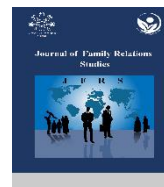




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## Research Paper

# Determining the mediating role of emotional repression in the relationship between parenting styles and ego strength



Faezeh Aliabbasi <sup>1\*</sup>, Masoume Maleki Pirbazari <sup>2</sup> & Fateme Ashournejad <sup>3</sup>

1. Master Student in General Psychology, Department of Psychology, Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran.

3. University Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran.

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study investigated the relationship between parenting styles and ego strength, with the mediating role of emotional repression.

**Methods:** The current type of research is descriptive-correlation based on structural equation modeling. The statistical population of the research includes female students of the first secondary level of schools in Abbas Abad city in the academic year of 2022-2023. 200 students were selected by a multi-stage cluster sampling method. To collect information in this research, the Parenting Styles & Dimensions Questionnaire, Psychosocial Inventory of Ego Strengths, and Weinberger Adjustment Inventory were used. Then, the data was analyzed using correlation tests and structural equation modeling using SPSS-24 and SmartPLS3.

**Results:** The results showed that permissive and authoritative parenting styles have a positive and direct effect on ego strength, and authoritarian parenting styles have a negative and direct effect on ego strength ( $p < 0.05$ ). Also, emotional repression has a negative and direct effect on ego strength ( $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, parenting styles have an indirect effect on ego strength through the mediating role of emotional repression ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results showed that the authoritative parenting style and emotional repression will have a negative effect on creating a strong ego in students. Therefore, it is necessary to train parents with healthy parenting styles to raise students with a strong ego.

## 1. Introduction

The way parents respond to their children and the way they meet their needs in all dimensions during their different periods of development causes the formation of various abilities in them, and these abilities enable them to have different reactions in dealing with life issues (Moradikelardeh et al., 2022; Narimani & Parnian Khooy, 2021). Psychoanalysts believed that early mother-child relationships form the prototype of

all future relationships, and the outcome of adolescents' development depends on their ego-strength (Ali Babaei et al., 2022; bin Yaacob, 2006). According to Bios (1979; cited by Goossens, 2020), the main task in adolescence is psychological reconstruction, which is necessary due to sexual transformation in puberty. Sigmund Freud divided the human personality into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego.

\*Corresponding Author:

Faezeh Aliabbasi

Address: Department of Psychology, Rahman Institute of Higher Education, Ramsar, Iran.

E-mail: [arammax@gmail.com](mailto:arammax@gmail.com)



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The ego part is created by the forces in the id and following the baby's encounter with reality, which deals with the conflicts between the id and the superego based on external realities (Lapsley & Stey, 2011). Regulation and control of instincts, thought processing, defensive functions, and judgment are among the functions of the ego. Also, a person's ability to cope with life and possible threats depends on the ego's ability to control the various pressures that are placed on it, and to the extent that the ego is not able to create a functional balance, the person's personality will be involved in mental disorders (Sobański et al., 2018).

Ego strength refers to a person's ability to effectively deal with competitive demands and difficult situations (Bahmannia & Sohrabi Shaghafi, 2024). Therefore, the existence of a strong ego makes a person show fewer signs of psychological damage and has sufficient tolerance and ability to withstand stress caused by stressful life conditions (Hilterbrand, 2022).

It has been shown that one of the areas that can play a role in ego strength is the influence of family and parenting styles (Besharat, 2015). Parents are the most important people who can try to find a way to understand the teenager and their world. Because the family is the most basic educational environment in terms of different dimensions of growth (physical, emotional, social), and the foundation of human personality will be formed in this environment (Xi et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023). According to Winnicott (1965; cited by Shafaghdoost & Shahamat Dehsorkh, 2019), the basis of healthy growth is the ego's progression from absolute dependence to independence.

