CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
香港城市大學

Maternal and Paternal Contributions to Chinese Children’s Emotion Regulation and Externalizing Behavior
中國父母對子女情緒調控以及外顯行爲的影響

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by
Xu Yan
徐岩

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Abstract

Emotion regulation and parental behaviors are the most important factors linked with externalizing behavior in childhood. This study investigated the relationships among parental warmth, parents’ reaction to children’s negative emotions, children’s emotion regulation, and children’s externalizing behavior, with a central focus of exploring both mother’s and father’s contribution simultaneously in Chinese context.

Parents were recruited from kindergarten and primary school located in Guangzhou and Shenzhen city in China. Total 193 couples with kindergarten child- (child’s mean age = 64.53 months; $SD = 6.39$ months) and 215 couples with primary school child (child’s mean age = 89.43 months; $SD = 8.73$ months) were included in the study. They completed a questionnaire independently. The child’s teacher also completed measures of the child’s emotion regulation and externalizing behaviors in school. Data were analyzed with structural equation modeling.

We conducted cross-sectional analysis to test the difference between two children age groups. Results showed that the kindergarten pattern of the relations among parenting variables, children’s emotion regulation and externalizing behavior differed with primary school pattern. For kindergarten children, maternal warmth, paternal warmth, and father’s punitive reactions had significant influences on children’s emotion regulation. For primary school
children, only maternal warmth was significant predictor of children’s emotion regulation. Children’s emotion regulation had a significant mediating effect on the relation between maternal warmth and children’s externalizing behavior in two age groups.

Results indicated that parents had different contributions to children’s emotion regulation and behavior; and parenting practices, depending on the child's age. The findings on Chinese parents’ reactions towards children’s negative emotion further clarified the difference between Chinese and Western Parenting practices to negative emotions. Moreover, our findings indicated that fathers have a more crucial role to play than mothers do in the emotional socialization of young Chinese children. At last, several practical implications were discussed in this study.

**Keywords:** parenting, warmth, emotion regulation, externalizing behavior
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