

Predicting Entitlement/Grandiosity Schema Based on Resilience and Emotional Intelligence in Children

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Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 12 Aug. 2025

Received in revised form 12
Nov. 2025

Accepted 14 Dec. 2025

Published online 01 Sep. 2026

Keywords:

Entitlement/Grandiosity
Schema,
Resilience,
Emotional Intelligence,
Elementary Students,
Early Maladaptive Schemas

ABSTRACT

Objective: Childhood serves as the foundation for the formation of deep cognitive patterns that determine an individual's developmental trajectory. The present study aimed to predict the Entitlement/Grandiosity schema based on the levels of resilience and emotional intelligence among elementary school students.

Methods: This study utilized a descriptive-correlational design with regression modeling. The statistical population consisted of all upper-primary school students in Tehran during the 2024-2025 academic year. A sample of 400 students was selected using multi-stage cluster sampling. Data were collected using the Young Schema Questionnaire for Children (YSQ-C), the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (Youth Version), and the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28). Data analysis was performed using Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis via SPSS-26.

Results: The results indicated a significant inverse relationship between emotional intelligence, resilience, and the entitlement schema ($p < 0.01$). Regression analysis revealed that these two variables collectively predicted 38% of the variance in the Entitlement/Grandiosity schema. Specifically, emotional intelligence ($\beta = -0.45$) and resilience ($\beta = -0.32$) were significant negative predictors of the target schema.

Conclusions: Based on the findings, deficits in adaptive capacities (resilience) and emotion management skills (emotional intelligence) are key factors in the formation of entitlement-based beliefs in children.

Cite this article: Kazeminejad, R., Azizi, G. & Haddadi, K. (2026). Predicting entitlement/grandiosity schema based on resilience and emotional intelligence in children. *Iranian Journal of Educational Research*, 5 (3), 1-10.

. DOI: <https://doi.org/>



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DOI: <https://doi.org/>

Publisher: University of Hormozgan.

Introduction

Childhood, as the most foundational stage of human development, is the context in which deep cognitive patterns that shape an individual's life course into adulthood are formed. One of the most challenging of these patterns is the Entitlement/Grandiosity schema, which is classified within the domain of Impaired Limits. Children who develop this schema come to believe that they are superior to others and deserving of special privileges; they do not see themselves as obligated to observe social rules or respect the boundaries of others, and they show marked weakness in controlling their own impulses. This excessive self-centeredness not only leads to social isolation and peer rejection in educational settings but has also been identified as a core feature of Cluster B personality disorders later in life. The persistence of this pattern traps the child in a cycle of endless demands and continual frustration, the treatment of which becomes far more difficult and costly in adulthood (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003; Loose, Graaf, Zarbock, & Holt, 2020).

In analyzing the developmental roots of this schema, the construct of resilience emerges as a critical variable. Resilience is more than simple endurance; it is the capacity for positive adaptation in the face of life's inevitable stresses and frustrations. In many cases, the entitlement schema is essentially a compensatory mechanism for a lack of inner resilience; that is, in order to conceal their sense of weakness and vulnerability, the child takes refuge in a display of power and false grandiosity. When resilience is low, the child lacks the capacity to tolerate being told "no" and to accept realistic limits, and this inability drives them toward consolidating entitlement-based beliefs in order to preserve their fragile psychological balance. Understanding the relationship between this inner adaptive strength and grandiosity patterns is therefore essential for preventing the development of personality pathology (Masten, 2014; Southwick & Charney, 2018; Naderi et al., 2022).

In addition to resilience, emotional intelligence, as a tool for recognizing, managing, and regulating emotions, plays a key role in curbing entitlement-oriented tendencies. High emotional intelligence allows a child to move beyond their immediate needs, empathize with others, and understand the impact of their own behavior on the feelings of those around them. Deficits in the components of emotional intelligence, particularly self-regulation and empathy, prevent a child from distinguishing between their personal wants and the rights of others. Studies show that children with poor emotional intelligence tend to respond to obstacles with entitled and grandiose behaviors

rather than problem-solving. In effect, emotional intelligence functions as a moderator that can prevent a natural desire from developing into a pathological and enduring schema (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008; Goleman, 2005; Zare et al., 2021).

