

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Effect of Positive Discipline Intervention on the Parenting Styles and Emotion Management Abilities of Chinese Parents

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## ABSTRACT

Parenting plays an important role in the overall physical, psychological, and emotional development of a child. In China, traditional parenting influenced by Confucianism encourages rigid control and emotional suppression of parents. However, with increasing globalization, a shift is seen towards more democratic parenting styles. This study focuses on the importance of positive discipline intervention on the parenting styles and emotion management abilities of parents in China. The study was conducted through an eight-week intervention program including 30 parents from Fuzhou. The parents were equally divided into an experimental group and a control group. The program consisted of activities focusing on emotional regulation, problem-solving, and collaborative relationship between parents and children. A shift was observed from authoritarian and permissive parenting styles toward more authoritative parenting styles among members of the experimental group. Emotional expression and cognitive reappraisal was reported to have improved after the intervention. Despite the limitations of the study with respect to the small size of the sample and localized population, this paper shows the importance of positive discipline in creating a healthy relationship between parents and children and helping in their holistic development. The findings should be viewed with caution considering that the inquiry is pilot and the sample size is limited.

**Keywords:** Positive discipline; parenting style; authoritative parenting; emotion regulation; emotional expression; cognitive reappraisal

## 1. Introduction

Parenting is a challenging task that requires parents to carry out their roles with full responsibility. The competence of parents in fulfilling their duties determines the positive growth and development of their children. Apart from shaping children, positive parenting styles also lead to the psychological well-being of the parents. The intervention of positive discipline as a parenting approach has taken shape in recent years, and it supports both tough and kind parenting styles<sup>[1, 2]</sup>. These methods have helped in regulating the emotional abilities of parents, especially in a country like China. Parenting styles in the country have long

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been influenced by Confucian models – rigid and traditional in nature. However, in the modern world, it is important for parents to be psychologically informed and possess emotional intelligence to help their children. Thus, positive intervention methods help them achieve these standards of parenting.

Alfred Adler has contributed greatly towards research focusing on the use of positive discipline in order to foster mutual respect and cooperation among parents and children. He believed that cooperation and the development of horizontal relationships are important, wherein everyone is treated with dignity and respect. In this relationship, it is the adults who should play the clear role of a leader. This model fits the democratic and authoritative style of parenting<sup>[3]</sup>. The positive discipline methods help in increasing positive emotions and fostering closer relationships between children and parents. Coming to the factor of self-efficacy of parents, it is manifested in the way a child behaves and develops<sup>[4]</sup>. This factor is one that determines the environment at home, the emotional abilities of parents, and subsequently, the growth and development of a child. High self-efficacy among parents is characterized by confidence and responsibility, whereas lower self-efficacy leads to frustration, stress, and irresponsible parenting styles<sup>[5, 6]</sup>. Thus, parental self-efficacy is an essential tool in determining the development of a child with respect to the emotional environment, the interactions between parents and children, and the structure of the family they grow up in.

Positive intervention strategies may include a number of exercises, such as mindfulness practices and training to regulate the emotional disturbances among parents. These methods help build resilience, improve communication, and nurture positive behavior towards children. With the increasing development of technology, modern parenting styles have witnessed a shift from their traditional counterpart. These involve high academic pressure as well as transformation in the family structure<sup>[7]</sup>. Though positive discipline methods have seen immense success in countries throughout the West, many Chinese parents still seem to lack the effective means to develop high self-efficacy that impacts the development of their children. Thus, it is important for parents to inculcate the means to deal with their children in a positive way through positive discipline techniques.

Researches on parenting styles and their effects on the development of children have its roots back in the 1920s. However, the major contribution towards this theme has been made by Diana Baumrind in the 1960s. Baumrind defined parenting styles to be the attitudes parents harbor regarding childrearing and the methods they use to help their children socialize<sup>[8]</sup>. It was Baumrind's theory that first identified three distinct types of parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive<sup>[9-11]</sup>. All three types of parenting have been discussed in the next section. The traditional parenting style in China is characterized by complete control, high expectations, and importance to morals and values. While such practices may sometimes help children achieve success in life, they often limit their emotional expressions. Children living under such parents live under constant fear of disappointing their parents and not being up to the mark in the eyes of their parents. Chinese parents, on the other hand, suffer from their own generational trauma and fostering of negative emotions. The taboo around expressing oneself emotionally and the increasing stress on hiding true emotions also leads to declining mental health among such people. Such individuals tend to burden their trauma and stress on their children, leading to poor emotional connection, harsh parenting styles, and low levels of attachment. Such factors affect the bond between parents and children. These types of bonds also negatively impact the psychological well-being of both parents and their children.

