A Review on the Influence of Parental Meta-Emotional Philosophy on Preschool Children's Emotion Regulation

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Abstract. Parental meta-emotional philosophy (PMEP), representing parental attitudes towards emotions, significantly shapes preschool children's emotional development. This review examines its impact on emotional regulation (ER). This study analyzes diverse academic literature and recent empirical research to draw precise conclusions. Parents with instructive meta-emotional beliefs positively influence emotional regulation in young children. In contrast, those with dismissive beliefs, influenced by factors like education and gender, harm children's emotional well-being, showing a significant negative correlation with emotional regulation. Parental beliefs about emotional disorders have limited prevalence but exhibit a marked positive association with children's negative emotional regulation. Among prevalent Chinese parental beliefs, emotional non-involvement stands out. While maternal participation is positively correlated with children's low emotional regulation scores, paternal involvement has a negligible impact. These findings highlight the nuanced effects of different parental meta-emotional philosophies on children's emotional regulation, impacting their mental health and social adaptability. This analysis has significant implications for promoting children's mental well-being, enhancing parenting, and raising awareness of children's development.

Keywords: Parental meta-emotion philosophy, emotion regulation.

1. Introduction

Emotion Regulation (ER) in children pertains to the capacity and approach through which youngsters perceive, express, and manage their emotions. It encompasses their emotional experiences, and understanding, as well as their ability to express, control, and navigate these emotions based on contextual demands. Children who exhibit effective emotional regulation are more likely to enjoy mental well-being, cope with the challenges of daily life, and adapt to changes and obstacles. Gorman underscores that childhood is a pivotal phase for instilling lifelong emotional dispositions, with the family serving as the primary emotional learning environment for young children. Given the significance of emotional competence in children's overall development, it is imperative to consider the role of significant adults in fostering it. A child's emotional competence is influenced by genetic factors, interactions with peers, and educational experiences. Parents, as a child's initial educators, play a fundamental role in shaping their ability to comprehend, express, and manage emotions from an early age. In contemporary society, numerous children and adolescents grapple with behavioural issues linked to their emotional well-being, often stemming from early familial influences [1]. On one hand, children observe and gradually internalize their parents' methods of expressing and regulating emotions. On the other hand, parents' perceptions of their children's emotions and their approaches to addressing them—referred to as Parental meta-emotional philosophy (PMEP)—also significantly impact a child's emotional competence. For instance, Gottman discovered that parental influence on children's emotions contributes to improved ER and decreased problematic behaviours in adulthood [2]. PMEP underscore the role of parental emotions in transmitting and shaping children's emotional experiences. Cunningham et al. further demonstrated that PMEP can influence individual internalizing and externalizing problems by shaping adolescents' emotional understanding and emotion regulation [3]. Consequently, this study aims to consolidate and explore how PMEP influences children's capacity to regulate their emotions. Through an extensive literature review, this study will elucidate the concepts of children's ER and PMEP. It will subsequently delve into the

diverse impacts of various PMEP on children's ER across various dimensions, ultimately arriving at a comprehensive conclusion."

2. Concepts and content of ER in children

2.1. Concept of ER in Children

With the advancement of individual socialization research and the emergence of psychoeducational research in recent years, the importance of ER and its investigation has grown in importance to psychologists. ER emerged as a separate field of study in developmental psychology in the 1980s. Related studies have spanned different phases of human life, with a significant amount of study undertaken in the field of children yielding rich results. However, research on ER has been hampered by a lack of exact definitions and concepts. The definition of ER is used to express that emotions may be controlled as well as circumstances where emotional processes are seen to influence other processes. Some people consider ER as a trait, while others see it as a temporary change in condition. Internal systems (such as neural, cognitive, and subjective appraisals), behavioural components (such as facial expressions and behavioural gestures), along external social components (such as cultural values, societal context meanings, and personal motivations or goals) are just a few of the systems and components that need to be managed and organized for ER to be effective [4]. Offers a distinctive viewpoint that deviates from examinations of emotional expression, linguistic aspects of emotions, and emotional comprehension. This perspective allows for an elucidation of the mechanisms by which emotions orchestrate or bolster various psychological processes and the reasons behind their adverse impacts [5]. This essay ultimately adopts Thompson's (1994) definition of emotion regulation, which is academically authoritative and encompasses both the biological basis and individual differences in regulatory tendencies. He states that ER is "a collection of intrinsic and extrinsic mechanisms tasked with overseeing, assessing, and adapting emotional reactions, with a specific focus on the temporal dimension and intensity levels in the pursuit of individual objectives" [6].

