found between attachment patterns and the emotion regulation of the child, such that the more secure the attachment pattern of the child, the more developed will be the emotion regulation of the child, and the more insecure the attachment pattern of the child, the less developed will be the emotion regulation of the child.

The findings of the present study constitute an important theoretical innovation. Although the findings paint a more complex picture, it is one that is clearer with an emphasis on certain aspects. At the same time, the findings add to previous data, and pave the way for more studies and references to the subject in the future.

In summary, the study results confirmed its hypothesis; parenting styles were found to be related to emotion regulation among kindergarten children – a positive correlation was found to exist between the authoritative parenting style, which is characterized by listening, and acceptance with clear boundaries, and the emotion regulation of the child. It was also found that a negative relationship exists between the uninvolved parenting style, which is characterized by indifference, and emotion regulation, and a negative correlation exists between the authoritarian parenting style and emotion regulation, and there is also a positive correlation between attachment patterns and emotion regulation among kindergarten children.

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