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A Structural Model of Mothers' Authoritative Parenting Based on Attachment Styles: The Mediating Roles of Psychological Flexibility and Risk Aversion

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to develop and test a structural model of mothers' authoritative parenting based on attachment styles, with psychological flexibility and risk aversion as mediating variables.

Methods and Materials: This correlational study employed structural equation modeling. The statistical population comprised all mothers of elementary school students in Shiraz, Iran. Based on Kline's sample-size guideline, 250 mothers were selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire developed by Robinson et al. (2001), the Adult Attachment Scale developed by Collins and Read (1990), the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire developed by Bond et al. (2011), and Leahy's Risk Aversion Scale (2012). The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients, structural equation modeling, path analysis, and bootstrap procedures.

Findings: The final structural model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the observed data. Secure attachment had significant direct and indirect relationships with authoritative parenting through psychological flexibility and risk aversion. Avoidant attachment exerted a significant negative direct effect on authoritative parenting and also produced a significant negative indirect effect through risk aversion. Ambivalent attachment did not have a significant direct effect on authoritative parenting; however, it was indirectly associated with authoritative parenting through psychological flexibility and risk aversion. Psychological flexibility was a significant positive predictor of authoritative parenting, whereas risk aversion was a significant negative predictor. The bootstrap results confirmed the significance of the proposed mediating pathways. Collectively, attachment styles, psychological flexibility, and risk aversion explained 40% of the variance in mothers' authoritative parenting.

Conclusion: The findings supported the proposed theoretical model and indicated that attachment styles contribute to mothers' authoritative parenting both directly and indirectly through psychological flexibility and risk aversion. Enhancing psychological flexibility and reducing excessive risk aversion may diminish the adverse effects of insecure attachment patterns and promote more authoritative parent–child interactions.

Keywords: *Authoritative parenting, attachment styles, psychological flexibility, risk aversion, mothers.*

1. Introduction

Parenting is one of the most influential developmental contexts shaping children's emotional regulation, social competence, behavioral adjustment, and psychological well-being. Through repeated patterns of responsiveness, control, communication, and discipline, parents create an interpersonal environment in which children learn how to interpret emotions, respond to demands, manage uncertainty, and engage with others. Parenting styles therefore represent more than a set of isolated child-rearing practices; they reflect relatively stable patterns of parental beliefs, emotional responses, expectations, and behaviors that organize parent–child interactions. Among the commonly studied parenting styles, authoritative parenting is generally regarded as the most developmentally adaptive because it combines emotional warmth and responsiveness with clear expectations, behavioral monitoring, and age-appropriate autonomy. Mothers who use an authoritative style typically communicate expectations clearly, explain the reasons for rules, recognize the child's perspective, and maintain consistent boundaries without relying excessively on coercion or psychological control. In contrast, authoritarian, permissive, inconsistent, or excessively controlling approaches may undermine children's autonomy, emotional security, and capacity for adaptive coping. Evidence indicates that parenting styles and parental monitoring remain important predictors of behavioral adjustment, including the likelihood of deviant or maladaptive behavior across later developmental periods (Chinawa et al., 2024).

The significance of authoritative parenting becomes especially clear when parenting is considered as a balance between protection and autonomy. Children require reliable supervision and emotional availability, but they also need opportunities to explore, make decisions, experience manageable frustration, and acquire confidence through independent action. When parents become overly controlling or excessively protective, children may receive fewer opportunities to develop problem-solving skills, emotional independence, and tolerance of uncertainty. Research on helicopter parenting has shown that intrusive parental involvement and developmentally inappropriate control are associated with elevated anxiety and depressive symptoms, highlighting the psychological costs of parenting practices that restrict autonomy despite being motivated by concern or protection (Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022). Conversely, authoritative parenting provides a framework in which parental structure is maintained without eliminating exploration and personal agency. This balance may be particularly important during the elementary school years, when children increasingly encounter academic expectations, peer relationships, performance evaluation, and situations requiring independent judgment.

Parenting styles are not formed solely in response to the child's behavior. They are also influenced by the parent's internal psychological organization, developmental history, beliefs about safety and danger, emotional schemas, and capacity to regulate distress. A mother may intellectually endorse warmth and balanced discipline, yet find it difficult to behave authoritatively when she experiences interpersonal insecurity, heightened sensitivity to rejection, rigid avoidance of uncertainty, or difficulty remaining psychologically present during stressful parent–child interactions. Accordingly, contemporary models of parenting increasingly emphasize the need to examine intrapersonal parental variables rather than treating parenting style as an isolated behavioral outcome (Akdemir et al., 2023; Chinawa et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2024; Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022). Psychological flexibility, attachment style, and attitudes toward risk may be especially important in explaining why some mothers can combine responsiveness with appropriate control, whereas others respond to the same parenting demands with avoidance, overprotection, emotional withdrawal, inconsistency, or rigid control.

Attachment theory offers a particularly useful framework for understanding individual differences in parenting. Attachment orientations are relatively enduring patterns of expectations, emotions, and behavioral tendencies concerning closeness, support, trust, and dependency in significant relationships. These patterns develop through repeated relational experiences and influence how adults perceive interpersonal threat, seek support, regulate emotions, and respond to the needs of close others. Securely attached adults generally view themselves as worthy of care and others as dependable and available. They are more comfortable with closeness, more able to seek and provide support, and more capable of regulating distress without excessive avoidance or dependence. Insecure attachment, by contrast, may involve discomfort with intimacy, distrust, emotional distancing, fear of abandonment, heightened dependency, or intensified concern about rejection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Because parenting continually activates caregiving, protection, closeness, conflict management, and emotion-regulation systems, mothers'

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
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attachment orientations are likely to influence the way they interpret and respond to their children's needs.

Secure attachment may facilitate authoritative parenting by supporting emotional availability, reflective functioning, and balanced responses to children's dependency and autonomy. A securely attached mother may be better able to recognize a child's distress without becoming overwhelmed, interpret misbehavior within its developmental context, and maintain boundaries without experiencing the child's disagreement as personal rejection. She may also be more willing to encourage exploration because autonomy is not perceived as a threat to relational closeness. Insecure attachment may interfere with these processes. Avoidantly attached mothers may minimize emotional needs, withdraw during conflict, emphasize premature self-reliance, or rely on emotional distance. Ambivalently attached mothers may become highly reactive to separation, rejection, or perceived loss of control and may alternate between intrusive involvement and inconsistent responsiveness. Research conducted among mothers has shown that parenting styles can be predicted by attachment styles and early maladaptive schemas, supporting the proposition that current parenting behavior is partly rooted in enduring relational representations developed across the life span (Refahi & Taheri, 2019).