The economic development and societal progress in China have made the traditional methods of parenting obsolete. This has observed a significant shift in parenting styles, with parents emphasizing the need to improve the quality of parenting. This high quality of parent-child relationship, especially the mother-child relationship, plays a significant role in the healthy growth of children and prevents behavioral

issues among them<sup>[12]</sup>. According to numerous studies, mothers are shown to have more self-efficacy than fathers. Thus, understanding the parenting styles of mothers, how they reward or punish their children, and their confidence and wisdom is essential for the healthy development of children. It is under these circumstances that positive discipline methods help shift parenting styles from being authoritarian to authoritative. According to a study conducted by Li & Zheng (2021)<sup>[13]</sup>, it was seen that including positive discipline methods for a period of 8 weeks reduced harsh punishment measures and improved communication among parents. These methods involved positive expression of emotions and actively listening to problems of children. These results show that positive intervention can encourage patience and empathy among students.

When it comes to managing emotions, a number of different techniques can be put to work. These include training how to regulate emotions through mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). These strategies help individuals manage their anger and frustration and reduce stress levels. A study was conducted in Beijing on 60 parents of children going to pre-school. The employment of MBSR techniques here showed that stress levels were reduced. It also helped in managing emotions better and improving their regulation<sup>[14]</sup>. These exercises help parents communicate with their children in a positive way, increase collaboration, and lead to better relationships. Other positive intervention techniques include journaling. This helps parents face challenges, and they can teach their children to do the same.

This study has been undertaken keeping in mind the following objectives:

- To evaluate the impact of positive discipline on parenting styles
- To evaluate improvements in the emotion management abilities of parents
- To explore the experiences and challenges faced by parents before and after positive discipline intervention

Keeping the aforementioned objectives in mind, this study has aimed to answer the following research questions to fill the gaps in knowledge:

- How does positive discipline intervention influence parenting styles in Chinese society?
- How does the intervention enhance the emotion management abilities of students?
- Which positive discipline strategies are found to be most useful in managing parental emotions and the behaviour of the children?

This study is significant in filling the gaps in knowledge by presenting empirical evidence of the impact of positive discipline in promoting better regulation of emotions and positive parenting styles among Chinese parents. It would also enhance the existing literature by providing knowledge of positive discipline and its incorporation within the Chinese social structure. It would also help in reducing stress levels and promoting healthy relationships among parents and children. Thus, this study will lead to the shift of parenting styles and create more healthy and democratic methods of parenting among Chinese parents.

## **2. Literature review**

Positive discipline methods and the need for self-efficacy among parents are important factors and have been studied throughout the world. The aim of these studies is to bring about changes in traditional parenting styles. These parenting methods can sometimes be very harsh and affect children in a negative way. Bringing about a change in these styles can help create better relationships among parents and children. The eventual

relationship will also be one that is free of stress and healthy in nature. In order to bring about this change, one must first know the different types of parenting styles throughout the globe and in China.

Parenting is one of the most difficult tasks in the world that requires a substantial investment of time and energy, something which cannot be matched with any other role in life<sup>[15]</sup>. It is the duty of the parents to create a good environment for the growth of their children and help them form healthy living habits. If parents do not change their parenting methods with the changing times and continue following traditional styles, they become more open to encountering challenges in life<sup>[16]</sup>. Adler proposed three fundamental life tasks within his theoretical framework. These are important when an individual wants to lead a healthy and happy life. The three aspects are love, friendship, and work. Love revolves around individuals expressing their warmth and affection in intimate relationships, fostering trust and care<sup>17</sup>. Friendship involves peaceful co-existence in society, leading to harmonious and effective collaboration among individuals. Work is essential in fulfilling the basic physiological needs of individuals – food, shelter, and safety. According to Adler, the main responsibility of parents is to help in the development of a healthy personality among children and to motivate them to cultivate emotions and behaviour to accomplish these life tasks.

Parenting style refers to how the parents behave with their children and act around them. The expression of emotions by the parents towards their children also comes under this definition. The four major parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful<sup>[18]</sup>. Authoritative parents set strict rules and maintain discipline. However, they also provide love and support to their children. Authoritarian parents are the ones who are very strict and harsh with their children. At the same time, they fail to provide the love and warmth to their children that is important for their development. Indulgent parents provide support to their children but fail to set rules and standards required for their discipline. Neglectful parents are concerned about themselves, neither providing love to their children nor setting any kind of rules. It has been seen that authoritative parenting style is the one that brings children and parents closer, leading to reduced conflict between them<sup>[19]</sup>. On the other hand, authoritarian parenting style leads to more frequent conflicts among parents and children, leading to reduced cohesion<sup>[20]</sup>.

