

Emotional Regulation in Children: Practices and Myths in the Indian Cultural Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This review examines emotional regulation (ER) development in Indian children within familial contexts, integrating cultural influences and parenting practices. Cultural factors significantly determine adaptive ER strategies, with Indian parents emphasising positive affect modulation and proactive reactivity. Evidence-based findings challenge Western normative assumptions, including the notion that expressive suppression is universally maladaptive. The paper identifies key misconceptions in Indian emotional socialisation, such as the myth of a singular normative family and misinterpretations of expressive suppression. Understanding culture-specific ER practices is essential for developing contextually appropriate interventions that promote children's psychological well-being in a globalised society.

Keywords: *Emotional Regulation, Children, Parenting Styles, Indian Cultural Context, Emotional Socialisation, Cultural Practices*

Since the 1990s, emotional regulation (ER) has emerged as a rapidly advancing research domain within developmental psychology (Thompson, 1994). Emotions fundamentally influence behaviour, cognition, and social engagement, making it essential to study ER within specific cultural frameworks (Calkins & Hill, 2007; Thompson & Lewis, 2008). Cultural background and family practices are crucial determinants of ER development in children. Despite extensive literature on emotional regulation, research examining ER practices within Indian cultural contexts remains limited (Raval et al., 2013). Understanding the relationship between culture and emotional experiences is increasingly pivotal in contemporary globalised society (Mesquita & Boiger, 2014).

This paper presents evidence on cultural practices, parenting strategies, and common misconceptions, thereby facilitating a context-sensitive understanding of the development of emotional regulation in Indian children within their distinct sociocultural framework.

METHODOLOGY

This narrative review examined emotional regulation techniques in children and misconceptions in ER management practices within Indian cultural contexts. Inclusion criteria encompassed studies focusing on emotional regulation in children or adolescents

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within Indian cultural contexts or samples. Studies examining parenting practices or cultural influences on emotional development were also included. All selected studies were published in peer-reviewed journals or scholarly books. Reference lists of key papers were reviewed to ensure comprehensive literature coverage.

This review addressed the scarcity of research on ER in Indian cultural contexts by examining ER through Gross's process model (Gross, 1998) and integrating theoretical frameworks from Indian philosophy (Triguna, Rasa, Bhava) and cross-cultural studies of collectivist societies. Rather than employing systematic review methods with stringent quality evaluations, this study synthesised current material thematically, enabling thorough analysis of cultural nuances and acknowledging the exploratory nature of research in this area.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Defining Emotional Regulation

While research on emotional regulation has expanded substantially, a universally accepted definition remains absent. The most widely cited definitions derive from Thompson's (1994) developmental approach and Gross's (1998) process model. Thompson defines emotional regulation as "the external and internal systems that monitor, evaluate, and modify our emotional responses to attain our goals" emphasising the purposeful nature of ER in human development (Garcia-Andres et al., 2010; Sanchis-Sanchis et al., 2020).

Gross's (1998) process model, commonly applied in ER research, conceptualises internal and external processes through which individuals regulate emotional responses. The model identifies five interconnected strategies: (1) *situation selection*, involving choosing situations based on predicted emotional impact; (2) *situation modification*, actively reconfiguring events to alter emotional impact; (3) *attention deployment*, purposefully directing attention to modify emotional responses through distraction or concentration; (4) *cognitive change*, adapting one's understanding of situations to enhance emotional experiences; and (5) *response modulation*, influencing emotions after generation through behavioral or psychological modifications.

Cultural Context and Emotional Regulation

Although Gross's process model provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding ER development, cultural context is essential for understanding emotional developmental nuances. The Triguna Personality System, an Indian philosophical concept, offers unique perspectives on emotional regulation. Research examining relationships between emotional expression, regulation, and Triguna personality characteristics indicates that the predominance of Sattva (purity/harmony), Rajas (activity/passion), and Tamas (resistance/darkness) impacts emotional comprehension and modulation processes (Sharma et al., 2024).

Research involving two generations from 30 families (parents aged 45–50 and children aged 18–24) demonstrated that younger generations exhibit greater awareness of and engagement in expressing and managing emotions (Smith & Johnson, 2022). Enhanced capabilities in understanding and expressing emotions correlate with superior emotional management skills, regardless of generational differences (Brown et al., 2021; Williams, 2020).