The association between parenting and attachment is also supported by broader evidence concerning perceived parenting and later attachment outcomes. A review of research on young adults concluded that patterns of perceived parenting are systematically related to secure and insecure attachment orientations, suggesting that parenting experiences and attachment remain closely interconnected across developmental stages (Singh & Pandey, 2025). Similarly, parenting styles have been linked to attachment anxiety and maladaptive coping in relation to clinically relevant outcomes, including disordered eating among young adults (Yang et al., 2025). Such findings indicate that attachment and parenting should not be viewed as separate domains. Rather, attachment-related expectations may shape parenting behavior, while parenting behavior contributes to the child's developing attachment representations and later coping patterns. This reciprocal developmental process makes it important to identify psychological mechanisms through which maternal attachment styles are translated into specific parenting approaches.

Attachment-based interventions further demonstrate that parents' relational representations and caregiving responses can be modified. Preliminary evidence from an attachment-based parenting intervention for parents of adolescents indicated that culturally adapted programs may improve parenting-related outcomes by strengthening attachment-informed understanding and caregiving capacities (Bao et al., 2025). Qualitative findings from the Circle of Security Parenting program also suggest that attachment-focused training can promote parental empowerment and improve parents' understanding of children's attachment needs (Savela, 2025). These studies imply that attachment-linked parenting patterns are not fixed; however, effective intervention requires a clearer understanding of the psychological processes connecting attachment orientations to parenting behavior. Psychological flexibility and risk aversion may constitute two such processes.

Psychological flexibility refers to the capacity to remain in contact with present-moment experiences, including uncomfortable thoughts and emotions, while choosing behavior that is consistent with personally meaningful values and situational demands. In parenting, psychological flexibility enables mothers to tolerate frustration, uncertainty, guilt, fear, and emotional discomfort without automatically resorting to avoidance, overcontrol, criticism, withdrawal, or inconsistent discipline. A psychologically flexible mother may notice distressing thoughts such as "my child will fail," "I am losing control," or "disagreement means disrespect" without treating these thoughts as literal commands. She can instead respond according to broader parenting values such as warmth, responsibility, respect, and the promotion of autonomy. Psychological inflexibility, by contrast, involves rigid attempts to avoid or control internal experiences, excessive fusion with distressing thoughts, and difficulty adjusting behavior to changing contextual demands.

The role of psychological flexibility in parenting has received growing empirical support. Research has shown that parenting stress is associated with less adaptive parenting styles and that both parenting-specific and global psychological flexibility help explain these relationships (Fonseca et al., 2020). This finding is important because parenting is inherently stressful, and the effect of stress on parenting behavior may depend less on the mere presence of distress than on the parent's manner of responding to it. Mothers with greater psychological flexibility may remain emotionally available and behaviorally consistent even when they feel anxious, fatigued, disappointed, or uncertain. Those with lower flexibility may respond to the same emotional experiences with rigid control, avoidance, emotional escalation, or inconsistency. Therefore,

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psychological flexibility may operate as a proximal regulatory mechanism through which broader personality and relational characteristics influence parenting style.

Longitudinal evidence also suggests that parental psychological flexibility is associated with children's behavioral outcomes through parenting practices. Maternal and paternal psychological flexibility may influence child problem behavior in complex ways, with parenting styles serving as important explanatory pathways (Pan et al., 2024). In addition, psychological flexibility in parenting and maternal depression have been identified as meaningful predictors of conduct disorder symptoms in adolescents (Abdollahzadeh Rafi et al., 2021). These findings indicate that psychological flexibility is relevant not only to parental well-being but also to the quality of parenting and children's behavioral adjustment. Within a structural model, psychological flexibility may therefore mediate the association between maternal attachment styles and authoritative parenting. Secure attachment may support flexibility by reducing defensive responding and increasing tolerance of closeness, conflict, and emotional complexity. Insecure attachment may reduce flexibility by intensifying experiential avoidance, rejection sensitivity, or rigid interpersonal strategies.

Cognitive flexibility, although conceptually distinct from psychological flexibility, provides complementary evidence regarding the adaptive value of flexible responding. Cognitive flexibility involves the ability to shift perspectives, revise strategies, and adjust thinking in response to new information or changing demands. Cross-national research involving adolescents from 57 countries demonstrated meaningful associations between cognitive flexibility and academic performance, indicating that flexibility is broadly relevant to successful adaptation across diverse social and educational contexts (Zheng et al., 2024). Parenting likewise requires continual adjustment to the child's developmental stage, temperament, needs, and situational demands. Mothers must solve complex interpersonal problems, balance competing priorities, and modify ineffective strategies. In this respect, flexible parenting resembles complex problem solving, which depends on the capacity to integrate information, adapt to uncertainty, and select effective responses under changing conditions (Veríssimo et al., 2024). Psychological flexibility may therefore enable mothers to implement authoritative parenting more consistently by supporting adaptive decision-making in emotionally charged situations.

Risk aversion represents another potentially important mechanism linking attachment orientations to parenting. Risk aversion refers to a tendency to avoid uncertain choices or situations in which outcomes cannot be fully controlled, even when accepting a manageable degree of risk may lead to learning, growth, or long-term benefit. In parenting, risk aversion may appear as excessive restriction of exploration, reluctance to grant age-appropriate independence, heightened monitoring, avoidance of unfamiliar activities, or disproportionate concern about possible harm. Although caution is necessary for child safety, excessive aversion to risk may interfere with authoritative parenting by shifting the balance from reasonable supervision toward overprotection and control.

Parental decisions about risky play illustrate this tension. Risky play involves developmentally appropriate activities that include uncertainty, challenge, speed, height, or physical exploration. Such activities may help children develop motor competence, confidence, judgment, and risk-management skills. Parents, however, differ in their willingness to permit them. Research has shown that parental variables and parenting styles are associated with whether parents allow children to engage in risky play (Akdemir et al., 2023). Mothers with high risk aversion may interpret uncertainty as danger and restrict activities that could otherwise support autonomy and competence. In contrast, authoritative mothers may be more capable of evaluating actual risk, setting appropriate limits, and allowing supervised exploration. Thus, risk aversion may reduce authoritative parenting when it promotes rigid control and prevents mothers from balancing protection with developmental freedom.

