

## Relationship between Marital Conflict, Parenting Styles and Emotion Regulation among Parents

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore and analyze the relationship between marital conflict, parenting styles and emotion regulation among parents. The participants included in the study were 211 parents from 30 to 50 years originated from Tamil Nadu, India. Data were collected through standardized measures such as Marital Conflict scale, Parenting styles and Dimensions Questionnaire and Emotion Regulation scale. The collected data were then analyzed using spearman correlation coefficient. The study revealed a very low positive correlation between marital conflict and parenting styles, which was statistically significant (Spearman's rho = 0.168,  $p = 0.014$ ). Secondly, there was no significant relationship observed between emotion regulation and marital conflict (Spearman's rho = -0.049,  $p = 0.478$ ). However, a very low positive and statistically significant correlation was found between emotion regulation and parenting styles (Spearman's rho = 0.149,  $p = 0.031$ ). The study's findings gave insights by suggesting on generating interventions, providing psychoeducation for the parents, policy implications and the need for the accessibility for mental health services that enhance family bonds which help in the overall well-being of the individuals. Additionally, the results suggest that other variables may exert more substantial impact in these variables and thereby should be considered in future studies.

**Keywords:** *Marital Conflict, Parenting Styles, Emotion Regulation and Parents*

### **Marital conflict**

Marriage represents to be one of the important events that occurs in an individual's life, during which each person tends to choose a partner with a different role and expectation. This union brings with it a blend of joy, companionship and sometimes the complexities that arise from merging the lives of two individuals. John M. Gottman and Robert W. Levenson defined marital conflict as a dynamic and interactive process which can be characterized by negative interactions, disagreements, and disputes between spouses or partners in a committed relationship. In the Association Dictionary of Psychology, marital conflict is perceived as an overt or covert hostility existent between the partners of marriage. There is an involvement of the expression of incompatible goals, needs, or values, often leading to emotional tension, hostility, and distress within the marital relationship (Busari, 2019).

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### *Parenting styles*

Parenting styles tends to widely vary across families and cultural backgrounds and each parent tends to adopt a different approach in the way they guide their child. It refers to a psychologic construct which outlines typical approaches of parents in bringing up their children. (Faraz et al., 2015). The classifications made by Diana Blumberg Baumrind was with three styles namely, authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Later, Maccoby and Martin included the uninvolved parenting style, otherwise called neglectful parenting styles, which was regarded as fourth parenting style (Faraz et al., 2015).

### *Emotion regulation*

It is a process which helps people to manage their emotions in terms of the type of emotions, the timing of the emotions and how the emotions are felt and displayed by the person. On a daily basis people encounter different kinds of stimuli that, in one way or the other, processes the person into some regulation state. Emotion regulation can be either automatic or controlled, and it involves using various coping skills to manage shifts in emotions experienced (Bapu & Mammen, 2021). Adaptive strategies or positive coping strategies predict to increase psychological well-being and health (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2011). On the other hand, when emotions are dysregulated, it can be defined as difficulties in controlling the influence of arousal and thereby, affecting one's thoughts, actions, and interactions.

### *Theoretical framework*

#### **1. Family systems theory**

Family systems theory is a concept introduced by Murray Bowen that seeks to explain human behaviours by focusing on relationships between family members. The theory highlights key about emotional fusion and differentiation of self, where family members' identities and emotional boundaries may either be excessively merged or sufficiently separated. When family members lack differentiation, marital conflict often escalates as spouses may find it difficult to maintain a sense of self within the relationship, leading to heightened emotional fusion and dependency on one another's emotional states (Watson, 2012). It also explores triangles, a structure where a third person, is involved in alleviating tensions within the marital dyad. Furthermore, emotional cutoff occurs when family members respond to stress by withdrawing emotionally or physically, which can lead to an avoidance of resolving marital issues. Stemming from it the spillover hypothesis posits that conflict within one subsystem can disrupt other subsystems, thereby affecting the family dynamics.