The type of parenting style heavily influences the growth and development of children. It plays a huge role in determining how the children turn out to be, in terms of behavior, later in their life. The way children behave stems from their experiences with different types of parenting styles and characteristics<sup>[21]</sup>. It has been seen that children who have an insecure attachment relationship with their parents and their corresponding environment at home are the ones who turn out to be bullies in schools<sup>[22]</sup>. A study by Demaray and Malecki (2003)<sup>[23]</sup> has shown that children who are bullies learn from their parents how to attack and retaliate in case of an attack. Thus, these children end up imitating the behaviour expressed by their parents at home. Behavioural problems in the early childhood stage can also lead to worsening mental health conditions in the future, social problems, and emotional disturbances<sup>[24, 25]</sup>. Early childhood is impacted heavily by the family and parenting styles exerted on these children. The personality development of a child takes place as a result of the varied parenting styles experienced by them<sup>[26]</sup>. The discipline strategies employed by parents to deal with their children vary according to the parenting styles adopted by different people.

Regulation of emotions on the part of parents plays an important role in fostering positive or negative parenting behaviours. Emotion regulation refers to the ability to have control over one's emotions and reacting to situations based on the surroundings one is present in. One of the most important skills required for parenting, emotion regulation, is important to be observed by parents, especially when they are distressed or angry<sup>[27]</sup>. The ability of parents to control their emotions has an effect on the regulation of the behaviour

of children and their interactions with their social and emotional surroundings. According to Rutherford et al. (2015)<sup>[28]</sup>, the emotion regulation abilities of parents lead to their corresponding caregiving attitude towards their children. The approach of parents when dealing with their children affects the levels of child adjustment. It has been seen that warm and supportive behaviour of parents and not using harsh punishment measures helps in keeping children healthy and happy<sup>[29, 30]</sup>. On the other hand, parents who do not show support towards their children, especially towards their negative behaviours, end up with children who are poor at adjusting to society at large<sup>[31, 32]</sup>.

Parenting is quite a difficult task that requires support to create an environment that would encourage positive parenting. This requirement has been understood by governments and national and international institutions alike. For example, the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity helps in organizing conferences, trains professionals to deliver services that help parents, and publishes articles and journals on this matter<sup>[33]</sup>. Positive intervention methods often focus on home schooling strategies to increase parental self-efficacy. Positive parenting interventions have a positive impact on the way children behave<sup>[34]</sup>. A community-based intervention program (SNAP) was conducted by Jiang et al. (2022)<sup>[35]</sup> that developed positive intervention methods which helped in reducing behavioural issues among children. A number of other positive discipline intervention methods include group counseling that helps in improving parent-child relationships and improving techniques of class management as well<sup>[36, 37, 38]</sup>. Thus, positive discipline can help parents in creating positive beliefs in terms of parenting by taking part in group work, cultivating collaboration, and instilling responsible attitudes among children.

Positive discipline strategies and methods have huge potential when it comes to improving the parenting styles of people and leading to the positive development of children. However, despite this potential, there are a few gaps in the existing research, especially in the Chinese context. Most of the evidences that come from China regarding the positive outcome of these methods are on the basis of short-term outcomes of quick experiments. This hinders knowledge regarding how these methods can help both parents and children in the long run<sup>[39]</sup>. Furthermore, though there are quite a few studies on this theme around the world, very few works have focused solely on China and the outcome of these practices in the country. Thus, there is a need for conducting studies that measure the long-term effectiveness of positive discipline methods, keeping the Chinese context in mind.

## **2.1. Conceptual model and integrated theoretical framework**

The above sections have discussed Adlerian positive discipline theory, parenting style taxonomy advanced by Baumrind and emotion regulation theory as individual constructs. However, it is justified that a unified framework should be provided to explain the theoretical connections between these areas. This research hypothesizes that positive discipline is an intervention modality able to supplement parental emotion-regulatory abilities, which are then used to initiate a transition of parenting styles to more adaptive ones.

The Adlerian theory preempts reciprocal respect, support and democratic leadership between parent and child dyads. These principles are parallel to some traits of authoritative parenting that is characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and strict yet sensible boundaries. However, successful application of positive discipline means that the parents should regulate their own affective reactions, especially anger and frustration.