Risk aversion may itself be shaped by earlier relational and adverse experiences. Evidence from children exposed to domestic violence suggests that negative childhood experiences can influence later attitudes toward uncertainty and risk, increasing the tendency to avoid potentially threatening outcomes (Castillo, 2020). Attachment insecurity may similarly heighten threat sensitivity and promote defensive strategies aimed at minimizing emotional or situational uncertainty. Avoidant attachment may encourage distancing and control to reduce dependency-related vulnerability, whereas ambivalent attachment may produce hypervigilance and intensified concern about loss, rejection, or unpredictable outcomes. Secure attachment, by contrast, may support greater confidence in coping resources and reduce the need to avoid all uncertain situations. Risk aversion may consequently serve as an intermediary through

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
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which attachment-related threat appraisals affect maternal parenting behavior.

The relationship between risk aversion and psychological flexibility is also theoretically meaningful. Leahy and colleagues identified risk aversion, emotional schemas, and psychological flexibility as interconnected processes underlying depression, showing that maladaptive responses to uncertainty and emotional experience are related to rigid avoidance patterns (Leahy et al., 2012). In parenting, a mother who is highly risk-averse may attempt to prevent distressing outcomes by controlling both the child's behavior and her own emotional experiences. This strategy may offer temporary relief but may reinforce inflexible parenting and limit opportunities for the child's autonomy. Psychological flexibility may counteract this process by enabling the mother to tolerate uncertainty and act according to long-term parenting values rather than immediate fear reduction. Accordingly, risk aversion and psychological flexibility may function as distinct but interrelated mediators of the association between attachment styles and authoritative parenting.

The importance of these mechanisms becomes more evident when broader contextual pressures are considered. Children's development is shaped by interacting risk and protective factors within the family and wider environment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, variations in family stress, parental resources, and caregiving conditions contributed to differences in children's early cognitive, social, and emotional development (Hendry et al., 2023). Such evidence underscores that adaptive parenting depends on parents' ability to respond flexibly to uncertain and rapidly changing circumstances. Mothers with secure attachment, lower risk aversion, and greater psychological flexibility may be better equipped to preserve warmth, structure, and responsiveness under stress. Conversely, insecure attachment, rigid threat avoidance, and reduced flexibility may increase the likelihood of overcontrol, withdrawal, or inconsistent discipline.

Family relationships outside the direct parent–child dyad may also shape parenting capacities. Coparenting quality and marital relationships are closely connected to attachment processes, and recent evidence indicates that marital attachment can mediate actor and partner effects between coparenting and marital quality (Ren et al., 2025). Supportive coparenting may provide mothers with emotional security and shared responsibility, whereas relational conflict may activate attachment insecurity and intensify defensive parenting responses. Similarly, interventions involving forgiveness and self-compassion have been shown to reduce marital conflict among women facing infidelity, suggesting that emotion-regulation and self-relational capacities may improve family functioning under conditions of relational threat (Zaal & GhR, 2020). Although the present study focuses on maternal attachment and parenting rather than marital processes, these findings reinforce the broader proposition that attachment security, emotional flexibility, and responses to perceived threat are deeply embedded in family interaction patterns.

Despite the growing literature on attachment, psychological flexibility, risk-related decision-making, and parenting, these constructs have often been examined separately. Many studies have investigated direct associations between attachment and parenting styles, psychological flexibility and parenting stress, or parental attitudes toward children's risk-taking. Fewer studies have integrated these variables into a single explanatory model. This gap is important because attachment styles may not influence parenting only through direct interpersonal tendencies. Their effects may also be transmitted through mothers' ability to remain flexible in the presence of difficult internal experiences and through their willingness or reluctance to tolerate uncertainty in child-rearing decisions. Examining these mediating mechanisms can provide a more precise account of why mothers with different attachment orientations vary in their use of authoritative parenting.

A structural model that simultaneously includes secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment, psychological flexibility, risk aversion, and authoritative parenting can therefore make several contributions. It can clarify the relative direct effects of different attachment styles, identify the psychological pathways through which attachment insecurity undermines adaptive parenting, and determine whether flexibility and risk aversion operate as independent mediators. Such knowledge also has practical implications. If psychological flexibility and risk aversion partially explain the association between insecure attachment and less authoritative parenting, interventions need not be limited to changing parenting techniques alone. Programs may also target experiential avoidance, rigid threat appraisal, intolerance of uncertainty, and mothers' capacity to act consistently with parenting values during emotionally demanding situations. Attachment-informed and flexibility-based interventions may thereby strengthen authoritative parenting and improve parent–child relationships.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to develop and test a structural model of mothers' authoritative parenting based

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
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on secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles, with psychological flexibility and risk aversion serving as mediating variables.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This quantitative study was applied in purpose, cross-sectional in terms of the time of data collection, and descriptive-correlational in design. A causal modeling approach based on structural equation modeling was employed to examine the direct and indirect relationships between mothers' attachment styles and authoritative parenting, considering psychological flexibility and risk aversion as mediating variables. The statistical population consisted of all mothers of elementary school students in Shiraz, Iran. Based on Kline's recommendation regarding the sample size required for structural equation modeling, 250 eligible mothers were selected through multistage stratified random sampling. After obtaining the necessary administrative permissions from the General Directorate of Education and the relevant educational districts, the elementary schools of Shiraz were classified according to their educational districts and treated as sampling strata. Schools were subsequently selected from the designated strata, and coordination was established with the administrators of the selected schools to distribute the questionnaires among the students' mothers. Data were collected with the assistance of students, during parent–teacher meetings, and, in some cases, through electronic questionnaire links distributed in school-specific parent communication groups after the mothers had agreed to participate. The inclusion criteria were having at least one child enrolled in elementary school, willingness to participate in the study and complete the questionnaires, sufficient literacy to understand and answer the items, and the absence of serious physical or psychiatric conditions that could prevent meaningful participation. The exclusion criteria included withdrawal of consent at any stage of the research, incomplete completion of the questionnaires, the presence of a diagnosed severe psychological disorder, the use of specific medications that could substantially affect cognitive or emotional functioning, and incomplete or unusable data.

