

# A Review of Research on the Effects of Intergenerational Parenting on Children's Emotional Control

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**Abstract.** Intergenerational parenting, also known as "intergenerational education," has gradually become a common phenomenon in family education. With social changes, the family structure has produced relatively significant changes. As intergenerational parenting has become increasingly common, it has also received more and more attention from scholars. Researchers have discussed and studied the causes, advantages, disadvantages, and effects on children's psychological development. However, there is still a lack of research on the effects on children's emotional regulation. This study focuses on the effects of intergenerational parenting on children's emotion regulation. It summarizes the existing research from the overview of intergenerational parenting (including definition, types, and effects on grandchildren), the overview of children's emotion regulation (including definition, strategies, and influencing factors), and the effects of intergenerational parenting on children's emotion regulation. The emergence of intergenerational parenting has changed the original structure of the family. Therefore, under the situation that the problem of intergenerational parenting is becoming more and more popular, how to improve the quality of intergenerational education and how to help children grow up healthily under intergenerational education will become the focus of attention of the majority of child-rearing families and society in China. This study will also provide a series of recommendations on the impact of intergenerational parenting on children's emotions and family structure.

**Keywords:** intergenerational parenting; children; emotion regulation.

## 1. Overview of Intergenerational Parenting

### 1.1. Definition of intergenerational parenting

Intergenerational parenting has been described differently by researchers in different countries. Generally speaking, in China, intergenerational parenting is mainly equated with grandparents' participation in raising children in the family. At the same time, foreign scholars define intergenerational parenting by distinguishing between intergenerational parenting families, in which the grandparents mainly participate in the children's entertainment without taking on too many educational tasks. With the increase in the number of "surrogate parents," the importance of grandparents in their grandchildren's education has begun to emerge.

In the view of domestic scholars, intergenerational parenting is a parenting model that refers to a situation in which a child is raised and educated by his or her grandparents or other elders. Typically, intergenerational parenting occurs when grandparents or other relatives take over the child-rearing responsibilities when parents cannot care for their children for various reasons [1].

Chinese researchers have categorized intergenerational parenting into three groups based on the degree of involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren's education. According to one group of researchers, intergenerational upbringing refers to the grandparents' assumption of primary or total responsibility for the upbringing of their grandchildren. The second section of researchers believes that intergenerational refers to the involvement of grandchildren in upbringing by their grandparents under conditions where the father cannot participate in upbringing. The last part of scholars believes that intergenerational upbringing refers to the grandparents' upbringing of their grandchildren. This process occurs in all three generations of the family: grandparents, fathers, and grandchildren, and excludes the process of being raised exclusively by grandchildren [2].

Foreign researchers mainly focus on three categories: family structure, rights and obligations, and family scope. From the perspective of family structure, it can be divided into two categories: grandparents bear the responsibility of the whole family, and parents of grandchildren bear the responsibility of the family. In both types of families, the educational activities engaged in by grandparents are called intergenerational education. From the perspective of the rights and obligations of grandparents and grandchildren, they can be categorized into three types:

Grandparents are only responsible for taking care of their grandchildren during the day.

Grandparents' income is the primary source of the family's economy.

Grandparents are the legal guardians of their grandchildren.

The third classification is based on the scope of the intergenerational parenting family, which is divided into a broad and a narrow sense. In the general sense, a family is an intergenerational parenting family as long as the grandparents are the bearers of the educational responsibilities of the grandchildren. In contrast, in the narrow sense of an intergenerational parenting family, the grandparents completely replace the parents in bearing all the educational responsibilities of the grandchildren.

To summarize, the definition of intergenerational parenting may vary in different cultural and social contexts, and thus the specific situation may vary. On the one hand, due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and on the other hand, most of the extant definitions follow the operational definitions proved by empirical studies. They thus may be more influenced by the experimental design of the researchers.

## **1.2. Types of intergenerational parenting**

Domestic scholars refer to dividing the type of parenting and categorizing intergenerational parenting according to a four-point method. The first is old-fashioned, spoiled, taught by example, and democratic [3]. Another tetrad- intermediate, neglectful, warm, and interfering [4]. The last tetrad categorizes parenting styles as optimistic-guided, worried-protective, high-hopes-control, and negative-permissive [5]. The last tetrad has been more widely recognized in the academic world, and therefore, domestic scholars generally use the last situation as a reference for classification when conducting research.