The systems involved and skills required to manage ER are based on neural and physiological foundations and are revealed through ongoing interactions with the environment. The diversity of systems associated with ER in children adds to its significance as well as the controversy and intricacy surrounding this subject within the realm of child development. ER constitutes a pivotal facet of early childhood socialization and development, serving as a vital mechanism for gauging children's normative and pathological psychological progress [7]. Research has indicated that children exhibiting proficient ER skills tend to manifest fewer behavioural issues, exhibit positive social adaptation, and foster improved peer relationships [8]. Eisenberg et al. propose that children displaying heightened ER capabilities tend to demonstrate greater social competence, while challenges in ER have been pinpointed as a risk factor for mental health concerns."

Children's capacity to exercise emotional control plays a pivotal role in enhancing their problem-solving abilities, behavioural regulation, and adaptability to their surroundings. Furthermore, it serves as an indicator of prospective achievements in academics and personality maturation. Consequently, early childhood emotional development is widely regarded as encompassing the cultivation of ER. In summary, the research underscores the integral role of ER in children's social-emotional development, affirming its status as a pivotal social-emotional skill.

2.2. Development and characteristics of emotional regulation in preschool children

It is challenging to scientifically define all components of ER because it is a small, dynamic process [5]. Due to the significant challenges preschoolers face in thinking about and defining their thoughts and experiences, the majority of research on preschoolers' development still mainly relies on observational methods, yet there are still certain patterns the study can infer. First and foremost, the development of children's ER undergoes a developmental trajectory. With age, individuals progressively acquire heightened mastery over their emotions and adeptly modulate their impulses in

alignment with societal norms. In the early stages of life, children cannot govern their emotional reactions, necessitating the support of caregivers (parents and guardians) to fulfil their physiological and emotional requirements

Research has shown that by approximately 9-10 months of age, the maturation of the frontal lobes and their connection to response inhibition awakens the child's ability to manage emotions as well as deal with emotional contingencies, which underpins the increasing growth and complexity of emotional behaviour [6]. Around the juncture of ages 2 and 3, the emergence of language acquisition opens avenues for children to convey their inner experiences and comprehend the emotional expressions of others. By the age of 4, children exhibit the capacity to employ diverse strategies in managing their emotions, with prominent approaches including distraction, external attribution, and seeking support from adults [9]. In essence, the development of ER in children undergoes a transformative journey, progressing from external to internal mechanisms, from passive to active engagement, from inadvertent to deliberate control, and from rudimentary to intricate strategies.

Secondly, children's capacities for emotion control varied according to factors such as age, gender, grandparental status, and whether they were the only children. The study conducted by Li Yan in 2021 is inconsistent with the earlier findings showing girls do not necessarily manage their emotions better than boys [10]. As a result, this finding may be attributed to assessment bias resulting from gender stereotyping in the case of gender disparities, for example. Therefore, more study of the objective facts is required; otherwise, the labelling effect could easily take place [10].