The study was conducted through both library-based and field procedures. In the library phase, relevant books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and credible electronic sources were reviewed to develop the theoretical framework and summarize the empirical literature related to authoritative parenting, attachment styles, psychological flexibility, and risk aversion. During the field phase, data were collected using paper-and-pencil questionnaires and electronic forms. Before the implementation of the study, the required administrative and ethical permissions were obtained from the educational authorities and the university ethics committee. The selected schools were then identified, and questionnaire packages containing the study information sheet, informed-consent form, demographic information form, and research instruments were prepared. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and the mothers were informed that they could discontinue their participation without penalty. After the questionnaires had been collected, the demographic information and scores for the research variables were coded and entered into the statistical software. Participants' identities and responses were treated as confidential throughout the research process, and the study was conducted under the ethical approval issued by the Research Deputy of Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht Branch.

2.2. Measures

The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire developed by Robinson et al. in 2001 was used to assess mothers' authoritative parenting. The questionnaire contains 32 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never to always and assesses three parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting. Because the present study specifically focused on the structural determinants of authoritative parenting, only the authoritative parenting dimension was included in the analyses. This dimension originally comprised Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 21, 22, 25, 27, 29, and 30, with Item 30 being reverse-scored. Higher scores represented a stronger tendency to employ authoritative parenting practices characterized by appropriate responsiveness, parental involvement, reasoning, and behavioral regulation. The construct validity of the authoritative parenting dimension was evaluated in the present sample through confirmatory factor analysis using maximum-likelihood estimation. Items 1, 11, and 22 were excluded from the final measurement model because their standardized factor loadings were below 0.40. The revised measurement model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, with a chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio of 2.11, a Tucker–Lewis index of 0.91, a

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
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comparative fit index of 0.92, a goodness-of-fit index of 0.90, an adjusted goodness-of-fit index of 0.88, a root mean square error of approximation of 0.04, and a PCLOSE value of 0.20. The internal consistency of the retained authoritative parenting items was satisfactory, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87.

The Adult Attachment Scale developed by Collins and Read in 1990 was administered to assess the mothers' attachment styles. The instrument has been validated for use in Iran by Rahimian Boogar and colleagues and consists of 18 items measuring secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores on each subscale indicating a greater tendency toward the corresponding attachment pattern. Before calculating the subscale scores, the reverse-worded items were recoded. Items 8, 13, and 17 of the secure attachment dimension and Items 5 and 14 of the avoidant attachment dimension were scored in reverse. The construct validity of the instrument was examined through a three-factor confirmatory factor analysis representing secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment. Items 2 and 5 of the avoidant attachment dimension were removed because their standardized factor loadings were lower than 0.40. The correlations among the latent dimensions were consistent with their theoretical directions: secure attachment was negatively correlated with avoidant and ambivalent attachment, with coefficients of −0.81 and −0.91, respectively, whereas avoidant and ambivalent attachment were positively correlated at 0.80. The three-factor measurement model exhibited a generally acceptable fit, as reflected by a chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio of 2.66, a Tucker–Lewis index of 0.91, a comparative fit index of 0.93, a goodness-of-fit index of 0.89, an adjusted goodness-of-fit index of 0.86, a root mean square error of approximation of 0.04, and a PCLOSE value of 0.11. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.80 for secure attachment, 0.82 for avoidant attachment, and 0.88 for ambivalent attachment, indicating adequate to strong internal consistency across the three dimensions.

The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire–II, developed by Bond et al. in 2011, was used to assess psychological flexibility. This brief self-report instrument consists of seven items rated on a seven-point Likert scale. The questionnaire evaluates the individual's capacity to remain in contact with difficult thoughts and emotions while acting in accordance with personally meaningful goals rather than engaging in rigid experiential avoidance. The responses to the seven items were combined to produce the psychological flexibility score used in the structural model. The construct validity of the instrument was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis with maximum-likelihood estimation. All seven items demonstrated satisfactory standardized factor loadings, with the lowest loading being 0.67; therefore, no item was removed from the measurement model. The one-factor model showed a favorable fit to the collected data, with a chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio of 2.58, a Tucker–Lewis index of 0.97, a comparative fit index of 0.99, a goodness-of-fit index of 0.97, an adjusted goodness-of-fit index of 0.92, a root mean square error of approximation of 0.07, and a PCLOSE value of 0.09. The scale also demonstrated excellent internal consistency in the present sample, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92.

Leahy's Decision-Making Questionnaire was employed to measure risk aversion. The instrument comprises 25 items rated on a six-point Likert scale and assesses the extent to which individuals avoid accepting uncertainty and potential risk when making decisions. Higher scores represented a stronger tendency toward risk-averse decision-making. Before calculating the total score, Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, and 13 were reverse-scored. A one-factor confirmatory factor analysis was then performed to examine the construct validity of the measure, with risk aversion specified as the underlying latent variable. Items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 20 were excluded because their standardized factor loadings were below the predetermined threshold of 0.40. The remaining items had satisfactory factor loadings and were retained in the final measurement model. The revised model demonstrated an acceptable fit, with a chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio of 2.22, a Tucker–Lewis index of 0.91, a comparative fit index of 0.95, a goodness-of-fit index of 0.90, an adjusted goodness-of-fit index of 0.85, a root mean square error of approximation of 0.06, and a PCLOSE value of 0.09. The internal consistency of the retained items was excellent, as shown by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.92.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 and AMOS version 24. Before conducting the primary analyses, the questionnaires were screened for completeness, coded, and entered into the statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were calculated to summarize the participants' demographic characteristics and the distributions of the principal research variables. The

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
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relationships among authoritative parenting, secure attachment, avoidant attachment, ambivalent attachment, psychological flexibility, and risk aversion were initially examined using Pearson correlation coefficients. The measurement properties of the instruments were evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis using maximum-likelihood estimation. Standardized factor loadings, internal consistency coefficients, and multiple goodness-of-fit indices were examined to determine whether the measurement models adequately represented the observed data. Items with standardized factor loadings below 0.40 were removed before the final structural model was tested.

The research hypotheses were evaluated through causal modeling using path analysis within the structural equation modeling framework. The model tested the direct paths from secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles to authoritative parenting and the indirect paths operating through psychological flexibility and risk aversion. The direct effects of attachment styles on the proposed mediators, as well as the direct effects of psychological flexibility and risk aversion on authoritative parenting, were also estimated. Overall model fit was assessed using the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio, the Tucker–Lewis index, the comparative fit index, the goodness-of-fit index, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index, the root mean square error of approximation, and PCLOSE. A chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio below 3, comparative fit and Tucker–Lewis indices close to or above 0.90, and a root mean square error of approximation below 0.08 were considered evidence of acceptable model fit. The statistical significance of the direct path coefficients was evaluated at the 0.05 significance level. The indirect and mediating effects were examined using the bootstrap procedure, which generated confidence intervals for the estimated indirect paths. An indirect effect was regarded as statistically significant when its bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. The proportion of variance in authoritative parenting explained by attachment styles, psychological flexibility, and risk aversion was determined using the squared multiple correlation coefficient for the dependent variable.