Foreign researchers classify the type of intergenerational parenting mainly from two perspectives. The first is the grandparents' educational philosophy, so what needs to be determined is whether the grandparents are concerned with the grandchildren's personal or social needs. The first is the distributive type, in which the grandparent will be invo with personal and social needs. The second type is symbolic, which emphasizes that the grandparent is primarily concerned with social norms, not individual needs. The third type bespeaks the individual type, in which the grandchildren are more concerned with individual needs than social expectations. The last type is the estranged type, in which grandparents rarely have strong expectations [6].

Another perspective is to refer to the grandchildren's intimate relationship, which is categorized as participative, where grandparents are in a parent-like position and have a say in important matters in the family; companionate, where grandparents follow the "non-interference principle" and do not get involved in the upbringing and disciplining of their grandchildren; and estranged, where grandchildren's relationship is both formal and distant [7].

## **1.3. Impact of intergenerational parenting on grandchildren**

### **1.3.1 Impact of intergenerational parenting on children's behavior**

The researchers noted that children in intergenerational parenting are more prone to anxiety and insecurity, developmental delays and behavioral disruptions, and inattentiveness than children raised by their parents and co-parents [8]. Other researchers have found that 26% of children in intergenerational parenting have problematic behaviors, 10% higher than the average child [9].

### **1.3.2 Intergenerational parenting adversely affects children's psychological well-being.**

Huang Xiangxiang pointed out in his study that intergenerational parenting, because of its excessive accommodation and indulgence of children, tends to make children develop a sense of "self-centeredness" and evil personalities [10]. Domestic and international studies have shown that children raised under intergenerational parenting generally have psychological problems [11].

### **1.3.3 Intergenerational parenting affects children's academic performance.**

Children under intergenerational parenting are likelier to have problems such as boredom in school. Over two-thirds of these children had moderate and lower-middle grades [12]. In her study, Shen Huixiang found that children under intergenerational parenting had an abysmal academic performance. The excellent level was 32.15%, the medium level was 33.61%, and the slightly poor level was 34.24% [13].

## **2. Overview of emotional regulation in children**

### **2.1. Definition of children's emotional regulation**

Some research suggests that children's emotional regulation refers to children's ability to effectively recognize, understand, and manage their emotional responses when confronted with a variety of emotional experiences and emotional triggers. This includes children's ability to recognize and express their emotions, understand the causes and effects of their emotions, and adopt appropriate strategies to regulate the intensity and duration of their emotions.

Emotion regulation in children involves the ability to recognize and express emotions and techniques and strategies for emotion regulation. This includes self-awareness, mastery of emotional vocabulary, appropriateness of emotional expression, emotional self-regulation, and the ability to cope with stress. Children's emotion regulation development has important implications for their social relationships, academic achievement, and mental health.

Effective children's emotion regulation helps children cope with frustration, adapt to change, develop positive relationships with others, and improve emotional stability and psychological well-being. Conversely, difficulties in emotion regulation may lead to problems such as emotional outbursts, behavioral problems, social disorders, and mental health distress.

### **2.2. Strategies for children's emotion regulation**

For the strategies of children's emotion regulation, scholars at home and abroad categorize them. Grolnick et al. classify children's emotion regulation strategies into two categories: The first is allowing attention to be shifted from the source of stimulation. For example, children can shift their attention from the person or object they dislike to another person or object. The second category focuses on behavioral strategies that allow children to be comforted. Three examples are physical reassurance, reassurance from others, and symbolic self-reassurance [14].

Another scholar classified children's emotion regulation strategies into six categories: self-soothing, alternative activities, passive coping, venting, problem-solving, and cognitive reconstruction [15].

In China, many researchers believe that preschoolers commonly use emotion regulation strategies that can be divided into four categories: distraction, catharsis, soothing behavior, and rational cognition [16].

Factors affecting children's emotion regulation

#### **2.3.1 Developmental stage and age**

Emotion regulation varies with the age and developmental stage of children. Younger children may be relatively weak in emotion regulation, and as they grow older, they gradually develop more sophisticated and mature emotion regulation strategies.