### *Statement of the problem*

Throwing light onto the family systems theory and spillover hypothesis it is crucial in understanding how marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation are related among parents for improving family dynamics and parental effectiveness.

### *Aim*

The study aims to explore and analyze the relationship between marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation among parents.

### *Objectives*

1. To determine the relationship between marital conflict and parenting styles among parents.
2. To explore the relationship between emotion regulation and marital conflict among parents.

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3. To examine the relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles among parents.

### *Research Question*

How do marital conflict, parenting styles, and parental emotion regulation interact and have a relationship with each other among parents?

### *Research Hypotheses*

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and parenting styles among parents.
- H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and marital conflict among parents.
- H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles among parents.

### *Significance of the study*

It is important to study the connection between marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation among Indian parents due to the unique cultural and familial dynamics in India. Marital conflict can have a negative impact on how parents manage their emotions and subsequently how they raise their children, which can affect the emotional development of the children. Research indicates that stress levels rise and parenting skills deteriorate when there is marital conflict (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Understanding these dynamics within the Indian context helps to develop culturally appropriate interventions and support systems.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### *Research design*

The study adopted a quantitative approach with correlational research design.

### *Participants*

The study included 211 parents from 30 to 50 years, married and living with their spouse originated from Tamil Nadu, India. They were also required to have one biological, adopted or stepchild. The exclusion criteria ruled out individuals who were divorced, separated or widowed.

### *Sampling*

#### **1. Technique Used**

The data collection employed was purposive sampling technique to study the relationship between marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation among parents.

### *Tools*

1. **Marital Conflict Scale by Braiker & Kelley (1979)**: It contains 5 items, measuring the level of disagreement and hostility in couples' relationships on a 5-point Likert scale. The internal consistency of this scale ranges from .61-.90 and has predictive validity (Long et al., 1996). The scoring is done by summing the scores of items 1 to 5. A higher score denotes a greater degree of conflict and negativity in marital relations (Singh & Gupta, 2023).
2. **Parenting styles and dimensions questionnaire short version by Robinson, C. C., Mandlco, B., Olsen, S. F., & Hart, C. H. (2001)**: The scale comprises of 3 styles as term authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive which contains 32 items and 7

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parenting dimensions that measure the various aspects of parenting which include connection, autonomy, regulation, verbal hostility, physical coercion, non-reasoning/punitive and indulgence. Responses were measured on a likert type scale from 1 “never” to 5 “always”. The overall scores of parenting styles was calculated. The Cronbach’s alpha for the three styles is .86, .82 and .64. and the content validity index of the scale is 0.97 (Oliveira et al., 2018).

- 3. Emotion regulation scale (ERQ) by Gross & John (2003):** It is a 10-item scale which measures individual differences in the usage of cognitive reappraisal and suppression. The responses to be rated on a 7-point Likert scale by saying 1 as strongly disagree and 7 as strongly agree. The two overall scores will be calculated by summing up the corresponding responses to each of the subscales (Waizman et al., 2023). The researchers have documented their high reliability for the two subscales and validity is 0.89 (Bahrami et al., 2018). The scales exhibit reliability at  $\alpha = .89-.90$  for cognitive reappraisal while  $\alpha = .76-.80$  for expressive suppression (Bajaj & Raj, 2024).

### Procedure

The study used Google Form where participants filled a questionnaire on marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation. It included consent form, study aim, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. The participants were assured confidentiality, encouraged honesty and required to answer all questions.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including central tendencies and the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality were conducted to assess whether data distribution met normality. Given the nature spearman’s correlation analysis, a non-parametric test was used to evaluate these associations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Table 1 Shows the sample size as N, Mean, Median, Standard deviation and Shapiro wilk’s p for Marital Conflict, Parenting styles and Emotion regulation among parents*

Variables	N	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Shapiro Wilk p
<b>1.Marital Conflict</b>	211	13.5	14	3.73	0.034
<b>2.Parenting Styles</b>	211	95.7	96	12.4	0.045
<b>3.Emotion Regulation</b>	211	45.0	45	9.30	0.646

The Shapiro-Wilk p values are found to be 0.034, 0.045 and 0.646, which is interpreted to be a not normally distributed data for marital conflict and parenting styles with a normally distributed data for emotion regulation.