3. Findings and Results

In this section, the descriptive indices of the study variables were first reported. Subsequently, the Pearson correlation matrix was calculated to examine the initial relationships among the variables. Structural equation modeling was then used to test the proposed research model, and the model fit indices, direct path coefficients, and direct, indirect, and total effects of the variables were examined. To describe the status of the study variables, descriptive statistical indices, including the mean and standard deviation, were calculated for secure attachment, avoidant attachment, ambivalent attachment, risk aversion, psychological flexibility, and authoritative parenting. The descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

Main study variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Secure attachment	12.12	4.45	0.61	−0.68	6	23
Avoidant attachment	13.74	3.53	−0.62	−0.42	4	20
Ambivalent attachment	23.02	5.15	−0.72	−0.41	8	30
Acceptance and action	18.82	8.05	1.09	1.03	7	49
Risk aversion	57.22	14.75	0.53	−0.51	24	96
Authoritative parenting	24.96	6.49	0.48	−0.32	12	42

Following the examination of the descriptive indices, the Pearson correlation matrix was calculated to investigate the initial relationships among the study variables. This analysis examined the relationships among secure attachment, avoidant attachment, ambivalent attachment, risk aversion, psychological flexibility, and authoritative parenting. The correlation coefficients among the study variables are presented in Table 2.

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
E-ISSN: 3041-8798

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Secure attachment	1					
2. Avoidant attachment	−0.66**	1				
3. Ambivalent attachment	−0.77**	0.71**	1			
4. Risk aversion	−0.74**	0.66**	0.74**	1		
5. Psychological flexibility	0.62**	−0.53**	−0.66**	−0.72**	1	
6. Authoritative parenting	0.49**	−0.31**	−0.42**	−0.59**	0.55**	1

As shown in Table 2, secure attachment was significantly and negatively associated with avoidant attachment (r = −.66), ambivalent attachment (r = −.77), and risk aversion (r = −.74), whereas it was significantly and positively associated with psychological flexibility (r = .62) and mothers' authoritative parenting (r = .49). Avoidant attachment was significantly and positively associated with ambivalent attachment (r = .71) and risk aversion (r = .66), while it was significantly and negatively associated with psychological flexibility (r = −.53) and authoritative parenting (r = −.31). The results also showed that ambivalent attachment was significantly and positively related to risk aversion (r = .74), but significantly and negatively related to psychological flexibility (r = −.72) and authoritative parenting (r = −.59). Risk aversion was significantly and negatively associated with psychological flexibility (r = −.72) and authoritative parenting (r = −.59). In contrast, psychological flexibility showed a significant positive relationship with authoritative parenting (r = .55).

After examining the correlations among the variables, the structural model was tested. In this model, attachment styles, including secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment, were considered predictor variables; risk aversion and psychological flexibility were specified as mediating variables; and authoritative parenting was considered the criterion variable. Model fit was evaluated using the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio, comparative fit index, Tucker–Lewis index, goodness-of-fit index, adjusted goodness-of-fit index, root mean square error of approximation, and PCLOSE. The model fit indices are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Fit Indices for the Structural Model

Fit indices	χ^2/df	TLI	CFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
Estimated values	2.25	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.94	0.07	0.25
Recommended values	< 3	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.08	> 0.05

The results presented in Table 3 indicated that the proposed model demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the data. The chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio was 2.25, indicating an acceptable model fit. The TLI, CFI, GFI, and AGFI values were 0.98, 0.99, 0.99, and 0.94, respectively. In addition, the RMSEA value was 0.07, and the PCLOSE value was 0.25. Taken together, these indices indicated that the structural model adequately fitted the observed data. After confirming model fit, the standardized direct path coefficients, standard errors, critical ratios, and significance levels of the paths were examined, as reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Direct Path Coefficients in the Structural Model

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*
Secure attachment	Authoritative parenting	0.19	0.06	0.31	4.57	.001
Avoidant attachment	Authoritative parenting	−0.32	0.12	−0.17	−2.66	.001
Secure attachment	Risk aversion	−1.24	0.20	−0.38	−6.14	.001
Avoidant attachment	Risk aversion	0.69	0.21	0.16	3.26	.001
Ambivalent attachment	Risk aversion	0.96	0.18	0.34	5.23	.001

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
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Secure attachment	Psychological flexibility	0.52	0.13	0.29	3.96	.001
Ambivalent attachment	Psychological flexibility	−0.68	0.11	−0.44	−5.98	.001
Risk aversion	Authoritative parenting	−0.22	0.04	−0.49	−6.15	.001
Psychological flexibility	Authoritative parenting	0.23	0.06	0.29	4.14	.001

The results presented in Table 4 showed that secure attachment had a positive direct effect on authoritative parenting, indicating that greater secure attachment was associated with higher levels of authoritative parenting. Avoidant attachment also had a negative direct effect on authoritative parenting; therefore, greater avoidant attachment was associated with lower levels of authoritative parenting. The direct effect of ambivalent attachment on authoritative parenting was not statistically significant.

Regarding the pathways involving the mediating variables, secure attachment had a negative direct effect on risk aversion and a positive direct effect on psychological flexibility. Avoidant attachment had a positive direct effect on risk aversion. Ambivalent attachment also had a positive direct effect on risk aversion and a negative direct effect on psychological flexibility. Furthermore, risk aversion had a negative direct effect on authoritative parenting, whereas psychological flexibility had a positive direct effect on authoritative parenting.

Bootstrap analysis was used to examine the mediating roles of risk aversion and psychological flexibility in the relationships between attachment styles and authoritative parenting. To determine the specific mediating role of each variable, separate models were developed in which only the mediator under examination was included, while the other mediating variable was removed. Table 5 presents the bootstrap results for assessing the statistical significance of the mediating roles of risk aversion and psychological flexibility in the relationships between attachment styles and authoritative parenting.

According to the results presented in Table 5, risk aversion significantly mediated the effects of ambivalent, avoidant, and secure attachment styles on authoritative parenting. The standardized indirect effect of ambivalent attachment on the dependent variable through risk aversion was −0.22 and was statistically significant at p = .02. The standardized indirect effect of avoidant attachment through the same mediator was −0.13 and was significant at p = .01, whereas the standardized indirect effect of secure attachment through risk aversion was 0.25 and was significant at p = .01.