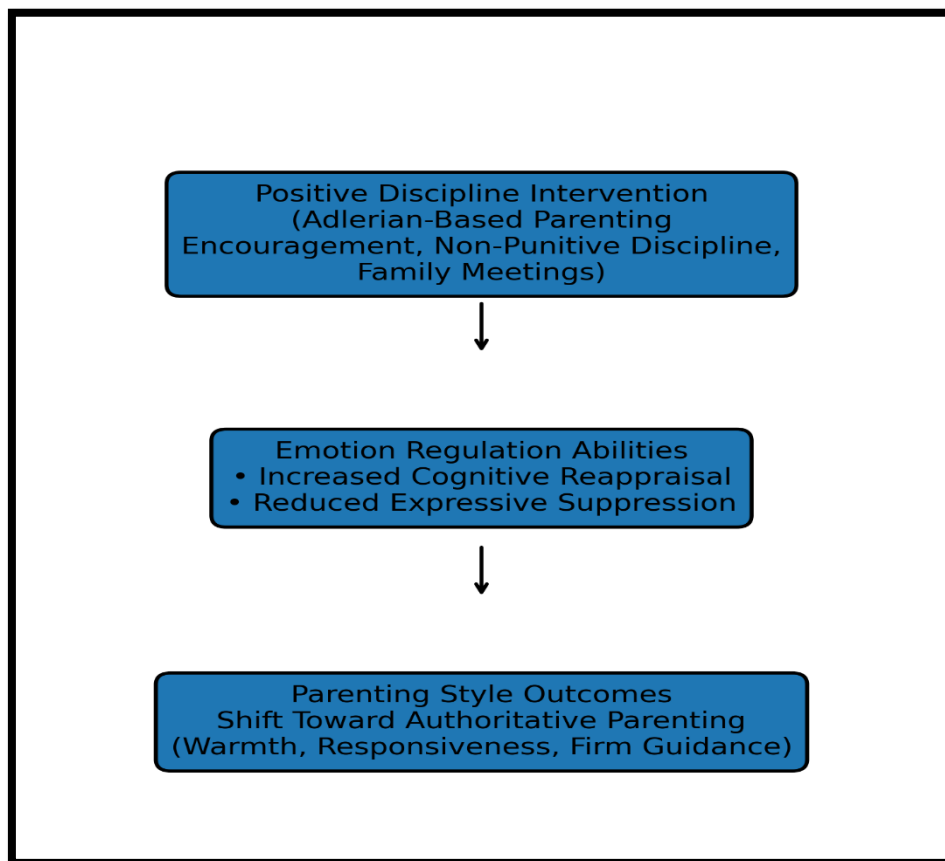
The emotional regulation theory argues that participants using cognitive reappraisal are more likely to react to the stressful contingencies adaptively, and expressive suppression is associated with negative

interpersonal consequences. In the context of parenting, improved emotion regulation can enable parents to replace severe or rash disciplinary methods to meditative and nurturing ones.

It is on this synthesis, that the current study has conceptualized the idea of positive discipline intervention as an intermediating process that strengthens parental emotion control, that is, by enhancing cognitive reappraisal and reducing expressive suppression, which facilitates a shift in the parenting model towards authoritative parenting and not authoritarian or permissive parenting. Emotion regulation is the central mediating construct in this model, which connects the exposure to interventions and parenting style change.

Accordingly, the theory propositions used to inform the study include:

- The use of positive-discipline intervention improves the emotion-regulation skills of parents.
- Authoritative parenting practices are based on improved emotion regulation.
- Heightened emotional awareness and control facilitates alterations in parenting style indirectly.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework for the Study

### 3. Methodology

The research design employed for this study is quasi-experimental in nature. A mixed-methods approach has been used to study the impact of positive discipline methods on the emotion regulation abilities of Chinese parents and the parenting style employed by them. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed to measure the change in behaviour of parents along with their personal experiences

during the course of the study. This helps in comprehensively understanding the influence of positive intervention techniques.

### **3.1. Research design**

As mentioned above, the quasi-experimental design strategy was employed to undertake this study. The participants in this survey were divided into two groups – the control group and the experimental group. One pre-test and one post-test were conducted wherein both groups used standardized instruments to complete their assignments. The experimental group underwent a training program for 8 weeks that introduced them to positive intervention techniques for positive parenting. The control group, on the other hand, underwent no such training and continued with their traditional and regular parenting styles. After the completion of 8 weeks, changes in behaviour of participants of both groups were measured using the same standardized instruments. With the help of this design, it was easy to measure behavioural changes as a result of the incorporation of positive discipline methods.

Since the sample size (n 30) is comparatively small and the research is targeted in Fuzhou, quasi-experimental design was chosen as a suitable and expedient method. The practical and ethical considerations such as availability of the participants and their voluntary involvement did not allow random assignment. Quasi-experimental designs are taken in general use in exploratory and pilot intervention studies where the controlled randomization is limited.

This research, therefore, can be interpreted as a pilot study, which seeks to test preliminary patterns and viability, but not to determine the relationship between two variables as causal factors.