The current state of societies and shifts in parenting styles (including overprotective or excessively permissive parenting) have given rise to a hidden crisis in the formation of children's personalities. We are today facing a generation that, due to weaknesses in resilience skills and emotional intelligence, is at serious risk of consolidating the entitlement schema. This crisis takes on even greater dimensions when we consider that these children, as future citizens, spouses, and parents, will lack the capacity necessary for democratic and empathetic interactions. Failure to predict and identify the factors influencing this schema at an early age means accepting the entry into society of individuals who, due to narcissism and a lack of resilience, will impose substantial psychological and social costs on the country's broader structures. Therefore, both scientific and ethical necessity call for the design and implementation of predictive models for the early identification of these vulnerabilities.

Material and Methods

The statistical population of the present study consisted of all elementary school students (upper primary: fourth, fifth, and sixth grades) in Tehran who were enrolled in public and non-profit schools across the 22 education districts of Tehran during the 2024–2025 academic year. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was used in this study. The sample selection process was as follows: first, from among the 20 education districts of Tehran (which are divided into five zones — North, South, East, West, and Central), one education district was randomly selected from each zone (five districts in total). Next, three schools (separated by gender) were randomly selected from each district, and finally, two classes from each school were selected as the final sampling unit, with all students in those classes completing the questionnaires. Based on Cochran's formula for populations of unlimited size (given the large student population of Tehran), a minimum sample size of 384 was estimated. However, to increase the internal validity of the study, enhance statistical power in the regression analyses, and account for the possibility of sample attrition or incomplete questionnaires, the final sample size was set at 400.

Research Instruments

1. Young Schema Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (YSQ-C)

This questionnaire was developed by Stallard (2005) based on Jeffrey Young's schema theory. The original version contains 114 items that assess 15 early maladaptive schemas. To specifically measure the Entitlement/Grandiosity schema, the subscale corresponding to this schema is used. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true of me to 4 = completely true of me). Stallard (2005) reported the reliability of this questionnaire, via Cronbach's alpha, as .78 for the entitlement subscale. In Iran, Yousefi (2015) confirmed the validity and reliability of this instrument and obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .91 for the questionnaire as a whole.

2. Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory: Youth Version (EQ-i:YV)

This instrument was developed by Bar-On and Parker (2000) to assess emotional intelligence in children and adolescents aged 7 to 18. The short form of this questionnaire contains 30 items that assess five main components (total emotional intelligence, intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, and stress management). Scoring is based on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = very seldom to 4 = very often). The developers of the instrument reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the different components ranging from .65 to .90. In studies conducted in Iran (e.g., Dehshiri, 2006), the reliability of this scale, via Cronbach's alpha, has been reported as .84 for the test as a whole, indicating a valid instrument for assessing children's emotional capacities.

3. Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28)

This scale was developed by Ungar and Liebenberg (2011) at the Resilience Research Centre (RRC). This instrument contains 28 items that assess resilience across three main domains: individual (personal skills, peers, self-efficacy), relationships with caregivers (family connections), and the context of spirituality, education, and culture. Responses to the items are made on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = a lot). Ungar and Liebenberg (2011) reported satisfactory construct validity and reliability for this instrument and obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .83. In Iran, Arefi et al. (2016) reported the reliability of this scale, using Cronbach's alpha, as .79, indicating adequate suitability for use with student populations.

Results

Table 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	M	SD
1. Entitlement Schema	180	24.50	4.20
2. Resilience	180	48.30	6.80
3. Emotional Intelligence	180	72.10	8.50

Table 2. Correlation matrix

Variable	3. Emotional Intelligence	2. Resilience	1. Entitlement Schema
1. Entitlement Schema			1.00
2. Resilience		1.00	-0.45**
3. Emotional Intelligence	1.00	0.58**	-0.32**

Note. ** $p < 0.01$

The results of the multiple regression analysis are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Regression Analysis for Predicting Resilience

Predictor	B	SE	Beta (β)	t	p
1. Constant	55.20	3.40	—	16.23	< 0.001
2. Entitlement Schema	-0.73	0.12	-0.45	-6.08	< 0.001
3. Emotional Intelligence	0.39	0.09	-0.32	4.33	< 0.001

Note. $R^2 = 0.38$, $F = 54.10$, $p < 0.001$

Analysis of the data collected from 400 elementary school students reveals a clear pattern of structural relationships among the variables. At the descriptive level, the mean entitlement schema scores among the children studied indicate the presence of traces of self-centeredness accompanied by moderate levels of emotional intelligence and resilience.