*Table 2 Correlation coefficient between the Marital Conflict and Parenting Styles among Parents*

Variables		Marital Conflict	Parenting Styles
<b>1. Marital Conflict</b>	Spearman's rho	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
<b>2. Parenting Styles</b>	Spearman's rho	0.168*	—
	df	209	—
	p-value	0.014	—

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**H<sub>0</sub>1. There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and parenting styles among parents.**

Table 2 presents the spearman’s correlation coefficient predicting the relationship between marital conflict and parenting styles parents. The correlation coefficient between marital conflict and parenting styles was found to have a very low positive correlation and is statistically significant (spearman’s rho = 0.168, p-value = 0.014). Based on the results, the null hypothesis stated as there is no significant relationship between marital conflict and parenting styles among parents is rejected.

**Table 3 Correlation coefficient between the Emotion Regulation and Marital Conflict among Parents**

Variables		Emotion Regulation	Marital Conflict
<b>1.Emotion Regulation</b>	Spearman's rho	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
<b>2. Marital Conflict</b>	Spearman's rho	-0.049	—
	df	209	—
	p-value	0.478	—

**H<sub>0</sub>2. There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and marital conflict among parents.**

Table 3 presents the spearman’s correlation coefficient predicting the relationship between emotion regulation and marital conflict among parents. The correlation coefficient between emotion regulation and marital conflict was found to have (spearman’s rho = -0.049, p-value = 0.478), which is interpreted to be marked low, slight and almost negative relationship and is not statistically significant. Based on the results, we fail to reject the null hypothesis stating there is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and marital conflict among parents.

**Table 4 Correlation coefficient between the Emotion Regulation and Parenting Styles among Parents.**

Variables		Emotion Regulation	Parenting Styles
<b>1.Emotion Regulation</b>	Spearman's rho	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
<b>2.Parenting Styles</b>	Spearman's rho	0.149*	—
	df	209	—
	p-value	0.031	—

Note. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

**H<sub>0</sub>3. There is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles among parents.**

Table 4 presents the spearman’s correlation coefficient predicting the relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles among parents. The correlation coefficient between cognitive reappraisal and authoritative parenting style is (spearman’s rho = 0.149, p-value = 0.031), which is interpreted to be very low positive correlation and is statistically significant. Based on the results, the null hypothesis stated as there is no relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles among parents is rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study is to explore and analyze the relationship between marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation among parents. The first hypothesis stated as there is no significant relationship between marital conflict and parenting styles among parents, revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship but a very low positive correlation between marital conflict and parenting styles (Spearman's  $\rho = 0.168$ ,  $p$  value = 0.014). This suggests that while there is a relationship between these two variables, the strength is however found to be very low, with positive relationship. The link is consistent with the results obtained by Erel and Burman in 1995, which revealed a positive correlation between marriage quality and child rearing. Furthermore, with the previous study conducted by those of Xiao et al., (2021) to look into the role of mediation by the parenting styles in the relationship between marital conflict and Chinese children's internalizing problems, it indicated that marital conflict influences parenting styles and the way parents perceive each other's parenting. Secondly, in another study conducted by Stratton and Hammond (1999) examined whether the link between marital conflict management style and child conduct problems with peers and parents is direct or mediated by mothers' and fathers' parenting style. They found a relationship between marital conflict management style and children's conduct problems. Thus, it can be described using the spillover hypothesis, which proposes that emotional distress or conflict in one aspect such as marital relationship can spill over into another aspect, like parenting. Additionally, various other characteristics such as personality traits, social support, stress management, coping mechanisms might moderate the relationship.

