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**Study of the relationship between maternal emotional  
regulation and emotional state, and the emotional  
and behavioral adjustment of their offspring**

MASTER'S THESIS

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**Abstract**

The present study aims to analyze the relationship between maternal emotion regulation and children's emotional and behavioral adjustment in a sample of 115 mother–child dyads. The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, and descriptive approach, incorporating various psychometric instruments (CERQ, GHQ, BASC-3, PSI) administered to both children and their mothers. It also examines potential differences based on sociodemographic variables and controls for confounding factors through multivariate analyses. The results indicate that maternal emotional distress and stress are associated with increased emotional and behavioral problems in children, whereas mothers' use of adaptive strategies is linked to better child emotional adjustment. Differences were also found according to the child's sex and the presence of prior psychological problems. Parental stress emerged as the most significant predictor of child well-being.

**Keywords:** mother–child emotion regulation, maternal emotional state, mother–child dyads, child emotional adjustment, adaptive strategies, sociodemographic variables.

## **Introduction**

Maternal emotion regulation refers to mothers' ability to modulate and express their emotions in both every day and stressful situations (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). Studies such as those by Price et al. (2022) and Duca et al. (2023) address it as a dynamic process involving the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage both one's own emotions and those of one's children. It is considered a fundamental ability, as it enables children to develop social and emotional competencies, as well as self-regulation skills essential for their psychosocial development. Bariola et al. (2011) found that mothers with strong emotion regulation skills tend to use adaptive strategies, which allow for a more flexible and constructive emotional response in stressful situations. Among these strategies is positive reappraisal, which involves cognitively reframing a negative event to give it a more functional meaning, thereby fostering a healthy emotional climate at home. In contrast, the frequent use of maladaptive strategies—such as rumination (repetitive focus on the negative aspects of an experience) or catastrophizing (exaggeration of negative outcomes)—has been linked to higher levels of maternal emotional distress and a decrease in the quality of the mother-child relationship (Zheng, 2023). From this perspective, the concept of emotional co-regulation within the family environment emerges, understood as a bidirectional process in which the mother helps the child manage their emotions, but the child can also influence the mother's emotional response, as discussed by Paley et al. (2022). One

factor associated with maternal regulation capacity is maternal emotional state, defined by Léniz-Maturana et al. (2022) as the emotions experienced by a mother depending on her personal, family, and contextual circumstances related to motherhood. Several studies have evaluated maternal emotional state in terms of emotional distress and affective symptomatology. For example, Riva et al. (2016) and Lo et al. (2023) show that mothers with higher levels of parental stress and depressive or anxious symptoms tend to respond less sensitively to their children's emotional needs, negatively affecting the parent-child bond and the child's emotional development. Riva et al. (2016) specifically found that higher maternal emotional distress is associated with children's emotional and behavioral maladjustment. Similarly, Lo et al. (2023), in a study conducted in Hong Kong with 736 participants, observed that more stressed mothers have greater difficulty responding to their children's emotional needs, hindering effective and positive co-regulation. Despite these contributions, there is still a need to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms involved in maternal emotion regulation and their influence on children's emotional and behavioral adjustment, especially from a multifactorial perspective. This includes considering the role of sociodemographic variables such as caregiver marital status, child health, and socioeconomic level. According to Sohn (2010), who analyzed data from 1,000 children in the Young Lives survey, these factors significantly affect children's emotion regulation and overall well-being. Specifically, children with health problems, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, or

with divorced parents tend to exhibit more emotional and behavioral symptoms. The present study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding, with one of its main strengths being the multidimensional perspective it adopts to assess emotional regulation and emotional and psychological states within the mother–child dyad. It includes both child self-reports on their own emotion regulation skills and maternal reports on their children’s symptomatology. The study also includes sociodemographic variables (age, education level, sex, psychological history and problems, and type of school) to analyze how these relate to the emotional skills of both mothers and their children. Additionally, a general population sample was selected, enabling the comparison of two very different educational settings, which enriches the understanding of the contextual role in family emotional well-being. This approach provides a richer and more contextualized view of the emotional and psychological functioning of both members of the dyad.

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