

Mediator Roles of Emotion Regulation Strategies in the Effect of Positive Schemas on Harmony in Life

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Received: February 14, 2025; received in revised form: April 1, 2025
accepted: April 2, 2025

Abstract:

Introduction: This study explores the impact of positive schemas on harmony in life and the mediating roles of emotion regulation strategies. It is hypothesized that positive schemas enhance emotional and social functioning. Specifically, reappraisal and suppression were examined as mediating variables in the study.

Methods: A quantitative approach was used, employing Pearson correlation and mediation analyses to assess relationships among positive schemas, harmony in life, reappraisal, and suppression.

Results: Positive schemas were positively associated with harmony in life and reappraisal but negatively associated with suppression. Mediation analysis showed that reappraisal significantly mediated this relationship, while suppression did not.

Discussion: Findings emphasize the role of positive schemas in psychological well-being. Encouraging reappraisal strategies may improve harmony in life, whereas suppression appears less effective.

Limitations: Self-reported data may introduce bias, and the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences. Cultural differences in emotion regulation were not deeply explored.

Conclusions: Positive schemas enhance harmony in life through reappraisal. Future research should explore additional emotion regulation strategies and cultural variations.

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Key words: positive schema, harmony in life, emotion regulation, reappraisal, suppression.

Introduction

People's ability to achieve harmony and balance in many facets of their lives determines their ability to live a healthy and satisfying existence. One of the key factors sustaining people's happiness and psychological health is finding balance and adaptability in life. This process develops emotional and cognitive processes that improve subjective well-being. Harmony in life has been shown to dramatically increase psychological resilience and enjoyment (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Fredrickson, 2001). Additionally, harmony in life promotes the growth of happy feelings and the formation of more wholesome social bonds. This in turn has a favorable impact on people's long-term happiness and general well-being (Kjell et al., 2016; Diener & Seligman, 2002). In this context, fostering harmony in life can be considered a crucial strategy for enhancing individuals' well-being, as it not only strengthens psychological resilience and emotional stability but also facilitates the development of positive emotions, adaptive coping mechanisms, and fulfilling social relationships, all of which contribute to a more balanced, meaningful, and satisfying life experience.

1 Literature review

Maintaining balance and harmony in life across different domains is one of the fundamental elements that protect an individual's psychological well-being and enhance overall happiness. Harmony in life enables individuals to develop healthier relationships with their surroundings. It is a crucial aspect of well-being that strengthens psychological resilience and helps individuals maintain a healthy balance with their environment. Additionally, it refers to establishing coherence and alignment across different areas of life. Kjell et al. (2016) expanded the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being by developing the Harmony in Life Scale (HILS) to measure this concept. This harmony in life contributes to more satisfying interactions in social relationships. Research suggests that positive schemas support an individual's harmony in life and that emotion regulation strategies play a mediating role in this process. Specifically, strategies such as reappraisal - which involves positively reframing situations - enhance well-being, while suppression, which involves inhibiting emotional expression, may have negative consequences. For instance, Ryff and Keyes (1995), in their examination of psychological well-being, emphasized that achieving balance and harmony in life is critical for overall well-being. Similarly, Fredrickson (2001)

stated that positive emotions enhance psychological resilience, thereby supporting harmony in life.

In cognitive psychology, a schema is an abstract cognitive framework that serves as a guide for interpreting information and solving problems (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Schemas are enduring cognitive structures that develop through early life experiences and learning, and they tend to remain stable over time (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Each individual has unique experiences, and as a result, schemas are formed. The schemas developed during early life serve as guiding frameworks for individuals. Schemas encompass all memories, bodily sensations, movements, and cognitions from childhood to adulthood (Farrell, Reiss, & Shaw, 2014). These memories, sensations, movements, and cognitions stem from an individual's interactions with their environment. Through personal meaning-making processes, these experiences transform into cognitive schemas. Cognitive schemas represent a mental model of the self and the world, influencing how information is processed and interpreted (Dozois & Beck, 2008). Therefore, an individual's mental representation is shaped by cognitive schemas, which, in turn, play a fundamental role in determining interactions with the world. In short, schemas are structures shaped by individuals' past experiences and learning (Wilde & Dozois, 2019).