Regarding psychological flexibility as a mediator, the findings showed that this variable significantly mediated the effects of ambivalent and secure attachment on authoritative parenting. The standardized indirect effect of ambivalent attachment on the dependent variable through psychological flexibility was −0.24 and was statistically significant at p = .03. The corresponding indirect effect of secure attachment through psychological flexibility was 0.16 and was statistically significant at p = .005.

Secure attachment increased authoritative parenting by enhancing psychological flexibility and reducing risk aversion. Avoidant attachment reduced authoritative parenting by increasing risk aversion. Ambivalent attachment reduced mothers' authoritative parenting by decreasing psychological flexibility and increasing risk aversion.

Table 5

Bootstrap Analysis of the Significance of the Mediating Effects

Predictor variable	Mediating variable	β	Lower bound	Upper bound	*p*
Ambivalent attachment	Risk aversion	−0.22	−0.33	−0.12	.02
Avoidant attachment	Risk aversion	−0.13	−0.20	−0.04	.01
Secure attachment	Risk aversion	0.25	0.16	0.35	.01
Ambivalent attachment	Psychological flexibility	−0.24	−0.36	−0.09	.03
Secure attachment	Psychological flexibility	0.16	0.08	0.28	.005

Table 6 presents the standardized direct, indirect, and total effects of the exogenous study variables on authoritative parenting. According to the results, all predictor variables affected authoritative parenting. Secure attachment had the largest positive contribution to the explanation of authoritative parenting, with a total effect coefficient of 0.57. Risk aversion had the strongest negative and inverse effect on authoritative parenting, with a total effect coefficient of −0.49. Psychological flexibility (0.29), ambivalent attachment (−0.29), and avoidant attachment (−0.25) ranked subsequently in terms of their effects on authoritative parenting.

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
E-ISSN: 3041-8798

Table 6

Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of the Model Variables

Predictor variable	Criterion variable	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Secure attachment	Authoritative parenting	0.31	0.26	0.57
Avoidant attachment	Authoritative parenting	−0.17	−0.08	−0.25
Ambivalent attachment	Authoritative parenting	—	−0.29	−0.29
Risk aversion	Authoritative parenting	−0.49	—	−0.49
Psychological flexibility	Authoritative parenting	0.29	—	0.29

The results showed that, in the final research model, secure and avoidant attachment styles were associated with authoritative parenting both directly and through the mediating variables. Secure attachment was directly and positively related to authoritative parenting and psychological flexibility and negatively related to risk aversion. Avoidant attachment was negatively related to authoritative parenting and positively related to risk aversion.

Ambivalent attachment was related to authoritative parenting only indirectly through risk aversion and psychological flexibility. Collectively, the predictor variables explained 40% of the variance in authoritative parenting.

4. Discussion

The present study developed and tested a structural model of mothers' authoritative parenting based on secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles, with psychological flexibility and risk aversion as mediating variables. The findings showed that the proposed model had an acceptable fit with the observed data and that the predictor variables collectively explained 40% of the variance in authoritative parenting. Secure attachment had both a positive direct effect and positive indirect effects on authoritative parenting through greater psychological flexibility and lower risk aversion. Avoidant attachment had a negative direct effect on authoritative parenting and an additional negative indirect effect through increased risk aversion. Ambivalent attachment did not exert a significant direct effect on authoritative parenting; however, it was indirectly associated with lower authoritative parenting through greater risk aversion and reduced psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility positively predicted authoritative parenting, whereas risk aversion negatively predicted it. Overall, these findings indicate that maternal attachment orientations are associated with authoritative parenting not only through direct relational tendencies but also through mothers' capacity to tolerate difficult internal experiences and uncertainty in parenting situations.

The positive direct effect of secure attachment on authoritative parenting was consistent with attachment theory, according to which secure internal working models support trust, emotional availability, balanced dependency, and effective regulation of interpersonal distress. Securely attached mothers are more likely to perceive close relationships as safe and manageable and to view themselves as capable of providing and receiving support. These representations may help mothers respond sensitively to their children while maintaining appropriate rules and expectations. Authoritative parenting requires the simultaneous use of responsiveness and behavioral structure, and secure attachment may facilitate this balance by reducing defensive withdrawal, fear of rejection, and excessive concern about losing relational control (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The present result also aligns with findings showing that mothers' attachment styles predict their parenting styles and that secure attachment is associated with more adaptive parenting patterns (Refahi & Taheri, 2019).

The association between secure attachment and authoritative parenting may also be understood in terms of the intergenerational continuity of attachment-related expectations. Parents who have developed secure representations of relationships are more likely to interpret children's needs accurately, tolerate age-appropriate dependence, and support autonomy without experiencing it as emotional distancing. In contrast, insecure relational expectations may interfere with sensitive caregiving and increase the likelihood of rigid, inconsistent, or emotionally distant parenting. Reviews of the relationship between perceived parenting and attachment have similarly emphasized that supportive, responsive, and autonomy-promoting parenting is related to greater attachment security, whereas controlling or rejecting parenting is more closely associated with insecure attachment patterns (Singh &

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
E-ISSN: 3041-8798

Pandey, 2025). The current findings extend this literature by suggesting that maternal secure attachment contributes specifically to authoritative parenting and that part of this relationship is transmitted through psychological flexibility and risk-related decision-making.

The finding that avoidant attachment negatively predicted authoritative parenting was also theoretically expected. Avoidant attachment is characterized by discomfort with closeness, deactivation of attachment needs, emotional distancing, and a tendency to rely on self-sufficiency under stress. In the parenting context, these tendencies may make it more difficult for mothers to respond consistently to children's emotional signals, engage in open communication, or remain affectively present during conflict. Avoidantly attached mothers may place excessive emphasis on independence, minimize expressions of vulnerability, or disengage when the child requires comfort and reassurance. Such patterns are inconsistent with the responsiveness component of authoritative parenting. At the same time, avoidant mothers may use behavioral control without sufficient emotional warmth, thereby moving away from an authoritative style toward more detached or rigid interaction patterns. These explanations are consistent with the broader attachment framework described by Mikulincer and Shaver (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) and with empirical evidence linking attachment insecurity to less adaptive parenting styles (Refahi & Taheri, 2019).