Researchers have divided parenting styles into authoritative, permissive, and (Baumrind, 1967; Vasiou et al., 2023). The authoritative parenting style is characterized by high levels of affection and participation, sensitivity, logic, control and limitation, encouragement and approval, and fostering self-control in the child. The authoritarian parenting style includes a high level of restriction, punishment, rejection, control, and listening, strictness, and domineering behaviors, and the permissive parenting style shows high levels of responsiveness, warmth, acceptance, child-centeredness, and extreme support (Khanum et al., 2023). Parenting methods are one of the basic components in growth and education and are often related to the most important achievements of children, such as their cognitive and social abilities (Bibi et al., 2013). In various research studies, the relationship between parenting styles and ego strength has been confirmed (Besharat, 2015; Farhadi & Beiranvand, 2023; Narimani & Parnian Khooy, 2021). For example, Shahla et al. (2022) showed that the parent-child relationship predicts adolescent ego identity. Fayaz

et al. (2015) showed that the more authoritative parenting style of parents, the more ego strength is observed in their children. Also, ego strength had a significant positive relationship with permissive parenting style. According to the research of Narimani & Parnian Khooy (2021), it was also shown that ego strength has a positive and significant relationship with authoritarian parenting style. One of the defense mechanisms that the ego uses when there is a conflict between the demands of the id and the norms of the superego is emotional repression, which refers to the conscious control of the expression of negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, and anger (Li et al., 2023). Repression leads to avoiding and inhibiting threatening information and not expressing unpleasant emotional experiences (Heshmati et al., 2023). In some studies, it has been shown that ego strength is related to some symptoms of emotional repression. For example, in the study of Mortezaazadeh (2021), a relationship between low ego strength and the experience of anxiety was observed, which can be the basis for the loss of control over conscious thoughts. In the study of Heshmati et al. (2019), the role of emotional repression and ego strength was investigated in predicting smoking and non-smoking in cancer patients. The results of the research showed that ego strength had a negative relationship with depression and anxiety. Ego strength partially mediates between emotional repression and depression, and fully mediates between emotional repression and anxiety.

On the other hand, the family, as children's first and most important educational environment, can also affect emotional repression (Myers & Brewin, 1994). In this context, the results of Mikaeeli & Moradikelardeh (2021) showed that the difficulty in regulating and repressing emotions can cause the vulnerability of adolescents.

Since adolescence is one of the most sensitive periods of growth in life and the role of parenting on teenagers is very important, the formation of a strong personality and the further reduction of emotional repression in teenagers is associated with positive mental health consequences (Young et al., 2019). However, this relationship has been investigated less in the research background. Therefore, considering the importance of the family's role in raising children, it seems necessary to do this research, and this study was done to determine the mediating role of emotional repression in the relationship between parenting styles and ego strength. To achieve this goal, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Parenting styles have a direct effect on ego strength.
2. Parenting styles have an indirect effect on ego strength through the mediating role of emotional repression.
3. Emotional repression has a direct effect on ego strength.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The current research is descriptive-correlation based on structural equation modeling. The research population includes female students of the first secondary school in Abbas Abad city in 2022-2023. Since the data analysis method in this research was structural equation modeling, a minimum sample size of 200 people was selected. According to some researchers, the normal sample size in studies that use structural equations is about 200 cases (Kline, 2012). Then, the sample was selected using a multi-stage cluster random sampling method. The method of selecting sample people and collecting data was such that, after coordinating with the education department of Abbas Abad city, the names of all the first secondary schools for girls in this area were prepared. Then, from among 7 schools, 2 schools were randomly selected, and 9 classes were randomly selected from among the schools. By attending schools, the number of secondary classes and the number of students studying at that level were determined. 205 questionnaires were distributed, and finally, 200 questionnaires were obtained without defects. It should be noted that the parenting questionnaire was completed by the mothers of these students.