Positive schemas refer to functional and supportive beliefs and thought patterns that individuals hold about themselves, others, and the world. These schemas help individuals make sense of their surroundings and evaluate life experiences from a positive perspective (Keyfitz, 2010; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). For example, an individual's self-confidence, optimism, and trust in others are components of positive schemas (Beck, 1995). The study by Keyfitz et al. (2013) examined the role of positive schemas in childhood psychopathology and psychological resilience, showing that positive schemas significantly reduce depression and anxiety levels. Specifically, positive schema themes such as optimism were found to support children's emotional and behavioural adjustment. Another study by Lumley et al. (2012) revealed that positive schemas serve a protective function in the relationship between emotional abuse and depression among young adults. Research indicates that positive schemas enable individuals to reframe negative life experiences and enhance psychological resilience. Furthermore, Young et al. (2003) emphasized that in therapy, positive schemas can replace dysfunctional beliefs, thereby improving psychological well-being. According to Beck's (1995) cognitive therapy model, positive schemas allow individuals to develop more flexible and constructive thought patterns. These schemas also help regulate emotional responses and facilitate the adoption of more functional strategies in the face of challenging situations.

Emotion regulation refers to the processes that enable individuals to control which emotions they experience, when these emotions arise, and how they are expressed (Gross, 1998). This process helps individuals maintain psychological well-being and cope with difficult situations. Emotion regulation consists of conscious and unconscious strategies that shape the emergence and effects of emotions, supporting psychological well-being (Gross, 1998). According to Gross's process model, emotion regulation strategies fall into two main categories. Reappraisal aims to reduce the emotional impact of an event by altering its meaning, helping individuals approach stressful situations with a more adaptive perspective. This strategy is positively associated with psychological resilience and life satisfaction. In contrast, suppression involves making a conscious effort to inhibit emotional responses. However, rather than reducing emotional intensity, suppression can have long-term negative effects on psychological and social functioning (Gross & John, 2003). In this context, the use of effective emotion regulation strategies is considered a key factor in supporting individuals' harmony in life and psychological well-being.

2 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of positive schemas on harmony in life and how this effect is shaped through reappraisal and suppression strategies. The study investigates the impact of positive schemas on reappraisal and suppression strategies, as well as the influence of these strategies on harmony in life. Additionally, it explores whether reappraisal and suppression function as partial or full mediators in the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes that influence harmony in life. The research model hypothesizes that the effect of positive schemas on harmony in life will be positively significant (c), that positive schemas will have a positive effect on reappraisal (a), and a negative effect on suppression (a). It is also hypothesized that reappraisal will have a positive effect on harmony in life (b), whereas suppression will have a negative effect on harmony in life (b). The study examines whether the mediating effects of these two variables operate at a partial or full mediation level.

3 Method

This study employed a correlational research design to examine how the impact of positive schemas on harmony in life is shaped through reappraisal and suppression strategies. A mediation model was tested to analyze both the direct and indirect relationships among the variables.

3.1 Participants

The study included 345 university students enrolled at a university located on the Aegean coast of Turkey. Among the participants, 184 (53.3%) were female, and 161 (46.7%) were male. Regarding the distribution of students by academic year, 93 (27%) were first-year students, 90 (26.1%) were second-year students, 89 (25.8%) were third-year students, and 73 (21.2%) were fourth-year students. The mean age of the participants was calculated as 20 years and 5 months. When asked about their place of residence before university, 143 (41.4%) reported living in a metropolitan area, 134 (38.8%) in a city, 21 (6.1%) in a town, and 47 (13.6%) in a village. Based on the participants' responses regarding their family income, the average monthly household income was reported as 5,158 Turkish Lira (SD=4,334).

3.2 Data collection instruments

3.2.1 Positive Schema Scale (Young Positive Schema Questionnaire - YPSQ)

The Positive Schema Scale was developed by Keyfitz (2010) and consists of 20 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale. The scale measures five sub-dimensions: self-efficacy, achievement, trust, optimism, and self-worth. Originally, the scale was designed with six sub-dimensions; however, exploratory factor analyses supported a five-factor structure. The internal consistency coefficient for the total scale was found to be .93. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Kılıç (2018). During the adaptation process, three items were removed after careful examination. The results of the first- and second-order confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) showed that the adapted version demonstrated an excellent model fit across nearly all fit indices. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the total scale was .89, while the reliability coefficients for the sub-dimensions ranged between .82 and .91. The test-retest reliability coefficient for the total scale was reported as .73.

