

- **Name of the study:** Strained Parenting and Emotion Regulation
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Abstract

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This dissertation examined the complex relationship between emotion regulation (ER) strategies and strained parenting across various challenging contexts. Through four studies, we investigated how different ER strategies (including reappraisal, mentalizing, suppression, and rumination) influence parental well-being, parent-child relationships, and children's emotional development under conditions of heightened stress. The research focused on three key sources of parental strain: child-related factors, parent-related factors, and environmental stressors.

Study 1 included a systematic review examining how parents of children with disabilities regulate their emotions and how their ER tendencies relate to both parent and child outcomes. The review revealed that parents of children with disabilities experience higher levels of emotion dysregulation and use reappraisal less frequently compared to parents of typically developing children. While reappraisal was associated with better outcomes for both parents and children, rumination and suppression were linked to distress and negative parenting practices. Based on these findings, we proposed the Strained Parenting and Emotion Regulation (SPER) model, which explains how heightened negative emotions, limited cognitive resources, and disrupted parent-child interactions can create a cycle of emotion dysregulation.

Study 2 investigated the role of parental mentalization in mediating and moderating the relationship between parental depressive symptoms and children's ER abilities. Results showed that parental depressive symptoms were negatively associated with children's ER skills, mediated by parental pre-mentalizing modes. In addition, parental certainty about mental states emerged as a protective factor, weakening the children's ER difficulties, whereas link between parental depressive symptoms and parental interest and curiosity did not moderate this relationship as expected. These findings highlight the crucial role of parental mentalizing capacity in shaping children's emotional development in the context of parental depression.

Study 3 examined ER as a buffer against COVID-19-related stress and mental health difficulties during the pandemic lockdowns. We investigated how factors at multiple levels of the socio-ecological system influenced maternal mental health during two peak periods of the pandemic in Israel. Results demonstrated that reappraisal was associated with lower distress levels, while suppression was linked to higher psychological distress.

Study 4 investigated the relationship between trait and state ER and parental burnout during the Israel-Hamas war that began in October 2023. We examined both dispositional tendencies and situational use of reappraisal and rumination through questionnaires and an emotion regulation task. Results showed that while trait reappraisal did not moderate the link between war-related stress and parental burnout, rumination significantly intensified this relationship. Additionally, state reappraisal effectively reduced negative emotions during the ER task, while rumination increased emotional distress.

Collectively, these studies reveal a complex bidirectional relationship between strained parenting and ER. While adaptive ER strategies, particularly reappraisal, consistently serve as protective factors across various stressful parenting contexts,

the capacity to use these strategies may be compromised under conditions of chronic or acute stress. The findings highlight a paradox: parents under strain might benefit significantly from adaptive ER strategies, yet their ability to utilize these strategies may be impaired by the very stress they're experiencing. Our findings suggest that efforts to enhance parental ER skills should be accompanied by practical support to bolster parents' resources.

Keywords

parenting, emotion regulation, disabilities, parental burnout, rumination, mentalization, reappraisal, stress contexts.

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