

From Family to School: Dual Protection from Fathers and Teachers for Children's Mental Health

Ellen Prima

UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto

Corresponding Author:

ellen.psi06@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Mental health in children is a critical issue that requires specialized attention, particularly during the preschool years. This study investigates the negative impact of maternal authoritarian parenting on the social-emotional development of preschoolers, specifically examining the mediating role of emotion regulation and the moderating effects of father-child and teacher-child relationships. Involving 412 preschoolers from kindergartens in Purwokerto, along with their parents and teachers, the research utilized a longitudinal design with a six-month interval. Data were analyzed using Polynomial Curved Surface Fitting (PCSF) to validate a double moderative mediation model. The results indicate that maternal authoritarian parenting significantly reduces children's emotion regulation ($\beta = -.211, p < .001$), which in turn correlates with mental health issues ($r = -.175, p < .01$). However, positive relationships with fathers ($\beta = .163, p < .05$) and teachers ($\beta = .145, p < .001$) act as synergistic protective factors that buffer these adverse effects. These findings offer strategic implications for educational interventions and policies aimed at safeguarding early childhood psychological well-being.

Keywords : Authoritarian Parenting, Emotion Regulation, Father-Child Relationship, Teacher-Child Relationship, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

The mental health of preschool children is a complex issue that has required special attention in recent decades (Barican et al., 2022). Data shows that one in six children is at risk of experiencing mental health disorders, which significantly impact achievement, learning motivation, character development, and the emergence of risky behaviors (Buchweitz et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024). This problem not only disrupts cognitive aspects but also disrupts children's holistic social-emotional development (Nilfyr & Ewe, 2025). Given that the preschool period is a critical stage for the maturation of emotional regulation as children begin to face social challenges in the kindergarten environment, a thorough understanding of mental health protection mechanisms is a crucial preventive measure (Thümmler et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that parental emotional support, family stability, and positive interactions at school are key factors in preventing mental disorders (Ginzburg et al., 2023; Iskandar, 2024). However, most studies still examine family and school factors separately (K. Liu et al., 2026). Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and the Cumulative Effects Theory, child development is shaped by the interaction of various interrelated systems (Ferreira et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to integrate the role of

maternal authoritarian parenting, child emotion regulation, and father-child and teacher-child relationships into a single, multiple-moderated mediation model. Through the method Polynomial Curved Surface Fitting (PCSF), this study provides a more comprehensive analysis of the complex interaction mechanisms at multiple levels (Hamilton, 2024).

Building upon the theoretical foundation outlined above, the subsequent discussion emphasizes that the integration of maternal authoritarian parenting, child emotional regulation, and father-child and teacher-child relationships within a multiple-moderated mediation framework not only advances empirical understanding but also offers practical implications for early childhood education and family interventions (Olowe et al., 2025). By employing Polynomial Curved Surface Fitting (PCSF), the study captures the nuanced, non-linear dynamics among these variables, illustrating how protective relational factors can buffer the detrimental effects of rigid parenting styles on children's psychological outcomes (Alcon et al., 2024a). This comprehensive approach highlights the compensatory and cumulative roles of supportive relationships, suggesting that even when maternal authoritarian tendencies are present, strong father-child bonds and positive teacher interactions can mitigate risks and foster resilience (Olowe et al., 2025). Consequently, the findings underscore the importance of designing holistic prevention programs that simultaneously target family and school systems, thereby reinforcing Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective and extending the Cumulative Effects Theory into applied contexts of child mental health.

Nevertheless, the theoretical connection between emotional intelligence and academic stress has not yet been sufficiently established in prior studies. Drawing on the Transactional Stress Model, stress arises from the interaction between environmental demands and individual coping resources, with emotional intelligence serving as a crucial mechanism for regulating emotions and appraising stressors (Yiwen et al., 2026). Furthermore, the Broaden-and-Build Theory emphasizes that positive emotions foster resilience and broaden cognitive resources, suggesting that emotional intelligence can act as a protective factor against academic stress (Abdelrahman et al., 2025). Incorporating these frameworks strengthens the conceptual foundation of this study and clarifies the mechanisms linking emotional intelligence to children's mental health outcomes.

The main focus of this study is the impact of maternal authoritarian parenting, characterized by high demands but low responsiveness (Waseem, 2024). Although parents intend to discipline their children, absolute control and physical and emotional punishment actually increase the risk of depression and anxiety in children (Faizal, 2025). This pressure hinders children's creativity and emotional regulation abilities due to the critical environment (Nyoni, 2024a). Emotional regulation skills are vital for developmental skills problem solving and the child's socialization in the future. In this context, the father's role is present as a support (buffer) through positive parenting, sensitivity, and emotional involvement to compensate for the lack of support from the mother (Vassilopoulou et al., 2023). This section underscores that maternal authoritarian parenting—marked by high demands but low responsiveness—creates a rigid environment that undermines children's emotional growth. While intended as discipline, practices such as absolute control and punitive measures elevate risks of anxiety and depression, stifling creativity and weakening emotional regulation (Khosla & Sharma,