3. Parental meta-emotional philosophy(PMEP)

3.1. Theoretical Foundations of the PMEP

Influenced by the term meta-cognition, Gottman et al. proposed the "meta-emotion structure" in 1995, and formally proposed the concept of "PMEP" in 1996. Meta-emotion is a kind of emotion about emotion, that is, the emotion or feeling that arises when facing a certain emotion. The notion of meta-emotion is postulated within the framework of meta-emotion research, encompassing structured sentiments and cognitive reflections concerning both self-emotions and those of others. This concept entails the development of a set of established cognitive frameworks or concepts over time [11]. Professor Xu, on the other hand, believes that meta-emotions are the subject's ability to perceive, introspect, express, describe, monitor, and regulate his or her own emotions, such as joy, anger, sadness, and happiness, as well as to ruminate and analyze the causes, processes, and results of these emotions, and to reasonably attribute them to the subject's emotions and to regulate them by himself or herself[12]. Meta-emotions enable a person to not only know his or her emotions, but also know why they are there, and it is an ability that every normal human being can acquire [12]. Building upon this foundation, PMEP encompasses a systematized collection of perspectives and constructs related to the emotional responses parents exhibit towards the emotional experiences of young children. It comprises a network of cognitive patterns about emotions, behaviours, attitudes, and ideas that parents cultivate when faced with their own emotions and their children's emotional expressions [2]. PMEPs have the function of perceiving and directing the functioning of emotions and are therefore a recurring, fairly stable, and fairly salient set of psychological and behavioural types in terms of outwardly related behavioural expressions [13].

Scholar Ye from Taiwan shares a perspective consistent with Gottman et al. He posits that 'meta-emotional philosophy' pertains to a collection of emotional, behavioural, attitudinal, and conceptual response patterns exhibited by parents in reaction to their own or their children's emotional expressions. This encompasses parental perceptions, acceptance, understanding of causality, communication, processing, and teaching concerning their children's emotions. This framework serves the purpose of comprehending and guiding emotional functioning, facilitating the interpretation of motives behind emotional behaviours, adapting one's emotional responses in specific contexts, and, when necessary, establishing a crucial foundation for instructing others on managing emotional events. PMEP, on the other hand, denotes a specific set of emotional responses, awareness,

understanding, evaluation, and practical utilization by primary caregivers about their own emotions or those of their children [14]. Currently, extensive research demonstrates a substantial correlation between PMEP and children's ER development.

3.2. Dimensions of Parents' Emotional Concepts

When the concept of PMEP was first proposed, Gottman et al. classified PMEP into two dimensions: emotional teaching and emotional dismissal from both the awareness and guidance dimensions. In 1997, Gottman et al. developed the Parental Meta-Emotional Philosophy Scale (PMPS) for the first time from the dimensions of emotional awareness, emotional acceptance, and emotional teaching. In 1999, Gottman et al. added emotionally disordered philosophy to the first two dimensions. In 2002, Professor Ye from Taiwan, China, extended the concept in a Chinese and localized way. Through his examination of daily parent-child interactions in China, he introduced the distinctive notion of parents' inclination to exhibit an undefined stance or reaction to their children's negative emotions, coining it as the concept of 'emotional non-intervention.' This expansion led to the subdivision of the parental meta-emotional concept into four dimensions, ultimately culminating in the development of the Parental Postdispositional Emotional Concepts Scale, tailored to the specific context of China [11].

Emotional teaching refers to parents being sensitive to their children's diverse emotional responses, accepting and assisting their children in accurately referring to their emotional feelings, and collaborating with their children to overcome their emotional difficulties [1]. Teaching meta-emotions reflects parents' effective awareness, identification, and acceptance of their own and their children's emotional reactions, especially their negative emotions, as well as their effective direction of their children's emotional coping styles [7]. Emotion-dismissing refers to parents holding the notion that negative emotions are unacceptable and striving to change or eradicate them as quickly as possible by disregarding, diverting, or punishing the child's unpleasant emotional responses, and teaching the child that negative feelings should be avoided. Parents' rejection, sensitivity, and critical attitude toward their children's negative emotional responses are reflected in emotional dismissal [7]. Emotion-dysfunction refers to the parent's feeling overwhelmed by the emotions of the self or the child, and being unable to regulate and calm them in a brief amount of time. Emotion non-involvement is also one of the more common meta-emotion concepts among Chinese parents [1], in which Chinese parents sometimes do not have any particular attitude tendency in the face of the negative emotions from their kid, but rather let their children express them freely without any interference or reaction [1]. Emotion-non involvement is a kind of particular meta-emotion concept to Chinese parents, and its impact on a person's development is rather complex and challenging to generalize. These four categories of parents each show emotion-oriented characteristics of perception, acceptance, communication, reasoning, processing, and teaching distinctly [14].