### **3.2. Participants**

For this survey, the purposive sampling method was used to recruit participants. The sample consisted of 30 Chinese parents, aged between 28 and 50. These participants were selected from the urban center, Fuzhou. The study involved parents with diverse educational backgrounds and diverse family backgrounds as well. This helped ensure diversity and proper representation of different groups in the study. Among the parents, 16 were mothers and 14 were fathers. 65% of the participants had undergraduate degrees while the rest had some sort of diploma or high school degree. The criteria for selection were that the parents should be available for weekly workshops and should have at least one child enrolled in a primary school in China. Another criterion was that none of the parents should have had any previous experience of attending such workshops.

### **3.3. Format of study**

The study was conducted through workshops conducted for two hours weekly and continued for 8 weeks. The session was conducted by counsellors who are experts on family matters and parenting styles. Along with theory classes, the session also consisted of practical applications such as role-playing and group discussions. The topics for discussion included emotion regulation methods, non-harsh methods of disciplining children, and fostering healthy relationships and connections between parents and children. The parents were encouraged to apply the strategies learned to their children in their homes. This ensured that the study was not just theoretical but experiential as well.

### **3.4. Data collection**

The data was collected with the help of two instruments. These helped in the collection of quantitative data. The tools are:

- The Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU)

- The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

The EMBU is a scale that was originally developed in Sweden but adapted for its use in China. It measures parenting styles based on the recollections of children regarding parental behaviour. The scale helps measure dimensions like emotional warmth and overprotection. In this study, the short version of the EMBU consisting of 23 items was used. It showed a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.87, meaning strong consistency. An ERQ is used to assess emotional behaviour and regulation strategies with respect to two factors: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. In this study, the ERQ displayed a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.83. This meant good reliability.

These tools helped in assessing parental style and behaviour as well as the expression and suppression of emotions. The methods were used among the Chinese population. The questionnaires were administered both before the training program and after its completion. Additionally, interviews were conducted with 15 participants from the survey to assess the qualitative changes, such as their emotional experiences and relationship dynamics.

To evaluate the results of this study, the survey method was used as it helps in easy reporting of changes in behaviour and emotional management abilities. The mixed-methods approach helps in understanding the influence of these strategies on both the cognitive faculties and emotional behaviour of the parents.

### **3.5. Ethical considerations**

While conducting research in China involving human participants, a number of ethical considerations must be adhered to. These include:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants must be totally aware of the nature and purpose of the research and must give their consent to be a part of the study voluntarily.
- **Confidentiality:** The data collected should be anonymous and protect the identity of the participants. Researchers must comply with China's Personal Information Protection Law (2021) when it comes to collecting and making use of data.
- **Institutional Approval:** Research work that involves human participants must be approved by an Institutional Review Board or Ethics Committee based in Chinese universities and institutions.
- **Respect for Culture:** The research should be sensitive enough not to harm the cultural dignity and family reputation by imposing uncomfortable questions. No judgments should be passed by the researchers through their questions or language.
- **Transparency:** Participants must be made aware of how the data collected from them will be used and published. The findings should not be misrepresented at any cost.
- **National Research Regulations:** Researchers should abide by national research policies that include the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the National Health Commission of China. Research including collaboration with foreign institutions must take approval from the government as well.

## **4. Data analysis**

The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to make a report on the changes in the behaviour of Chinese parents after the intervention program, their emotion management abilities, and parenting styles. The intervention program was an 8-week workshop including positive discipline methods and strategies.



#### 4.1. Intervention format

The positive discipline intervention program was conducted over a period of eight weeks. This was done through weekly workshops that stressed on regulating the emotions of parents and certain aspects of parenting. The table below shows the format of the strategies employed for this purpose.

**Table 1.** Intervention Program Format

Week	Topic	Objectives	Weekly Exercises
1	Introduction to Positive Discipline	Understanding the core concepts and strategies involved in positive discipline	Reflecting on the personal parenting experiences, goals, and the corresponding challenges
2	Difficult Attitude and Misbehavior	Identifying the causes behind misbehavior and negative attitudes of children	Observing the behavior of children and keeping a record of it
3	Emotional Awareness and Regulation of Parents	Improving self-awareness among parents regarding their emotions	Keeping a journal of the emotional expression and suppression of parents; identifying triggers behind emotional outbursts
4	Role of encouragement and praise	Understanding how encouragement builds motivation among children	Giving regular feedback to children that is descriptive in nature
5	Family Meetings and Building of Mutual Respect	Learning the art of respectful communication within the family	Bringing people of the family together to engage in meaningful conversation
6	Discipline without Harsh Measures	Discovering discipline strategies that do not involve harsh punishments	Instead of using a punishment strategy, using a logical and calm response against the child
7	Managing Stress and Anger of the Parents	Developing emotion management abilities and resolving conflicts calmly	Practicing meditation and deep breathing
8	Incorporation in everyday life and reflection on the practices	Reflecting on the skills that have been learned, the corresponding growth, and challenges	Writing an essay on the overview of the entire program, reflecting on positive parenting styles and emotional management through positive discipline

#### a. Quantitative Data Analysis

##### i. Tools Used

The tools used to collect the quantitative data for this study were Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU) and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ). Both tools were used pre- and post-intervention in the control group (n=15) as well as the experimental group (n=15).