### Research Instrument:

**1. Parenting Styles & Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ):** The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) was designed and validated by Baumrind (1971). This questionnaire was initially prepared from 48 items. Finally, 36 questions were added by twenty one experts in educational psychology and sociology to express the three views of parents, and 30 items were finalized out of 36 items that measure permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting styles 10 items of this questionnaire are related to the permissive style, 10 items are related to the authoritative style and the other 10 items are related to the authoritarian style. In this questionnaire, parents specify their opinion according to a 5-point Likert scale: I completely agree (5), I agree (4), to some extent (3), I disagree (2), I completely disagree (1). Buri (1991) reported the reliability of this questionnaire using the test-retest method as follows: 0.81 for the permissive style, 0.86 for the authoritarian style, 0.78 for the authoritative style among mothers, and 77 0.0 for the permissive style, 0.85 for the authoritarian style, and 0.92 for the authoritative style among fathers. Also, the internal consistency was adequate for all subscales (Cronbach  $\alpha \geq .83$ ). Cronbach's alpha of parenting styles was in the research of Fakhri Aliabadi (2017), for permissive parenting style (0.74), authoritative parenting style (0.71), and authoritarian parenting style (0.71). In the present study, the fit indicators confirmed

the three-factor structure of the scale (RMSEA: 0.032 (90% confidence interval [CI] 0.032-0.033); SRMSR: 0.029; TLI: 0.982; CFI: 0.987). Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire in this research is 0.79.

**2. Psychosocial inventory of ego strengths (PIES):** This inventory was created by Markstrom et al. (1997). PIES was created to measure 8 points of ego strength (hope, desire, goal, competence, loyalty, love, care, and wisdom) and has 64 items. This questionnaire has 64 closed-ended items with a five-point Likert scale (does not agree with me at all, does not agree with me a little, does not have an opinion, agrees with me a little, completely agrees with me) with scores of 1-2-3-4-5, respectively. In this questionnaire, items 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 34, 36, 40, 41, 42, 43, 47, 48, 50, 51, 54, 55, 58, 61, 64 are scored in reverse. In this questionnaire, the highest score a person can get is 320, and the lowest score is 64. Obtaining a score close to 320 indicates a high level of ego strength, and obtaining a score close to 64 indicates low ego strength. The score of each of the subscales is calculated by summing the points of the questions of each of the subscales. As the creators of this questionnaire, Markstrom et al. (1997) investigated its validity and reliability. They confirmed the validity of this questionnaire's form, content, and structure and checked its reliability by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient; they reported it as 0.68. Altafi (2008) also confirmed the construct validity of this list and reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 and split-half reliability of 0.77. In the present study, the fit indicators confirmed the factor structure of the scale (RMSEA: 0.063 (90% confidence interval [CI] 0.063-0.064); SRMSR: 0.049; TLI: 0.938; CFI: 0.982). Cronbach's alpha calculated for this questionnaire in this research is 0.81.

**3. Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI):** This questionnaire, which is known as the emotional repression questionnaire in Iran, was prepared by Weinberger et al (1979) and was designed to evaluate long-term functions instead of short-term functions, and to evaluate both clinical and non-clinical populations. This questionnaire has 84 items and ten sub-scales. The present scale is used to measure three different constructs, including disturbance structure, mental distress, self-control, and defensive state. The mental distress (29 items) has been classified into four dimensions: anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and low level of well-being. Self-control (30 items) has four dimensions: repression of anger and aggression, impulse control, consideration of others, and responsibility. Defensive state (22 items) is divided into two dimensions: repressive defense and denial of anxiety.