Currently, studies on PMEP that are more reliable are published in foreign nations and Taiwan, which may have significant cultural differences from the Chinese mainland. As a result, some academics at the moment have presented their perspectives on the current categorization of parental meta-emotions. For example, Qu made an effort to go beyond the current four-dimensional model and present parental meta-emotional dimensions more appropriate for China's mainland [15].

4. Relationship between PMEP and Children's ER

4.1. The Effect of Different Types of PMEP on Children's ER

Overall, PMEP were significantly associated with children's ER, but the effects of different types of PMEP on children's ER differed significantly. Parents holding different types of meta-emotional philosophies not only differ in how they react to children's emotions behaviorally, but they may also have distinguished emotional perceptions and underlying beliefs about how well their children can control their feelings. These contrasting beliefs may also be internalized by children through expectancy effects or indicating [16]. However, this relationship is not unidirectional, and children's

positive emotionality can similarly moderate the relationship between positive PMEP and children's problematic behaviours, with the components of children's negative emotions (sadness, fear, discomfort, and angry emotions) moderating the relationship between negative parental meta-emotional concepts (e.g., emotional non-involvement, emotional dismissal, and emotional disruption concepts) and children's problematic behaviours [17].

4.2. Influence of Emotionally Coaching Parents on Children's ER

PMEP is significantly related to the development of ER in young children, and studies by Li, and Zhang and Zhang have shown that parental PMEP is biased in favour of the emotion-coaching type and that the level of the emotion-coaching type is high [10, 18]. Generally, parents who embody coaching meta-emotional concepts tend to exhibit heightened sensitivity toward both their own emotions and those of their children. Emotion coaching demonstrated a statistically significant and positive correlation with the advancement of emotion regulation and all its constituent aspects. Furthermore, parents practising emotion coaching exhibited a notable negative prediction regarding their children's utilization of negative emotion regulation strategies. Parents achieving higher scores on the emotion-coaching concept also displayed elevated scores in attentional focus, perceptual sensitivity, and inhibitory control.

Children who have parents who practice strong emotional coaching display good emotional control, efficient problem-solving techniques, positive peer interactions, and fewer health issues. Parents who hold an emotionally teachable parenting style have a high level of emotional recovery and are better able to perform the function of ER and maintain an appropriate dynamic balance between positive and negative emotions so that they are better able to care for, accept, and respect their children. When they notice that their child is in a bad mood or has emotional problems, they take the initiative to discuss with their child the context in which their emotions are occurring, and calm and coach their child on how to deal with unpleasant emotional reactions. Children of parents who hold a didactic meta-emotional philosophy are more likely to reappraise positive aspects in their emotional regulation and rationalize emotional events in terms of changing perceptions [7]. Parental meta-emotional philosophy as emotionally teachable also significantly and positively predicts young children's emotion regulation development. Easily enabling young children to develop cognitive reappraisal attempts to make sense of the events that give rise to negative emotions, such as frustration, anger, and disgust, in a more positive way [18].

Nonetheless, a notable divergence exists in the meta-emotional philosophies of fathers and mothers, with fathers generally endorsing fewer emotional guidance practices compared to mothers. Mothers consistently scored significantly higher than fathers in the realm of emotional guidance [10]. This pattern aligns with the outcomes of the investigation conducted by Fei [19].