The SPSS Version 26 was used to analyze quantitative data. Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to determine the difference between pre and post intervention measures in the experimental group. Effect sizes were calculated with the help of Cohen d to determine the strength of the intervention effects. The statistical significance was determined to be  $p < 0.05$ . Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample size used, both significance, as well as the effect size of the interpretation, received special attention.

## ii. Descriptive Statistics

The pre-test scores depicted a higher level of the authoritarian style of parenting and expressive suppression among the parents who were a part of the study. The post-test scores showed that parents who were a part of the experimental group revealed an enhancement in authoritative parenting styles. There was a decrease in authoritarian and permissive parenting styles among them.

**Table 2.** Pre- and Post-Intervention Mean Scores for Parenting Styles and Emotion Regulation (Experimental Group)

Measure	Pre-test Mean (Intervention)	Post-test Mean (Intervention)	Change
Authoritative Parenting	3.1	4.2	+1.1
Authoritarian Parenting	3.8	2.6	-1.2
Permissive Parenting	2.9	2.3	-0.6
ERQ – Cognitive Reappraisal	3.4	4.3	+0.9
ERQ – Expressive Suppression	4.1	3.0	-1.1

## iii. Inferential Statistics

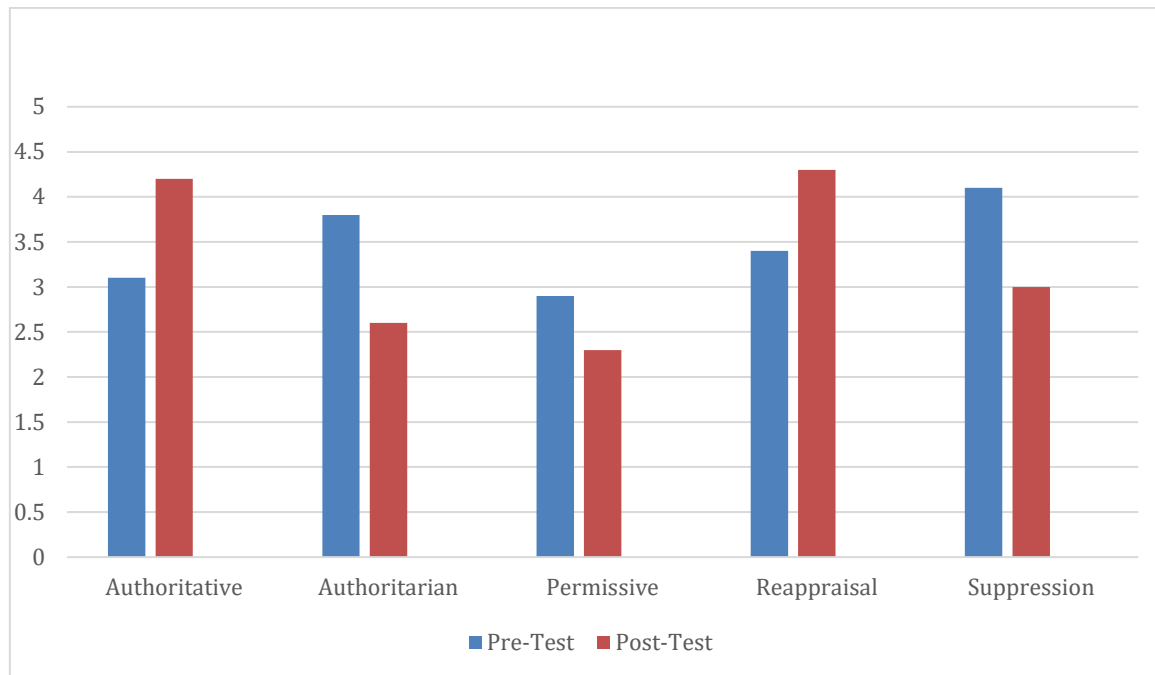
The importance of the changes was evaluated through paired-sample t-tests. The results were as follows:

- Authoritative Parenting [ $t(14) = 5.81, p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.1$  (large effect)]
- Authoritarian Parenting [ $t(14) = -6.03, p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.2$  (large effect)]
- Permissive Parenting [ $t(14) = -2.78, p = 0.015$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.6$  (medium effect)]
- Cognitive Reappraisal [ $t(14) = 4.92, p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.95$  (large effect)]
- Expressive Suppression [ $t(14) = -5.76, p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.05$  (large effect)]

The results indicate that involvement in positive discipline practices was linked with the increase of parenting style and emotion regulation skills among parents.