### **2.3.2 Emotional parenting styles**

It has been found that parents who respond positively to their children's emotions can help to improve their children's emotion regulation. People found that children who frequently communicated with their parents about emotional problems used more emotion regulation strategies.

### **2.3.3 Parental marital relationship**

Porter et al. found that the mother's marital conflict and the child's ability to regulate emotions were closely related. Children whose mothers had prominent marital conflict had relatively low levels of emotion regulation, while children whose parents had a harmonious marriage had high levels of emotion regulation [17].

## **3. Impact of intergenerational parenting on children's emotional regulation**

Research has pointed out that intergenerational parenting may affect children's emotional regulation, which can be positive or negative.

### **3.1. Emotional support and emotional expression**

Intergenerational parenting can provide children with more emotional support and understanding, which helps children to express better and manage their emotions. As emotional supporters, grandparents can provide a safe and warm environment to help children deal with emotional distress and frustration. In a study by Gao Sheng that used propensity score matching to examine the impact of intergenerational parenting on the health of grandchildren, it was found that children raised by intergenerationally raised (external) grandparents were 2.2% less likely to suffer from psychiatric disorders in January compared to children raised by their parents. The same trend was found among rural and urban residents [18].

### **3.2. Emotional separation and identity problems**

Intergenerational parenting may lead to emotional separation and identity problems in children. Separated from their parents, children may face confusion about their identity and sense of belonging and may face additional challenges in regulating their emotions. A survey showed that rural children in intergenerational upbringing were more likely to experience loneliness than those in shared and paternal upbringing, with 79.6 percent of rural children experiencing loneliness, including 94 percent of intergenerationally upbringing children and 68.2 percent of parental upbringing. It can be seen that children raised by grandparents will show more psychological problems [19].

The authors believe that the impact of intergenerational parenting on children's emotional regulation varies according to individual differences, family relationships, and parenting environments. Intergenerational parenting may provide crucial emotional support, learning opportunities, and emotional separation and regulation difficulties. Establishing positive family communication and emotional connections, as well as attending to children's emotional development and needs, is essential to support the development of their emotional regulation.

## **4. Limitations of prior studies**

### **4.1. Lack of systematic research**

The literature review revealed that although there have been many studies on intergenerational parenting and children's emotion regulation, there are fewer systematic studies on the effects of intergenerational parenting on children's emotion regulation. Family environment is the main factor affecting children's emotional regulation. There are significant differences between the family environments of intergenerational parenting and parenting. People need to explore whether these differences impact children's emotion regulation and the specific manifestations of the impact. In addition, there is a definite link between the outcomes of intergenerational parenting on children, such

as children's temperament and personality, which also influence children's emotion regulation. We need to understand further this connection's nature, strength, and operating mechanism, as well as the related influences. More systematic and detailed research is needed to answer these questions.

#### 4.2. Demand for inclusion of additional research variables

Studies on the effects of intergenerational parenting on children's emotion regulation have focused on choosing children's emotion regulation strategies. However, children's emotion regulation is a comprehensive concept that includes aspects of intrinsic cognition and extrinsic performance. The choice of emotion regulation strategies is only a part of internal cognition and does not fully represent the whole picture of children's emotion regulation. Therefore, research on children's emotion regulation needs to be broadened to cover multiple perspectives to understand and explain children's emotion regulation fully.

### 5. Conclusion

Research has found that intergenerational parenting has a dual impact on children's emotional regulation. On the one hand, intergenerational parenting can provide more emotional support and understanding to help children better express and manage their emotions. As emotional supporters, grandparents can provide a safe and warm environment that helps children deal with emotional distress and frustration. On the other hand, intergenerational parenting may lead to emotional separation and identity problems for children. As a result of being separated from their parents, children may face confusion about their identity and sense of belonging and may face additional challenges regarding emotional regulation.

Therefore, more systematic and detailed studies are needed to explore the effects of intergenerational parenting on children's emotion regulation and to conduct in-depth studies from multiple perspectives to understand and explain children's emotion regulation fully. In addition, establishing positive family communication and emotional connections that are attentive to children's emotional development and needs is essential to support the development of their emotion regulation skills.

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