In this scale, 3 items have also been taken into account to measure the validity of the answers. A high score in this scale indicates a high level of emotional suppression. Cronbach's alpha reported by Weinberger et al (1979) for the disturbance structure is 0.91, self-control is 0.87, denial of anxiety is 0.75, and repressive defense is 0.79 (Weinberger, 1971). This questionnaire has high internal consistency (0.85) and good test-retest reliability (Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). This questionnaire was used for the first time in Iran in the research of Heshmati et al. (2019), and the Cronbach's alpha calculated for this questionnaire was reported as 0.77. Cronbach's alpha reported by Mikaeeli & Moradikelardeh (2021) is 0.79. In the present study, the fit indicators confirmed the factor structure of the scale (RMSEA: 0.085 (90% confidence interval [CI] 0.085-0.086); SRMSR: 0.066; TLI: 0.915; CFI: 0.920). Cronbach's alpha calculated for this questionnaire in this research is 0.87.

**Procedure:** In order to carry out this research, the necessary arrangements were made with the education officials of Abbas Abad city and school principals, and the necessary explanations were given about the research. Then, three schools were randomly selected from among the schools of Abbas Abad city, and 200 samples were selected from among the schools. Then, the researcher gave the necessary explanations about how to complete the questionnaires to the sample members. The participants were asked to ask the researcher for further explanation if they encountered any problems in the process of completing the questionnaire. Then they were assured that the information would be completely confidential and only used for academic research. The

data analysis in this research was done through SPSS 24 and SmartPLS-3 software.

### 3. Results

The mean and standard deviation of the sample's age are 15.65 and 1.49, respectively. The educational level of most of the respondents (86 people; 43%) was 9th, and the least of them (51.5%) was 7th, and the rest (31.5%) were at the 8th educational level. Among the components of ego strength, the competence variable has the highest score with a mean of 28.08 and a standard deviation of 3.734, and the lowest score is obtained by the variable of hope with a mean of 24.35 and a standard deviation of 4.02. Among the components of emotional repression, the variable of repressive defense, with an average of 36.54 and a standard deviation of 5.925, has the highest score, and the variable of repressing anger and aggression, with an average of 20.7. A standard deviation of 5.839 has the lowest score. Among the components of parenting styles, the authoritative style has the highest score with an average of 33.26 and a standard deviation of 4.299, and the lowest score is the authoritarian variable with an average of 29.87 and a standard deviation of 3.259. The results of the normality of the variables were checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the variables of ego strength ( $F = 0.11$ ,  $P = 0.67$ ), emotional repression ( $F = 0.10$ ,  $P = 0.70$ ), and parenting style ( $F = 0.25$ ,  $P = 0.21$ ), the research data have a normal distribution. The correlation matrix of research variables is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Correlation matrix of research variables**

Number	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	ego strength	1						
2	mental distress	-0.38**	1					
3	self-control	-0.38**	0.61**	1				
4	defensive state	-0.36**	0.48**	0.51**	1			
5	permissive	0.21**	-0.28**	-0.35**	-0.26**	1		
6	authoritarian	-0.25**	0.31**	0.24**	0.32**	0.33**	1	
7	authoritative	-0.28**	-0.24**	-0.25**	-0.47**	-0.24**	-0.29**	1

\*\* The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As can be seen, there is a positive and significant relationship between authoritarian and permissive parenting styles and ego strength, but this relationship is negative for authoritarian parenting styles. There is

also a negative and significant relationship between ego strength and emotional repression components. The fit indices are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Fitness indicators**

Fitness indicators	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
Ego strength	0.62	0.45
Emotional repression	0.36	0.28

According to Table 2, the criterion of R<sup>2</sup> is related to endogenous (dependent) hidden variables of the model. It is a criterion that shows the effect of an

exogenous variable on a non-exogenous variable, and three values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are considered as the criteria for weak, medium, and strong values.