## iv. Correlation Analysis

A positive correlation was found between cognitive reappraisal and authoritative parenting, that is,  $r = 0.48$ . A negative correlation was found between expressive suppression and emotional communication, that is,  $r = -0.52$ . According to these results, it was seen that parents who were able to improve their regulation of emotions were the ones who incorporated constructive parenting styles to deal with their children.



**Figure 2.** Comparison of Parenting and Emotional Regulation Scores

### b. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data were collected through reflective journals written by 20 participants and submitted at the end of the study. Data was analyzed using thematic coding through NVivo 12. Both inductive and deductive approaches were employed to analyze data. There was a significant shift in emotional behaviour, such as:

- Many parents reported becoming more emotionally aware and being conscious of their emotional outbursts and reactions during arguments
- Participants reported the usefulness of applying techniques such as taking a pause and practicing deep breathing in regulating their emotions
- Parents admitted to seeing the importance of replacing harsh punishment measures with empathetic conversations and dialogues in improving their relationship with children

### c. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings align, offering credibility to the findings and proving their validity. For example, the decrease in expressive suppression (quantitative) aligns with the adoption of more open conversations between parents and children. The shift towards authoritative parenting aligns with the incorporation of respectful relationships and problem-solving approaches of parents and children.

## 5. Results and discussion

The study, after exploring both qualitative and quantitative data, helped in exploring the influence of positive discipline on Chinese parents to positively transform their parenting styles and improve their emotion management abilities.

### **5.1. Changes in parenting styles and emotional regulation**

After conducting experiments with the help of the Egna Minnen av Barndoms Uppfostran (EMBU), a shift was seen among the intervention group from permissive and authoritarian parenting styles to a more authoritative style of parenting. The pre-test scores showed a high occurrence of authoritarian behaviour (mean = 3.8). The post test scores showed a significant decline in this number (mean = 2.6). On the other hand, authoritative behaviour showed a marked increase from 3.1 to 4.2. This reflects a balanced shift towards a more balanced style of parenting.

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) showed the emotion management abilities of parents. Here, participants reported a decline in expressive suppression (4.1 to 3.0) and an increase in cognitive reappraisal (3.4 to 4.3). According to this, it can be said that after the intervention, parents showed a positive way to deal with their emotions and were more likely to face challenging situations with ease. These skills are important when a parent needs to address the misbehaviour of a child and deal with them in a calm manner.

### **5.2. Positive outcomes of the change in parenting styles**

Interviews with parents (qualitative data) helped analyze the positive outcomes of the change in parenting styles. Following the intervention, parents reported improved communication with their children. One of the participants revealed having replaced punishment with listening to the child calmly and solving his/her problems. After this study, none of the parents reported a negative outcome of the change in parenting style. Though some faced an initial discomfort while having to replace strict discipline measures with problem solving and cooperation, they gradually understood the importance of such positive discipline measures that observed increasing cooperation from their children.

### **5.3. Emotional growth**

One of the most important outcomes of the intervention methods employed in this study was the emotional growth of the parents. With new strategies every week, parents gradually started learning how to handle their own frustrations and anger. A significant emotional adaptation is this change, which can enhance more productive parenting practices. According to many parents, Week 3 and Week 7 came out to be major turning points in their emotional regulation abilities. Mindfulness breathing exercises and journaling emerged as the most helpful activities in bringing about the emotional growth of the parents. Thus, the emotional suppression of parents, very common in Chinese society, witnessed a transformation towards the expression of emotions and their proper regulation.

### **5.4. Sociocultural adaptation of positive discipline**

As already mentioned before, the parenting styles prevalent in China have been influenced by Confucian ideals – strict, obedient, and exercising complete authority. These values are the ones that have observed a formal relationship between parents and children, characterized by high demands on the part of the parents and emotional suppression. The intervention study for this experiment has incorporated positive discipline within this social and cultural context prevalent in the country. The study does not aim to challenge the ideals prevalent in Chinese society. Instead, it has focused on positive discipline methods to unite the family, a concept that is highly valued in the country. Thus, the intervention program was accepted and welcomed by the parents, seeing it as a tool for building connections and not sowing the seeds of rebellion.

### **5.5. Most effective positive discipline methods**

Among the various strategies introduced throughout the intervention program, the following proved to be the most effective according to the parents themselves:

- Journaling – This method helped parents understand their emotions and practice self-regulation.
- Breathing exercises – This exercise helped parents cool down and get a grip on their emotions.
- Family meetings – This strategy fostered closer relationships within the family and reduced emotional distances among parents and children.