The study utilized the Mothers' Meta-Emotional Philosophy Scale, the Emotion Regulation Checklist, and the Short Form for Assessing Young Children's Social Competence and Behavior, all completed by mothers themselves. Fei employed the Parental Meta-Emotional Philosophy Questionnaire adapted from Qu and Xu at Xinyang Normal University, along with the Adolescents' Everyday Emotion Regulation Questionnaire developed by Deng and Sang [12]. In contrast, the two Korean scholars relied on the Parental Meta-Emotion Scale (PMES) reconstructed by Bae in 2010. These variations in measurement tools may contribute to the observed differences in outcomes.

4.3. The Effect of Emotion-Abstaining Parents on Children's Emotion Regulation

Like parental emotional parenting philosophies, parental emotional dismissal philosophies also differ by gender, education, and other related factors. Fathers usually have more emotional dismissal philosophies than mothers; parents with lower education have more emotional dismissal philosophies than parents with higher education [10]. On the aspects of emotional loss of control, emotional non-involvement, and emotional dismissal, fathers' and mothers' scores varied little [20].

Collectively, the research underscores the detrimental impact of exclusionary PMEP on children. Both the emotional exclusion and emotional loss of control dimensions exhibit statistically significant

negative associations with the development of ER in young children, encompassing all of its constituent factors [18]. Previous studies have consistently positioned emotional exclusion concepts as adverse predictors of children's emotion regulation strategies. Furthermore, PMEP characterized by emotional exclusion displays a significant positive correlation with children's heightened employment of negative regulation strategies, while simultaneously demonstrating a significant negative correlation with children's diminished utilization of attenuated regulation strategies [19]. Children with an exclusionary philosophy will tend to use expression inhibition strategies to repress their emotional expression [7]. Sometimes, the mother's emotion-abstention philosophy may represent an over-attention, where the mother, although she is also able to be keenly aware of her child's negative emotional traits and has the intention to deal with them quickly for her child, will habitually adopt, for example, demanding, ignoring, or denying the expression of her child's emotions to interact with her child because of her fixation on her emotion-abstention philosophy. The mother's insistence on compelling the child to suppress negative emotions perpetuates the challenge of recognizing and embracing these emotions. Consequently, this hinders the child's ability to effectively manage and promptly navigate their emotional experiences, often leading to the suppression of their own emotions in favour of inhibiting their expression. Therefore the concept of mothers' emotional rejection will hurt primary school children's emotion regulation strategies through their negative emotional expression [21].

Conversely, contrary to the outcomes reported in prior research, Yao observed that the parental meta-emotional philosophy of emotional dismissal did not impede children's emotion regulation capabilities [22]. This disparity in findings may be attributed to Chinese parents' inclination to employ suppression and dismissal strategies when addressing their children's negative emotions, reflecting an adaptation to the cultural context in China that may not inherently compromise children's emotion regulation abilities. Daniel et al. and Qu Hongyan et al. found that children taught by parents with emotionally uncontrollable, emotionally non-interfering, and emotionally dismissing parental meta-emotional philosophies were better than those with emotionally teachable parental meta-emotional philosophies in terms of concentration and attentiveness [15]. Daniel et al. and Qu Hongyan et al. found that children taught by parents with emotionally uncontrollable, emotionally noninterfering, and emotionally rejecting parental meta-emotional philosophies were better at attentional focusing than children taught by parents with emotionally teaching philosophies [13].

4.4. Influence of Emotionally Disturbed Parents on Children's Emotion Regulation

Many studies have shown that parents have relatively fewer meta-emotional ideas of mood disorders, which is consistent with previous research findings. Parents with lower educational attainment hold more emotionally disturbed ideas [10]. PMEP of emotional disturbed reached a very significant positive correlation level with children's negative emotion regulation [22]. Moreover, parents' meta-emotional disturbed-type concepts were significantly positively correlated with young children's attentional focus and perceptual sensitivity, significantly negatively correlated with inhibitory control, and not correlated with impulsivity. This is not quite the same as the findings of Taiwanese scholars Jiang [13].