3.2.2 Harmony in Life Scale (HILS)

The Harmony in Life Scale was developed by Kjell, Daukantaitė, Hefferon, and Sikström (2016). The scale consists of a single factor with five items, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Based on exploratory factor analysis (EFA), five of the most relevant items were selected from the original 15-item pool. Factor loadings for these five items ranged between .73 and .86, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these five items was found to be .90. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Satıcı and Tekin (2017). The adaptation analyses indicated that the factor loadings ranged from .46 to .84. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed the single-factor structure, and the scale demonstrated a good model fit across the sample (χ^2 (5, N=253)=9.01, CFI=.99, GFI=.99, IFI=.99,

SRMR=.033, RMSEA=.056). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was .78, the composite reliability (CR) was .78, and the test-retest reliability was .89.

3.2.3 Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) was developed by Gross and John (2003). It consists of 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale and measures two sub-dimensions: reappraisal and suppression. In the original study, the internal consistency coefficients were .73 for reappraisal and .79 for suppression, with test-retest reliability coefficients of .69 for both sub-dimensions. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Totan (2015). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated that the model fit was adequate ($\chi^2=107.02$, $df=34$, $\chi^2/df=3.15$, CFI=.92, RMSEA=.06, 90% CI for RMSEA=.06-.10). The Cronbach's alpha for the reappraisal subscale was .78, while for the suppression subscale, it was .71. The test-retest reliability coefficients were .67 for reappraisal and .65 for suppression.

3.3 Data analysis

The statistical methods used in this study were designed to examine the relationships between variables and the effect of mediating variables in these relationships. In the first stage, descriptive statistics of the independent variable, positive schema, the dependent variable, harmony in life, and the mediating variables, reappraisal and suppression strategies, were calculated. Basic descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were used to examine the general characteristics of the variables. The linear relationships between variables were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients; in this analysis, the strength and direction of the relationships were reported, and the significance levels ($p \leq .05$ and $p \leq .001$) were emphasized. Then, the effect of emotion regulation strategies on the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life was examined using Hayes' (2022) PROCESS macro. Afterwards, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. The effect of the independent variable (positive schema) on the mediating variables (a coefficient), the effect of the mediating variables on the dependent variable (harmony in life) (b coefficient), and the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (c coefficient) were examined. To test mediation effects, the Bootstrap approach was used to evaluate the reliability and significance of indirect effects. The Bootstrap method calculated 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects, determining their statistical significance. The explanatory power of the regression models was determined using R^2 values, while the overall model significance was evaluated using the F-test. Through these methods, the impact

of positive schemas on harmony in life and the role of emotion regulation strategies in this relationship were comprehensively examined.

4 Findings

4.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

It was determined that the research variables, positive schema, harmony in life, reappraisal, and suppression strategies, met the assumptions required for multivariate statistics. Based on this, the examination of descriptive statistics and correlation analyses between the variables was conducted. The research analyses began with the reporting of means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations. The obtained results are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlation results of research variables

<i>Heading</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>L.V.</i>	<i>H.V.</i>	<i>s.d.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Positive schema	74.70	24	102	11.84			
2. Harmony in life	27.04	10	35	5.52	.57**		
3. Reappraisal	30.61	6	42	6.11	.44**	.40**	
4. Suppression	16.08	4	28	5.62	-.12*	-.07	.11

Note: L.V.= Lowest value obtained in the variable, H.V.= Highest value obtained in the variable, * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .001$

When examining the correlation coefficients obtained in Table 1, a significant relationship was found between the independent variable, positive schema, and the dependent variable, harmony in life ($r^2 = .33$), indicating that individuals with stronger positive schemas tend to experience greater harmony in their lives. Furthermore, positive schemas demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship with the reappraisal strategy of emotion regulation ($r^2 = .19$), suggesting that individuals with well-developed positive schemas are more likely to engage in reappraisal as a means of regulating their emotions. In contrast, positive schemas were found to have a statistically significant negative relationship with the suppression strategy of emotion regulation ($r^2 = .01$), implying that those with stronger positive schemas are less inclined to use suppression as an emotion regulation strategy. Additionally, harmony in life was significantly and positively associated with the reappraisal strategy of emotion regulation ($r^2 = .16$), reinforcing the idea that reappraisal contributes to greater psychological well-being and life adaptation. However, its relationship with the suppression strategy of emotion regulation was not statistically significant, indicating that suppression may not play a meaningful role in shaping an individual's sense of harmony in life.