### **5.6. Addressing research gaps**

This study helps address the gaps in knowledge when it comes to the application of positive discipline methods in the Chinese context. Though there are a number of studies on the application of positive intervention strategies to transform parenting styles and emotional behaviour of parents in the West, very few studies have explored the combined impact of positive discipline on the behaviour and emotion management abilities of Chinese parents. The use of emotional regulation metrics along with narrative data in this study adds positively to the existing literature on this theme and shows the importance of emotionally aware and conscious parents in a household. Thus, this study helps bring about a holistic development of parents, leading to an improved relationship with their children.

### **5.7. Follow-Up Plan**

A three-month follow-up plan can be charted out to determine the sustainability of the intervention program. The same scales, that is the EMBU and ERQ, will be administered to the parents in the experimental group after three months to see whether the improvements have been maintained over time. This plan will help determine the effectiveness of the intervention program and analyze whether new sessions are required by the parents to inculcate positive discipline strategies in their parenting.

### **5.8. Study design concerns and sample constraints**

The results of this research should be viewed through the perspective of its methodological limitations. The sample size was small and only restricted to parents in only one urban area which limits the power of statistics and generalization. However, pilot-scale intervention research is an important role in determining feasibility, improving processes, and developing hypotheses to proceed to larger randomized studies.

The quasi experimental design facilitated within group comparisons and post intervention evaluation of change, which provided useful information on the responsiveness of interventions in a real world setting. However, one should be very careful when coming up with causational inferences and it is highly encouraged that further research using randomized controlled designs with larger and more diversified samples should be done.

## **6. Conclusion**

The current exploratory study reflects that, participation in a constructive discipline intervention is associated with a considerable improvement in the parenting behaviour and emotional regulation skills among the Chinese parents. This was done through the introduction of an Adlerian-based intervention program for a period of eight weeks. The results of this exploratory investigation indicate that the involvement in the positive discipline program was related to the positive shifts in the authoritative parenting practices and emotion management skills of the parents. This study proposed that the integration of positive

discipline can help parents to use more constructive methods of disciplining their children and to better manage their emotions.

The study involved 30 parents from the Chinese city of Fuzhou who were equally divided into an experimental group and a control group. Through the intervention program, the experimental group participated in workshops for a period of eight weeks that included themes like emotional self-regulation and encouraging problem-solving over punishment. The activities were organized keeping in mind the sociocultural context of a country like China. This helped maintain the family hierarchy and give importance to family values prevalent in Chinese society. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data helped in providing a comprehensive understanding of what changes occurred in the parents as a result of positive discipline and how these changes helped them in their parenting.

The results of this study showed a transformation and shift from authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting to authoritative styles of parenting. There was a shift in parents from carrying out punishments to disciplining children to adopting a more respectful and democratic approach in dealing with children and their misbehaviour. There was also a decrease in expressive suppression and an increase in cognitive reappraisal among the parents. This displayed the role of positive discipline in helping parents develop healthy emotional habits. Apart from being evident in the quantitative data, these results were also reported through qualitative data, wherein parents admitted to the positive effects of reacting in a calm manner and addressing problems through open dialogue and conversations.

Despite the comprehensive nature of this study, it comes with its own limitations. The study was restricted to parents living in urban areas and completely neglected participants from rural areas. Thus, general comments regarding the openness of Chinese parents in adopting positive discipline methods cannot be made based on the sample size. Another limitation may be that the results of the study were based on the immediate changes noticed among parents and failed to look at the long-term effects. In order to do this, further research must be undertaken to explore the influence of positive discipline on parents after a few months or even a few years of the intervention program.

Even with its limitations, the study strongly advocates for the need for positive discipline in managing the behaviour and emotional expression of parents. It adds to studies that are claiming that parenting is not just about managing the behaviour of children but also about managing the behaviour of the parents themselves. Through the different activities in the program, parents not only learned how to address the issues of their children but also how to gain a better understanding of themselves. Thus, the program observed the emotional growth of parents.

In conclusion, this study brings forward the notion that a healthy relationship between parents and children is based on proper management and regulation of emotions. The emotional awareness of parents helps children develop their own emotional intelligence scales and abilities. When parents think before reacting and deal patiently with difficult situations, they lay the foundation for empathy, emotional attachment, and psychological well-being of their children. Positive discipline, in this case, becomes a vehicle for emotional regulation not just among parents but among the child as well. This study also addresses the changing nature of parenting in China. With increased exposure to international parenting standards, Chinese parents are gradually moving away from the traditional methods of rigid parenting and adopting more balanced and respectful styles of parenting. It is positive discipline that creates a bridge between the Chinese values and traditional norms and the Western values of effective communication and autonomy. Thus, positive discipline methods, when implemented carefully, provide a way forward and lead

to not just better parenting but also better relationships among parents and children in the modern Chinese society.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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