Table 1 Theoretical Frameworks in Emotional Regulation Studies

Perspective	Theoretical Frameworks	Focus	Key References
Western	Process model	Situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, response modulation	Gross (1998)
Indian	Triguna personality characteristics	Sattva, Rajas, Tamas	Sharma et al. (2024)

Social and Cultural Influences on Emotional Regulation

Complex interactions between biological predispositions and environmental influences contribute to ER development, primarily as a developmental achievement (Calkins & Hill, 2007). Social influences, including parental training, modelling behaviours, parent-child conversations, and holistic values for parent-child relationship, substantially influence ER (Thompson & Lewis, 2008).

Social rules, cultural contexts, and values form the basis for sharing and preserving cultural knowledge. Culture incorporates patterns of ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours that are rooted in communal living and are selectively transmitted to subsequent generations (Krober & Kluckholm, 1952). Culturally promoted values and behaviours are performed more routinely and receive social reinforcement (Mesquita et al., 2014). Family socialisation practices play significant roles in transmitting and maintaining culture. Culture substantially influences both which emotions are regulated and the methods used to regulate them. (Butler, 2011).

Cross-cultural research reveals that the efficacy of emotional regulation techniques, including expressive suppression, is context-specific, varying across cultural settings (Aka, 2023). Research demonstrates that expressive suppression can be adaptive in collectivistic cultures, challenging Western presumptions about its universal maladaptiveness (Park & Huang, 2010). This cultural positioning suggests ER techniques function more effectively when oriented toward prevailing cultural contexts, leading to improved psychological well-being and social functioning (Ford & Mauss, 2015).

Cultural Practices and Beliefs on Emotional Regulation in Indian Families

Family frameworks, combined with intergenerational relationships, influence emotional norms and expression patterns. Parents' goals and culturally rooted scripts shape emotional socialisation within Indian families. Indian parents often modify positive affect to achieve emotional equilibrium and may resort to dampening as appropriate responses to children's emotional manifestations. Proactive caregiver sensitivity and targeted coaching techniques are associated with reduced emotional lability and varied regulatory profiles in children (Song et al., 2023), suggesting that culturally aligned sensitivity types are crucial for developmental outcomes.

Indian traditions challenge the notion of solely controlling family structures, shaping the reasonableness standards for emotional expressions across diverse family constitutions (Prasad & Deshwal, 2024). Congruous patterns coupled with geographical difference are observed in emotional socialization practices. Research indicates that Bengaluru-based urban middle-class families prioritise achieving joy over conforming to stringent systems of enhancement and dampening (Wick et al., 2024).

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Gendered convictions may hinder the development of emotional competence. Cultural demands regarding academic success, traditional conservative gender roles, and physical image contribute to emotionally detrimental practices, potentially compromising healthy regulation development among adolescents (Waseem et al., 2024). Boys frequently encounter punitive minimisation responses. Gender-specific responses to cross-generational trauma may reinforce beliefs about effective emotional socialisation. Acknowledging emotionally stigmatising behaviours regarding academic success or gender norm conformity can normalise emotional abuse. Parents often mistake expressive suppression as a resilience-building technique, potentially leading to maladaptive regulation patterns, as evidenced by research (Swathi et al., 2024).

Specific Cultural Practices Impacting Emotional Regulation in Indian Children

Early bedtime routines have demonstrated associations with enhanced emotional regulation development. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project examined correlations between early bedtimes at age three and subsequent behavioural complications, testing whether emotional regulation mediated this relationship (Pudasainee-Kapri et al., 2025). Findings revealed that persistent early bedtime schedules predicted significantly enhanced ER in three-year-old children, with improved ER associated with positive development of internalising and externalising behaviours. These outcomes have practical applications in the healthcare and education industries, enabling families to build consistent bedtime routines as preventive measures in ER.

Parenting Styles and Emotional Regulation Outcomes

Parental techniques considerably influence children's emotional control abilities. A meta-analysis of 61 papers involving 8,864 children found positive correlations between compassionate parenting and adaptive emotional regulation (Irwin, 2024). However, methodological considerations require attention, particularly regarding informants providing information on emotional regulation and parenting factors. Associations between caring parenting practices and emotional regulation became more pronounced when single informants reported on both factors, highlighting the importance of advanced methodologies and assessments in future research.

Primary caregivers substantially influence the development of emotional regulation by employing strategies such as attention redirection, cognitive reframing, and combined modulation, which reduce negative feelings in children (Morris et al., 2017). Active learning experiences with primary caregivers cultivate emotional regulation more effectively than passive observation alone.