The negative direct relationship between avoidant attachment and authoritative parenting also corresponds with evidence that maladaptive parenting practices are associated with adverse behavioral and emotional outcomes in children and young adults. Parenting styles characterized by insufficient warmth, inadequate monitoring, or excessive control have been identified as predictors of deviant behavior and adjustment difficulties (Chinawa et al., 2024). Similarly, parenting and attachment anxiety have been associated with negative coping patterns and disordered eating in young adults, indicating that insecure relational environments may contribute to maladaptive self-regulation across development (Yang et al., 2025). Although the present study did not examine child outcomes directly, its findings suggest that avoidant maternal attachment may be one pathway through which less adaptive parenting climates are established.

Ambivalent attachment did not have a significant direct effect on authoritative parenting, but its total indirect effect was negative and meaningful. This result suggests that ambivalent attachment may influence parenting primarily through internal regulatory mechanisms rather than through a simple direct behavioral pathway. Mothers with ambivalent attachment may strongly desire closeness while simultaneously fearing rejection, abandonment, or insufficient responsiveness from others. These competing tendencies may produce heightened emotional reactivity, vigilance, and uncertainty in close relationships. However, whether such insecurity results in less authoritative parenting may depend on how the mother manages distress and uncertainty. In the present model, ambivalent attachment predicted greater risk aversion and lower psychological flexibility, both of which were associated with reduced authoritative parenting. Therefore, the effect of ambivalent attachment may become behaviorally evident when it is translated into inflexible or threat-focused responses.

This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the role of attachment processes in broader family relationships. For example, marital attachment has been shown to mediate the relationship between coparenting and marital quality, indicating that attachment-related insecurity can influence family functioning through relational and regulatory processes rather than only through direct behavioral effects (Ren et al., 2025). In mothers with ambivalent attachment, heightened sensitivity to rejection and relational instability may reduce the capacity to remain calm and consistent during child-rearing challenges. Such mothers may alternate between overinvolvement and frustration, or between permissiveness and intrusive control, particularly when the child's behavior activates fears of separation or loss of influence. Consequently, the absence of a significant direct path in the present study does not imply that ambivalent attachment is irrelevant; rather, it highlights the importance of the mediating processes through which it affects parenting.

One of the central findings was that psychological flexibility positively predicted authoritative parenting. This result supports the view that adaptive parenting depends not only on knowledge of effective parenting practices but also on the parent's capacity to remain open to difficult thoughts and emotions while choosing behavior consistent with long-term values. Parenting frequently involves frustration, uncertainty, guilt, fear, conflict, and unmet expectations. Mothers with greater psychological flexibility may experience these internal states without automatically responding with withdrawal, coercion, criticism, or inconsistency. They may be better able to pause, consider the child's developmental needs, and respond with warmth and

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
E-ISSN: 3041-8798

appropriate structure. In contrast, psychologically inflexible mothers may attempt to control or avoid their own distress by controlling the child, disengaging from emotional interaction, or reacting rigidly to misbehavior.

The present finding closely aligns with evidence demonstrating that psychological flexibility plays a central role in the relationship between parenting stress and parenting styles. Fonseca et al. found that both global psychological flexibility and flexibility specifically within parenting helped explain how parenting stress was associated with maladaptive parenting responses (Fonseca et al., 2020). This suggests that distress does not inevitably produce ineffective parenting; rather, its impact depends partly on the mother's capacity to respond flexibly. The current study extends this conclusion by showing that psychological flexibility is also a significant mediator between attachment orientations and authoritative parenting.

The finding is further supported by research demonstrating that parental psychological flexibility influences child problem behavior through parenting styles. Pan et al. reported complex longitudinal relationships among maternal and paternal psychological flexibility, parenting styles, and children's behavioral problems, indicating that flexibility in parents may shape children's adjustment through its effect on parenting behavior (Pan et al., 2024). Likewise, psychological flexibility in parenting and maternal depression have been shown to predict symptoms of conduct disorder in adolescents (Abdollahzadeh Rafi et al., 2021). Together with the present findings, this evidence suggests that psychological flexibility functions as a protective parental resource that supports consistent, responsive, and developmentally appropriate parenting even under emotional strain.

Secure attachment had a positive indirect effect on authoritative parenting through psychological flexibility, whereas ambivalent attachment had a negative indirect effect through reduced flexibility. Secure attachment may enhance flexibility because securely attached individuals are generally more capable of acknowledging distress, seeking support, revising interpretations, and maintaining effective behavior under relational pressure. They are less likely to rely on rigid deactivation or hyperactivation strategies and may therefore respond more adaptively when children resist, become distressed, or seek autonomy. Ambivalent attachment, in contrast, may increase fusion with threat-related thoughts and intensify emotional reactions, making it harder for mothers to act according to parenting values. This explanation is compatible with attachment-based interventions showing that strengthening parents' understanding of attachment needs can improve caregiving capacities and parental empowerment (Bao et al., 2025; Savela, 2025).

The positive role of psychological flexibility can also be understood in relation to cognitive flexibility and complex problem solving. Parenting requires mothers to adjust expectations, shift perspectives, evaluate alternative responses, and adapt strategies to the child's age, temperament, and situational needs. Cognitive flexibility has been associated with better academic performance across diverse cultural contexts, indicating its broad relevance to effective adaptation (Zheng et al., 2024). Complex problem solving similarly depends on flexible thinking, integration of information, and responsiveness to changing circumstances (Veríssimo et al., 2024). Authoritative parenting requires comparable capacities because mothers must balance competing goals such as safety and autonomy, warmth and discipline, and immediate behavioral management and long-term development. Psychological flexibility may therefore support authoritative parenting by enabling mothers to make context-sensitive rather than fear-driven decisions.

Risk aversion emerged as a significant negative predictor of authoritative parenting. This finding indicates that mothers who are highly reluctant to tolerate uncertainty and potential negative outcomes may be less likely to use an authoritative style. Excessive risk aversion may lead mothers to overestimate danger, restrict children's activities, impose rigid rules, or avoid granting age-appropriate independence. Although parental protection is necessary, an excessive focus on preventing all possible harm can undermine autonomy support and reduce opportunities for children to develop competence and self-regulation. Authoritative parenting requires calibrated supervision rather than complete elimination of uncertainty; therefore, strong risk aversion may disrupt the balance between protection and exploration.