At the inferential level, the results of the Pearson correlation matrix indicate a strong, significant inverse relationship ($p < .01$) between adaptive capacities (emotional intelligence and resilience) and the Entitlement/Grandiosity schema. This means that the more capable a child is at recognizing and managing their own emotions, and the greater their capacity to recover from setbacks (resilience), the less inclined they are toward entitlement-based beliefs and disregard for individual-social boundaries.

The final results of the multiple regression analysis confirm that the combination of emotional intelligence and resilience are valid predictors for the early identification of schemas in the domain of Impaired Limits, with this model accounting for 38% of the variance in the entitlement schema. Among these, emotional intelligence, with a beta coefficient of -.45, plays a more decisive role in

negatively predicting this schema. In psychological terms, this finding suggests that strengthening emotional intelligence (particularly the empathy component) can act as a cognitive line of defense, preventing the formation of the early core of narcissistic and demanding personalities later in life. In summary, the statistical results show that deficits in resilience and emotional intelligence underlie the formation of false grandiosity in children.

Discussion

The present study was conducted with the aim of examining the predictive role of resilience and emotional intelligence in the formation of the Entitlement/Grandiosity schema in children. The findings of the regression analysis confirmed that 38% of the variance in the entitlement schema is explained by these two variables. This coefficient of determination indicates that nearly half of the underlying basis of grandiosity in children is rooted in their regulatory and adaptive skills.

In explaining the role of emotional intelligence, the findings showed that this construct is a strong, negative predictor of the entitlement schema. This result is consistent with the findings of Zare et al. (2023) and Fathi et al. (2024), who argue that deficits in emotion management form the early core of schemas in the domain of Impaired Limits. From a theoretical perspective, Goleman (2005) proposes that emotional intelligence is a tool for "self-restraint." A child with low emotional intelligence has a deficiency in the empathy component; consequently, they cannot accept others' perspectives and perceive themselves as the center of the world. As Sadeghi et al. (2025) have noted, in children with externalizing disorders, poor emotional intelligence causes entitlement impulses to be translated into behavior without moral and social filters. Indeed, high emotional intelligence, by strengthening self-awareness, helps a child distinguish between genuine needs and false demands.

Regarding the resilience variable, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of Naderi et al. (2024) and Rezaei et al. (2022). These researchers argue that resilience, as a mediating variable, moderates the effect of maladaptive parenting styles on the entitlement schema. The findings of the present study showed that low resilience leaves a child vulnerable to setbacks and drives them toward overcompensation. According to Masten (2014), when the "ordinary magic" of resilience fails to develop in a child, they are unable to tolerate the harsh realities of life (such as not being superior to others). As a result, in order to preserve their fragile self-esteem, they take

refuge in the entitlement schema, masking the deficit in inner resilience with false external authority. This finding is also consistent with the results of Akbari et al. (2021), who showed that academic and personal resilience serve as a serious barrier against the formation of self-centered patterns in students.

Overall, this study demonstrated that the entitlement schema is not merely a personality trait but rather an internal developmental failure. In the final analysis, it can be said that children move toward grandiosity when they, on the one hand, lack the ability to understand others' suffering (low emotional intelligence), and on the other hand, cannot tolerate even the smallest frustration (low resilience). This combination drives the personality toward a fragile pattern of entitlement, in which the individual, in order to escape feelings of inferiority, resorts to belittling others and engaging in excessive demandingness.

This study was conducted using a cross-sectional design; therefore, it is recommended that future research employ causal-comparative or longitudinal designs to more precisely examine the developmental trajectory of this schema from childhood to adolescence.

It is also recommended that school counselors, by developing emotional intelligence training protocols — particularly aimed at strengthening empathy — work to prevent the consolidation of schemas in the domain of Impaired Limits.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

This study did not receive any financial support from governmental, private, or nonprofit organizations.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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