Indian mothers frequently choose proactive sensitivity, substantially affecting children's emotional regulation development. Intergenerational processes impact children's emotional development when parents have adverse childhood experience (ACE) histories, leading to reduced authoritative parenting styles (Naik et al., 2024), that hinders children's opportunities to develop emotional strategies supporting autonomy. Maternal responses, shaped by social norms, may vary by children's gender (e.g., punitive or minimising toward boys), potentially creating divergent emotional developmental trajectories for girls and boys (Menon, 2024).

Research demonstrates that children with effective emotional regulation exhibit greater cognitive reappraisal and reduced expressive suppression, which correlate with authoritative parenting styles (Swathi et al., 2024). Conversely, children whose parents displayed

authoritarian and permissive parenting styles demonstrate poor regulation and ineffective emotional strategies.

Rasa and Bhava: Indian Perspectives on Emotional Expression

Cultural psychology perspectives focusing on emotional expression provide key insights into understanding and applying emotions within Indian settings. Rasa (aesthetic emotion) and Bhava (emotional state) are specific Indian concepts facilitating understanding of human emotional experience and regulation (Misra & Ramanathan, 2024). These frameworks promote understanding of culture's impact on emotional experience and expression, particularly significant in today's globalised world.

Myths and Misconceptions in Indian Emotional Socialisation

The Myth of a Single Normative Family

Contemporary research on Indian family diversity opposes the single normative family model. Relying on a single-family model produces overly generalised and narrow emotional socialisation perspectives, excluding family setup configurations, extended circles, and regional differences across India (Prasad & Deshwal, 2024). This misconception leads to tactless intervention measures and impractical emotional socialisation expectations.

Misunderstanding Positive Affect Regulation

Global contrasts between enhancing versus dampening positive affect inadequately capture Indian parental goals and strategies. Regarding dampening as uniformly negative or positive, this view proves deceptive, as many Indian parents purposefully prefer balancing emotions for relational or normative reasons over purely individual emotional optimisation (Wick et al., 2024). This cultural complexity demands more sophisticated comprehension of emotional regulation goals within collectivistic societies.

Gendered Beliefs and Emotional Development

Persistent gendered beliefs, such as expectations that boys should receive more punitive or minimising responses to emotional expression, or that different encouragement types are appropriate based on gender, may be mistaken for effective socialisation when they potentially hinder the development of emotional competence (Menon, 2024; Waseem et al., 2024). Such gender-restricting perspectives impede optimal emotional development, particularly in boys who are frequently reprimanded for emotional awareness and expressiveness.

Normalisation of Emotional Control and Shame

Cultural acknowledgement of emotionally controlling or shaming practices, particularly those tied to scholastic performance expectations or stern gender norm conformity, can normalise emotional harassment patterns and hinder adolescents' self-concept development and complete psychological well-being (Waseem et al., 2024). These practices may be defended as character-building or foundations for life obstacles, but research demonstrates their detrimental impact on emotional development.

Misinterpretation of Emotional Suppression

Parental emotional expressive suppression as a resilience-building means requires careful consideration. Research reveals that suppression strategies are associated with less adaptive regulation patterns in Indian samples compared to authoritative coaching styles that teach children to understand and appropriately express emotions (Swathi et al., 2024). Developing culturally relevant measurement instruments, such as the Perceived Parental Socialisation of

Emotions (PPSE) scale, represents progress in creating culturally appropriate assessment tools (Joyce & Shukla, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that emotional regulation in Indian children develops within culturally contextualised frameworks that encompass both adaptive strategies and potential misconceptions. While Indian cultural practices provide meaningful approaches to emotional socialisation that incorporate proactive sensitivity and emotional balancing, certain myths hinder healthy emotional development. Understanding Indian family diversity, recognising the cultural validity of identified emotional regulation strategies, and addressing detrimental misconceptions are essential for designing effective interventions that promote optimal emotional development.

Future research must move beyond Western ER frameworks to develop culturally appropriate interventions grounded in Indian emotional socialisation practices. Rigorous methodologies suited to cultural contexts, culturally sensitive assessment tools, and mental health professional preparation for effective work within diverse Indian settings are necessary. Longitudinal and intervention-based studies examining the interplay among parenting behaviours, cultural practices, and children's emotional regulation within Indian contexts will provide evidence-based insights that honour cultural wisdom while advancing child well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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