The value in the table almost confirms the fit of the structural model. The criterion of  $Q^2$  determines the predictive power of the model, and if its value is 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for an endogenous structure, it indicates weak, medium, and strong predictive power, respectively. The value in the table shows the appropriate predictive power of the model regarding the endogenous constructs of the research and confirms the appropriate fit of the structural model. Also, the results of the overall fitness of the model were checked with the GOF criterion. This index also acts like the fit indices of the LISREL model and is between zero and one, and values close to one indicate

the appropriate quality of the model. Of course, it should be noted that this index does not examine the degree of fit of the theoretical model with the collected data, just like the chi-square-based indices in LISREL models. Instead, it examines the overall forecasting ability of the model and whether the tested model was successful in predicting the endogenous variables or not. In this research, the standard value of GOF equal to 0.434 was obtained, which is greater than the criterion value of 0.3 and shows the appropriate power of the model in predicting the endogenous variable of the model. Figure 1 shows the standard path coefficients of the research conceptual model.

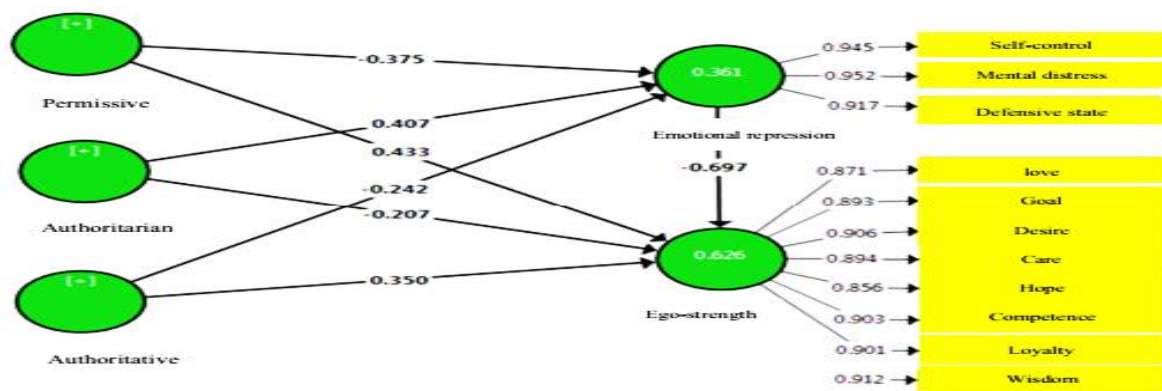


Figure 1. Standard path coefficients of the research conceptual model

To test the significance of path coefficients, using the bootstrap method, T-Student test values have been calculated. If the values of the t-Student test are greater

than 1.96, the path coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level. Table 3 shows the evaluation results of the structural model to check the coefficients of direct paths.

Table 3. The results of the evaluation of the structural model to check the coefficients of direct paths

Number	Path	Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	T value	Test result
1	permissive $\rightarrow$ ego strength	0.43	5.46	confirmation
2	authoritarian $\rightarrow$ ego strength	-0.20	2.49	confirmation
3	authoritative $\rightarrow$ ego strength	0.35	4.92	confirmation
4	Emotional repression $\rightarrow$ and ego strength	-0.69	8.44	confirmation

According to Table 3, the significant statistic for the influence of permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting styles on ego strength is greater than 1.96, which indicates the significant impact of all three parenting styles on ego strength. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted. Also, according to the values of the path coefficients, it is clear that permissive and authoritative parenting styles have a positive and direct effect on ego strength, and authoritarian parenting styles have a negative and direct impact on ego strength. Also, the significant statistic between the variable of emotional repression and ego strength is equal to (8.442), which is greater than the value (1.96) and shows that the relationship between emotional repression and ego strength is at the confidence level (95%) and is significant. Also, the path coefficient between these two variables is equal to (-0.697) and

shows the negative impact of emotional repression on ego strength. In other words, one unit of change in emotional repression will cause a decrease of 0.697 units in ego strength. This means that emotional repression has a negative and direct effect on ego strength. Therefore, the research hypothesis is confirmed. The bootstrap method has been used to check that parenting styles have an indirect effect on ego strength through the mediating role of emotional repression. In this method, if the value of the lower limit and the upper limit of the bootstrap are both positive or negative, and zero is not placed between these two limits, then the indirect path is significant and the hypothesis will be accepted. Also, the indirect effect is accepted if the significance level is less than 0.05. Table 4 shows the significance of the indirect path.