4.2 Mediation analysis

In the continuation of the research analyses, mediation analyses were conducted to examine the mediating effects of reappraisal and suppression strategies in the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life. These analyses aimed to determine whether and to what extent emotion regulation strategies influence the connection between an individual's positive schemas and their overall sense of life adaptation. The two different emotion regulation strategies were defined as separate variables within the models to ensure a clearer understanding of their distinct contributions to this process. Initially, the effect of reappraisal as a mediating variable in the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life was examined, focusing on how individuals' ability to reinterpret emotional experiences influences the impact of positive schemas on life harmony. The findings obtained from these analyses are presented below.

Table 2

Mediation analysis results of reappraisal in the effect of positive schemas on harmony in life

				<i>Results</i>				
<i>M(R.E.)</i>				<i>Y(H.L.)</i>				
Antecedent		<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>X</i> (N.S.)	<i>a</i>	.23	.03	.000**	<i>c'</i>	.23	.02	.000**
<i>M</i> (R.E.)		-	-	-	<i>b</i>	.17	.04	.000**
Constant	<i>i_M</i>	13.55	1.89	.000**	<i>i_y</i>	5.04	1.65	.000**
<i>R</i> ² = .20				<i>R</i> ² = .35				
<i>F</i> _{1,343} =83.58, <i>p</i> <.001				<i>F</i> _{2,342} =91.43, <i>p</i> <.001				

Note: N.S.= Negative schema, R.E.= Reappraisal, H.L.= Harmony in life * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .001$

The results of the mediation analysis examining the role of reappraisal strategy in the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life are presented in Table 2. Findings indicate that positive schemas significantly and positively predict reappraisal strategy ($\beta=.44$, $b=.23$, 95% CI [9.84, 17.27], $t=9.14$, $p\leq.001$). Positive schemas account for approximately 20% of the variance in reappraisal strategy. The right section of Table 2 presents the effects of reappraisal strategy (b) and positive schemas (c) on harmony in life. The results show that the reappraisal strategy has a significant and positive impact on harmony in life ($\beta=.19$, $b=.17$, 95% CI [.09, .26], $t=3.91$, $p\leq.001$). Additionally, positive schemas directly influence harmony in life in a significant and positive manner ($\beta=.48$, $b=.23$, 95% CI [.18, .27], $t=9.88$, $p\leq.001$). Together, positive schemas and reappraisal strategy explain 35% of the variance in harmony in life. The direct effect of positive schemas on harmony in life (c), excluding the mediating variable reappraisal strategy, was also significant and positive ($\beta=.32$, $b=.57$, 95% CI [.22, .30], $t=4.68$, $p\leq.001$; $F(1,343) = 160.86$, $p\leq.001$). The indirect

effect of positive schemas on harmony in life through the reappraisal strategy was tested using the Bootstrap method, which confirmed that the indirect effect was statistically significant ($b=.04$, 95% CI [.01, .07]). The completely standardized indirect effect coefficient ($K^2=.08$) suggests a moderate effect size. In the subsequent analyses, the role of suppression strategy in the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life was examined. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Mediation analysis results of suppression in the effect of positive schemas on harmony in life

		<u>M(R.E.)</u>			<u>Results</u>		
Antecedent		<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>p</u>		<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>s.e.</u>
X(N.S.)	<i>a</i>	-.06	.03	.031*	<i>c'</i>	.26	.02
M(S.P.)		-	-	-	<i>b</i>	-.01	.02
Constant	<i>i_M</i>	20.19	1.92	.000*	<i>i_y</i>	7.51	1.81
		$R^2=.01$			$R^2=.32$		
		$F_{1,343}=4.68, p\leq.05$			$F_{2,342}=80.21, p\leq.001$		

Note: N.S.= Negative schema, S.P.= Suppression, H.L.= Harmony in life; * $p\leq.05$, ** $p\leq.001$

The results of the mediation analysis examining the role of suppression strategy in the relationship between positive schemas and harmony in life are presented in Table 3. Findings indicate that positive schemas significantly and negatively predict suppression strategy (*a*) ($\beta=-0.06$, $b=-0.06$, 95% CI [9.84, 17.27], $t=9.14$, $p\leq.001$). Positive schemas explain approximately 1% of the variance in suppression strategy. However, the effect of suppression on harmony in life was not statistically significant ($\beta=-0.01$, $SE=.042$, 95% CI [.09, .26], $t=.16$, $p\leq.001$). Additionally, the indirect effect of positive schemas on harmony in life through suppression strategy was also not statistically significant ($b=.01$, 95% CI [-.01, .01]).