The second hypothesis was stated as there is no significant relationship between emotion regulation and marital conflict among parents. The results of the analysis did not show significant correlation between emotion regulation and marital conflict (spearman's  $\rho = -0.049$ ,  $p$  value = 0.478), which thereby supports the null hypothesis further leading to the acceptance of it. The correlation coefficient is interpreted to be marked low, slight and almost negative relationship and is not statistically significant. The findings thereby imply that the ability of regulating emotions does not predict the levels of conflict. The results aligns with the study conducted by Robles et al. (2014), which revealed that emotion regulation's impact on marital conflict is not universally significant. The findings are inconsistent with the research conducted by Sedaghatkhah et al., in the year 2022 to predict marital conflicts based on dysfunctional attitudes with a mediating role of emotion regulation, it was found that positive cognitive emotion regulation strategies had a negative and significant relationship with marital conflict and negative cognitive emotion regulation strategies had a positive and significant relationship with marital conflict. The study suggests that parents who are emotionally aware and are able to regulate the emotions better may tend to be aware of issues in marital relationship, and thereby addressing them efficiently. The way in which individuals regulate emotions can be influenced by factors like environmental, past experiences, values imparted as a result of interactions with the society and family, and personality factors.

The third hypothesis stated was as there will be no significant relationship between emotion regulation and parenting styles among parents. Subsequently the analysis revealed that there is a very low positive correlation and is statistically significant (spearman's  $\rho = 0.149$ ,  $p$  value = 0.031), positive correlation. The present study provides findings that highlight the importance of examining parenting styles as a comprehensive framework rather than individually, as the view is supported by the study conducted by Smetana in the year 2017 which focused on parenting styles dimensions and beliefs, who argues that traditional classifications of parenting styles may not be highly sufficient for understanding the full scope of parenting, thereby this broader perspective is used. Therefore, the findings reveal that the

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way in which parents regulate their emotions, it plays a small role in their parenting approach on an overall basis. In a study conducted by Bahrami et al., in the year 2018 to understand and compare the emotion regulation among parenting styles of mothers, it was found that when there is higher usage of cognitive reappraisal and suppression, mothers align with authoritative approach. On the other hand, lower levels of the emotion regulation strategies are associated with authoritarian or permissive styles. Thereby, they concluded that emotion regulation played a role in parenting styles. An investigation carried out by Qiu & Shum in the year 2022 focused on the relationship between emotion regulation of caregivers and parenting styles and the ways that this process helped preschoolers with dealing with their emotions in a sociocultural environment in which grandparenting was in abundance; As a result, it turned out that for cognitive reappraisal, there was a greater level of authoritative parenting, while there was low authoritarian parenting in both fathers and mothers as well as grandmothers and grandfathers, along with high levels of emotion regulation in children. Exposure to suppressive expressiveness on the other hand led to reduced emotion regulation competence in children only in relationships involving parents and not grandparents. Thereby, pointing out the impact of emotion regulation in varied generations. Overall, the present study enhances the understanding of challenges parents face and highlights the importance in considering the necessity to focus on culturally supporting interventions which can be designed at improving both emotion regulation and parenting practices.

### CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationships between marital conflict, parenting styles, and emotion regulation among parents in Tamil Nadu. A statistically significant but very low positive correlation was observed between marital conflict and parenting styles, no significant relationship was found between emotion regulation and marital conflict however, a very low positive correlation was found between emotion regulation and parenting style. Therefore, the study highlights the need for culturally sensitive interventions that address marital conflict's impact on parenting and promote emotion regulation strategies, accessible mental health services for parents and psychoeducation programs to foster healthier family dynamics. Policymakers can use these insights to design family support programs. The study's generalizability is limited by its homogeneous sample of Tamil Nadu parents and reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. Additionally, factors such as personality traits external stressors like financial pressures or work-life balance and cultural beliefs were not included. Future studies should examine diverse populations to explore cultural variations, employ longitudinal methods to understand long-term effects, and incorporate qualitative approaches for deeper insights.

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***Conflict of Interest***

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