Children's negative augmentative regulating tactics were considerably and favourably connected with parental disturbed meta-emotional philosophy. It suggests that parents with exclusionary and loss-of-control meta-emotional philosophies cause children to use more augmentative regulation strategies (cognitive immersion, expressive catharsis) and less attenuative regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal, expressive inhibition) when confronted with negative emotions [19]. This is partially consistent with Yao's findings that the higher the mother's meta-emotional conceptual score for mood disorders, the weaker the children demonstrated emotion regulation [22]. Preschoolers will more often use venting strategies as an emotion regulation strategy, a result that has been confirmed in several studies. Hence, the meta-emotional philosophy associated with emotional disturbance tends to be perceived as a hindrance to children's emotional regulation abilities. Maternal viewpoints, attitudes, and behavioural postures regarding emotions are believed to exert a modelling influence on

children's aptitude for recognizing, comprehending, and addressing both their own emotions and those of others. Consequently, they play a pivotal role in fostering children's capacity to manage and regulate their emotions effectively. When mothers themselves struggle with heightened sensitivity to their own and their children's emotional reactions, displaying frequent emotional outbursts, feeling overwhelmed, or engaging in erratic behaviour, it becomes challenging for them to comprehend and manage their own emotions. As a result of adopting their coping mechanism, the youngster shows more negative emotion regulation and less capacity to regulate, failing to learn appropriate ways to cope.

However, Yao's study on the correlation between the father's emotionally disturbed meta-emotional concepts was different from the previous researchers'. Her study showed that the correlation between the father's emotionally disturbed meta-emotional philosophy and the children's emotion regulation ability did not reach a significant level, and did not find that the father's emotionally disturbed meta-emotional philosophy affected the children's ER ability [22].

4.5. Effects of Emotionally Non-Involvement Parents on Children's Emotion Regulation

Emotional non-involvement is also one of the more common meta-emotional among Chinese parents, however, the level of parental emotional non-involvement involvement meta-emotional concepts was the lowest and mothers did not differ significantly in emotional-interference meta-emotional philosophy [14,18]. However, Li's study showed that the father's emotional non-involvement was not significantly correlated with children's emotional relativeness. Another study showed a significant positive correlation between mothers' emotional non-involvement meta-emotional philosophy and children's negative ER scores [22].

Within the framework of PMEP, emotional disengagement emerged as a noteworthy negative predictor of ER development in young children. Moreover, the emotional disengagement subtype exhibited a significant adverse prediction concerning the utilization of positive emotion regulation strategies by young children [18]. Interestingly, these findings deviate somewhat from those reported by Liu, whose research indicated a positive predictive influence of the emotion non-involvement concept on ER strategies among children [21].

5. Conclusion

All in all, the Parental Meta-Emotional Philosophy demonstrated a significant association with preschoolers' emotion regulation. However, the impact of distinct categories of parental meta-emotional philosophy on children's emotion regulation exhibited substantial variations. These effects on children are modulated by the cognitive processes through which children and adolescents perceive, comprehend, and integrate their emotions, culminating in a diverse array of responses. A synthesis of the studies showed that, in general, parents with emotion-coaching meta-emotional philosophies positively facilitated children's emotion regulation, while parents with emotion-dismissing, mood-disordering, and emotion-non-interference meta-emotional philosophies negatively inhibited children's emotion regulation. However, the appropriate parental meta-emotional philosophy should be chosen for children with different types of temperaments and emotion regulation abilities, and it is not necessarily the case that emotion-coaching philosophies are the most effective. In addition, future research could further explore the attitudes and practices of different cultures towards parental meta-emotional philosophies and how they affect children's emotion regulation abilities across cultures. Researchers need to be mindful of collecting and comparing research data on parental meta-emotional philosophies across cultures and across time. By doing this, it will be possible to get a more thorough understanding of how various cultural norms affect children's ability to regulate their emotions and to develop education and support programs that are tailored to particular cultures.

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