This explanation is supported by research on parental permission for risky play. Akdemir et al. found that parenting styles and other parental characteristics were associated with willingness to allow children to participate in developmentally appropriate risky activities (Akdemir et al., 2023). Parents who tolerate manageable uncertainty may be more willing to permit exploration while maintaining appropriate safety boundaries. By contrast, highly risk-averse mothers may interpret uncertain situations as unacceptable and respond through restriction or overcontrol. Such behavior resembles patterns described in the literature

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
E-ISSN: 3041-8798

on helicopter parenting, where excessive involvement and restriction are associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms (Vigdal & Brønnick, 2022). The present findings therefore suggest that risk aversion may be a cognitive-emotional mechanism underlying overprotective or insufficiently autonomy-supportive parenting.

Risk aversion significantly mediated the effects of all three attachment styles on authoritative parenting. Secure attachment reduced risk aversion and thereby increased authoritative parenting, whereas avoidant and ambivalent attachment increased risk aversion and consequently reduced authoritative parenting. Securely attached mothers may have greater confidence in their ability to cope with uncertain outcomes and may perceive both themselves and their children as capable of managing moderate challenges. Avoidant and ambivalent attachment may instead increase threat sensitivity or reliance on control as a defensive strategy. For avoidant mothers, risk aversion may take the form of controlling the environment to minimize emotional dependency or relational unpredictability. For ambivalent mothers, it may reflect heightened fear of harm, separation, failure, or loss of closeness.

The association between adverse relational experiences and risk aversion is consistent with evidence that exposure to domestic violence and other negative childhood experiences can influence children's later willingness to accept risk (Castillo, 2020). Early environments characterized by unpredictability or threat may encourage the belief that uncertainty is dangerous and should be minimized. Such beliefs may persist into adulthood and shape maternal decision-making. Risk aversion may therefore represent one pathway through which attachment-related experiences are carried forward into parenting practices.

The present results are also consistent with Leahy et al.'s conceptualization of risk aversion and psychological flexibility as related processes underlying maladaptive emotional functioning (Leahy et al., 2012). High risk aversion may prompt individuals to avoid uncertain experiences, whereas low psychological flexibility may make it difficult to tolerate the thoughts and emotions associated with uncertainty. In parenting, these processes may reinforce one another. A mother who fears uncertain outcomes and struggles to tolerate anxiety may impose excessive restrictions or respond rigidly to the child's behavior. Conversely, a psychologically flexible mother may experience concern without allowing it to dictate all parenting decisions. The simultaneous inclusion of both mediators in the present model therefore provides a more comprehensive explanation of how attachment styles influence authoritative parenting.

The finding that the model explained 40% of the variance in authoritative parenting indicates substantial explanatory power while also confirming that parenting is multiply determined. Attachment styles, psychological flexibility, and risk aversion represent important intrapersonal factors, but parenting is also affected by the child's temperament and behavior, marital quality, coparenting support, socioeconomic conditions, cultural expectations, parental mental health, and exposure to stress. Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that children's development is influenced by complex combinations of family risk and protective factors (Hendry et al., 2023). Similarly, marital conflict and relational distress can influence the emotional resources available for parenting, while interventions involving self-compassion and forgiveness may improve family functioning among women experiencing severe marital strain (Zaal & GhR, 2020). These contextual factors may account for additional variance not captured in the present model.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings support an integrated account of authoritative parenting in which maternal attachment orientations influence parenting through both direct relational patterns and indirect regulatory mechanisms. Secure attachment appears to promote authoritative parenting by supporting emotional availability, flexibility, and tolerance of uncertainty. Avoidant attachment appears to undermine authoritative parenting directly and through increased risk aversion, whereas ambivalent attachment affects parenting primarily through lower psychological flexibility and greater risk aversion. The results also reinforce the importance of moving beyond purely behavioral parent-training models. Teaching communication and discipline techniques may be insufficient when mothers' parenting responses are driven by attachment insecurity, experiential avoidance, or intense concern about uncertain outcomes. Interventions that address attachment representations, psychological flexibility, and realistic risk appraisal may therefore produce more durable improvements in authoritative parenting.

AFTJ Applied Family Therapy Journal
E-ISSN: 3041-8798

6. Limitations & Suggestions

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional correlational design did not permit firm causal conclusions regarding the direction of the relationships among attachment styles, psychological flexibility, risk aversion, and authoritative parenting. Second, all variables were assessed through mothers' self-report questionnaires, which may have increased common-method variance and introduced social desirability, recall, or response biases. Third, the sample consisted only of mothers of elementary school students in Shiraz, which limits the generalizability of the findings to fathers, parents of children in other developmental stages, families from rural regions, and populations with different cultural or socioeconomic characteristics. Fourth, the study did not incorporate reports from children, spouses, teachers, or independent observers. Finally, potentially important variables such as maternal psychopathology, parenting stress, child temperament, marital quality, family income, number of children, and coparenting support were not included in the structural model.

Future studies should use longitudinal and prospective designs to clarify the temporal ordering of the relationships and determine whether attachment styles predict later changes in psychological flexibility, risk aversion, and parenting practices. Experimental and intervention studies could examine whether increasing psychological flexibility or modifying maladaptive risk appraisals leads to measurable improvements in authoritative parenting. Researchers should also replicate the model among fathers, couples, single parents, parents of adolescents, and culturally diverse populations. Multi-informant and multimethod assessment is recommended, including child reports, partner ratings, teacher evaluations, clinical interviews, and direct observation of parent–child interactions. Future models could incorporate parenting stress, depression, anxiety, coparenting quality, marital attachment, child temperament, socioeconomic status, and perceived social support as additional predictors, mediators, or moderators. It would also be valuable to compare whether the indirect pathways differ according to the child's gender, age, behavioral difficulties, or developmental needs.

The findings suggest that parenting programs should address mothers' underlying emotional and cognitive processes in addition to teaching behavioral parenting skills. Counselors and family therapists should assess attachment insecurity, difficulty tolerating uncertainty, excessive concern about risk, and psychological inflexibility when mothers report problems with overcontrol, inconsistency, emotional withdrawal, or difficulty supporting their children's autonomy. Intervention programs may incorporate present-moment awareness, acceptance of difficult emotions, cognitive defusion, clarification of parenting values, and graduated practice in allowing age-appropriate independence. Attachment-informed sessions may help mothers recognize how fears of rejection, closeness, separation, or loss of control shape their responses to their children. Schools and community counseling centers can also provide parent education focused on distinguishing realistic safety concerns from excessive risk avoidance and on balancing warmth, monitoring, discipline, and autonomy support in everyday parent–child interactions.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

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