

Self-Critical Rumination and Parenting Stress: The Mediating Role of Mindful Parenting

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Background and objectives: although self-criticism and rumination are two maladaptive psychological processes with a negative effect on parenting, including parenting stress, the specific role of self-critical rumination (rumination focused on the content of self-critical thoughts) on parenting outcomes has never been explored. The aim of this study is to analyze the role of self-critical rumination on parenting stress and examine whether mindful parenting dimensions (listening with full attention, compassion for the child, non-judgmental acceptance of parental functioning, emotional awareness of the child, and self-regulation in parenting) mediate this association. The moderating role of child's age in the direct and indirect associations between self-critical rumination and parenting stress was also examined. Methods: the sample included 265 Portuguese mothers of children and adolescents aged between 1 and 18 years old from the general community who completed measures of self-critical rumination (Self-Critical Rumination Scale), mindful parenting (Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting Scale), and parenting stress (Parenting Stress Scale). Results: a moderated mediation model was conducted to test whether the association between self-critical rumination and parenting stress was mediated by mindful parenting dimensions and whether the direct and indirect effects were moderated by child's age. Self-critical rumination was negatively associated with all mindful parenting dimensions and positively associated with parenting stress. However, only non-judgmental acceptance of parental functioning and emotional awareness of the child dimensions were significant mediators of the relationship between self-critical rumination and parenting stress. The link between self-critical rumination and parenting stress not moderated by the child's age. Discussion and conclusion: this study provides a novel contribution to the study of parenting stress and mindful parenting by identifying an important maladaptive psychological process (i.e., self-critical rumination) that seems to explain individual differences in parenting and can be modified in therapy. At a clinical level, this study emphasizes the importance of helping mothers reduce self-critical rumination and develop a mindful and compassionate approach in parenting to decrease their parenting stress.