5 Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of emotion regulation strategies in understanding the effect of positive schemas on harmony in life. While positive schemas play a crucial role in enhancing life adaptation, their influence is largely dependent on how individuals regulate their emotions. Emotion regulation facilitates a more harmonious and balanced life by leveraging positive schemas. According to the study results, the reappraisal strategy demonstrated a significant mediating effect between positive schemas and harmony in life. Specifically, positive schemas enhanced cognitive

reappraisal, which in turn increased harmony in life, explaining approximately 35% of the variance. However, the suppression strategy did not contribute significantly to this process, indicating that different emotion regulation strategies have varying effects on individuals' well-being.

Research has long explored the impact of early-acquired schemas on long-term life quality, both positively and negatively (Bishop et al., 2022; Janovsky et al., 2020; Pilkington et al., 2021; Yakin et al., 2019). A common finding in these studies is that positive schemas contribute to greater life adaptation. Supporting these findings, Louis et al. (2018) identified a positive relationship between positive schemas - including secure attachment, self-regulation, self-confidence/competence, emotional satisfaction, emotional openness, spontaneity, healthy boundaries, achievement, self-compassion, personal care, social belonging, realistic expectations, and basic safety/optimism - and life satisfaction. Similarly, Paetsch et al. (2020) found a positive relationship between positive schemas and life satisfaction in a German sample. Additionally, Chi et al. (2022) reported that psychiatric inpatients with stronger positive schemas exhibited higher levels of life satisfaction. Özkök (2021) found that positive schemas significantly predicted resilience, particularly in terms of coping and adaptation sub-dimensions among adults. Furthermore, Tomlinson et al. (2017) identified a strong relationship between positive schemas and life satisfaction in studies conducted with children and adolescents. These findings emphasize that positive schemas serve as fundamental psychological structures that help individuals make sense of their life experiences and enhance life adaptation. Several studies investigating the relationship between harmony in life and emotion regulation strategies suggest that functional emotion regulation strategies positively impact psychological well-being. For instance, Garnefski, Koopman, and Kraaij (2009) examined the role of cognitive emotion regulation strategies in psychological adaptation among adolescents with chronic illnesses and found that positive strategies enhanced psychological well-being, whereas maladaptive strategies were associated with dysfunction. Similarly, Garnefski, Kraaij and Spinhoven (2001) found that using adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies such as positive reappraisal and planning was associated with reduced emotional distress. Conversely, Campbell-Sills et al. (2006) reported that suppression strategies increased anxiety and emotional regulation difficulties.

Emotion regulation skills have also been found to be strongly linked to long-term marital adjustment and relationship satisfaction. Specifically, healthy emotion regulation strategies play a critical role in couples' ability to maintain harmony and manage conflicts in their relationships (Bloch, Haase, & Levenson, 2014; Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Sibley, 2009; Butler & Randall, 2012). These

findings reinforce the importance of emotion regulation strategies in psychological well-being and life adaptation.

Comparisons between different emotion regulation strategies reveal that reappraisal has beneficial effects, while suppression has detrimental effects. In their seminal work, Gross and John (2003) found that reappraisal was positively associated with psychological health, whereas suppression had negative consequences, such as lower satisfaction in social relationships and increased stress symptoms. Similarly, Şahin and Tabak (2020) reported that school leaders' use of positive interpersonal emotional expressions - particularly affiliative humour - contributed to a more constructive and cohesive school climate, underscoring the limitations of suppressive approaches to emotional regulation. The current study also indicates that emotion regulation strategies play a crucial role in shaping individuals' positive schemas and overall life adaptation. The current study also indicates that emotion regulation strategies play a crucial role in shaping individuals' positive schemas and overall life adaptation. Specifically, reappraisal significantly enhances the effect of positive schemas on harmony in life, whereas suppression appears to have no meaningful impact. These findings highlight the diverse roles of different emotion regulation strategies in psychological adaptation. Cognitive reappraisal, in particular, has been shown to be a key mechanism for coping with stress and maintaining positive emotional states, thereby enhancing life adaptation. On the other hand, suppression may lead to negative outcomes or remain ineffective, which aligns with research suggesting that emotional suppression has long-term adverse effects on psychological health. Overall, these findings suggest that how individuals regulate their emotional experiences plays a critical role in their overall life adaptation. The results of this study indicate that emphasizing reappraisal techniques in psychological interventions and therapy programs may be a valuable strategy for improving individuals' life satisfaction and well-being. Consequently, therapeutic interventions should be designed to promote the effective use of emotion regulation strategies to enhance psychological resilience and overall life adaptation.

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