**Table 4.** The results of the bootstrap method to check the significance of the indirect effect

Independent variable	Mediator	dependent variable	Indirect t effect	Bootstrap value		T	Estimation error	Sig
				Upper limit	lower limit			
Permissive	emotional repression	ego strength	0.26	0.34	0.14	3.35	0.04	0.00
Authoritarian			-0.28	-0.17	-0.38	4.41	0.03	0.00
Authoritative			0.16	0.26	0.05	2.91	0.04	0.01

According to Table 6, the significance level in all three cases is less than 0.05, and the confidence interval does not include zero. Therefore, the hypothesis of the research is accepted. This means that parenting styles have an indirect effect on ego strength through the mediating role of emotional repression.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between parenting styles and ego strength, with the mediating role of emotional repression. The first hypothesis of the research was that parenting styles have a direct effect on ego strength. The second hypothesis of the research was that parenting styles have an indirect effect on ego strength through the mediating role of emotional repression. The results showed that permissive and authoritative parenting styles have a positive and direct/indirect effect on ego strength, and authoritarian parenting styles have a negative and direct/indirect effect on ego strength. Also, regarding the third hypothesis of the research, the findings showed that emotional repression has a direct effect on ego strength. These results are in line with the results of previous studies (Besharat, 2015; Shahla et al., 2022; Fayaz et al., 2015; Farhadi & Biranvand, 2023; Narimani & Parnian Khooy, 2021).

In explaining these results, it should be said that a child who has seen his parents neglect him in his childhood and did not experience their love may have problems in his relationships as an adult because such people have a fear of being asked and answered by the community and being judged in the crowd. Similarly, in Fayaz et al. (2015), all three parenting styles have a significant relationship with ego strength. So, it can be said that the behavior of parents and the way they deal with their children in the future affects their abilities, such as ego strength. Besharat et al. (2015) concluded in their research that all the sub-components of appropriate actions of parents have a positive and significant relationship with ego strength and its sub-scales. So it can be concluded that parenting styles have a direct effect on ego strength.

Regarding the observed relationship between emotional repression and ego strength, it can also be said that if a person cannot express his negative emotions, this has negative effects on ego functions. The ego cannot act

based on logic and may be dominated by negative emotions. On the other hand, due to the mediating role of emotional repression in the relationship between parenting styles and ego strength, it can be said that the type of parent relationship has an effect on the way children express their emotions. In this way, it can affect their ego strength. In an authoritarian parenting style, it is not possible to express emotions and desires (Nathania et al., 2022). Therefore, instead of being expressed, the emotions experienced are repressed, and in this way, they will cause the ego's strength to be impaired. On the other hand, in the permissive and authoritative parenting style, there is an opportunity for the child to talk about his emotions, and this expression of emotions is recognized. As a result, this process can form more ego strength.

This research, like other scientific research, had limitations. The results of this research are limited to female students of the first secondary school in Abbas Abad and cannot be generalized to other students. Self-report tools were used to collect information, which may bias the results. On the other hand, this research is correlational, and it is not possible to examine the cause-and-effect relationships of the variables. In general, it can be seen that parenting styles are related to ego strength in different ways. Authoritative and permissive parenting styles positively and authoritarian parenting styles negatively affect ego ability. Emotional repression also plays a role as a mediating variable in this relationship. It is suggested that educational classes be held for families to inform them about the important role of parenting style and the possibility of expressing emotions in forming their children's personalities. This way, the ground will be provided for raising generations with stronger personalities.

#### 5. Ethical Considerations

##### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation steps. They were also assured about the confidentiality of the research. They were free to participate in the research and could leave the study whenever they wanted, and the research results were provided to them if they wished.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the design, implementation, and writing of all parts of the article.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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