2024). Since emotional regulation is a cornerstone for problem-solving and social adaptation, its disruption has long-term developmental consequences (Mugenyi et al., 2025). Within this dynamic, the father's role emerges as a compensatory buffer, where sensitivity, warmth, and emotional involvement counterbalance maternal rigidity. Positive father-child interactions provide models of healthy emotional expression, fostering resilience and mitigating the harmful effects of authoritarian maternal practices (Nyoni, 2024b). This duality highlights the importance of examining parenting not in isolation but as an interplay of relational systems, reinforcing the ecological perspective that children's mental health is shaped by multiple, interconnected influences.

Beyond the home, teachers at school also play a unique role through the dimensions of closeness, conflict management, and dependency (Duan et al., 2024). Teachers play a role in addressing mental health issues experienced by children at home through discussion sessions, personal space between teachers and children, and during children's academic activities at school (Kletečki et al., 2023). Repeated interactions between teachers and children foster emotional and physical closeness, as well as warmth, which supports children's self- and emotional development. Therefore, an optimal teacher-child relationship can positively impact children's emotional regulation skills and mental health. Child development is jointly shaped by the roles of family and teachers at school. Repeated interactions significantly influence a child's psychological and social adjustment. Previous research has found that family and school relationships form a synergy that protects children's mental health. This study aims to combine studies of maternal authoritarian parenting, children's emotional regulation, fathers' roles, and teachers' influence on children's mental health.

This paragraph highlights how the teacher-child relationship functions as a crucial extension of the family system in shaping preschoolers' mental health (Rucinski et al., 2018). Teachers provide emotional closeness, manage conflict, and create spaces of trust that allow children to express themselves beyond the home environment (Smith et al., 2025). Through repeated daily interactions—whether in academic activities, informal discussions, or moments of personal support—teachers foster warmth and stability that strengthen children's emotional regulation and resilience. Importantly, these relationships do not operate in isolation; rather, they synergize with family dynamics, reinforcing the protective effects of positive father-child involvement and buffering against the risks of maternal authoritarian parenting (Olowe et al., 2025). By integrating these dimensions into a single framework, this study advances the understanding of how family and school systems jointly contribute to children's psychological adjustment, offering a comprehensive ecological perspective that aligns with Bronfenbrenner's theory and cumulative effects models. To enable more concrete analysis, this study uses the Potential Source Contribution Function (PCSF) with the following proposed hypotheses:

- H1: Mother's authoritative parenting has a positive effect on children's mental health.
- H2: Children's emotional regulation ability mediates the relationship between maternal authoritarian parenting and children's mental health problems.
- H3: The father-child relationship moderates the relationship between the mother's authoritarian parenting style and the child's emotional regulation ability.

H4: The teacher-child relationship moderates the relationship between children's emotional regulation abilities and children's mental health problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maternal Authoritarian Parenting and Children's Mental Health

Authoritarian parenting is characterized by high levels of control, rigid demands for obedience, and low levels of emotional warmth and support (Waseem, 2024). In the context of Chinese families, although parental control is often interpreted as a form of care (*chiao shun*), excessive controlling practices still risk inhibiting children's autonomy (Han & Yan, 2025). Children's inability to express themselves under strict maternal control can trigger psychological distress that develops into mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Będziechowska-Czyżewska et al., 2025; Thümmler et al., 2022).

The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation

Emotional regulation is an internal process that allows children to monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional reactions. According to the family influence model, the parenting environment significantly influences how children learn to manage their emotions. Authoritarian parenting, which restricts children's emotional expression, disrupts the development of emotional regulation (Waseem, 2024). When children fail to develop adaptive regulatory strategies, they become more vulnerable to mental health disorders when faced with environmental stressors (Bonete et al., 2023). Therefore, emotional regulation is thought to be an internal mechanism that mediates the influence of parenting styles on children's psychological well-being.

The Moderating Role of Father-Child Relationship

Resilience theory shows that the presence of protective factors can neutralize the impact of risk factors in the family (Y. Liu et al., 2022). Even if the mother applies an authoritarian parenting style, a high-quality father-child relationship can serve as emotional compensation (Masuda et al., 2025). Supportive and warm fathers provide space for children to learn emotion regulation strategies that they do not receive from their mothers (Chaq, 2024; Levinson et al., 2017). This emotional involvement of fathers creates a safe environment for children, thereby weakening the negative impact of maternal authoritarianism on children's emotion regulation (Che et al., 2025).

The Moderating Role of Teacher-Child Relationship

Besides the home environment, school is an important microsystem in child development. Based on attachment, teachers can be secondary attachment figures who provide a "secure base" for children (Chen et al., 2021). High-quality teacher-child relationships, characterized by warmth and openness, enable children to feel emotionally supported in the school environment (Iskandar, 2024). This support is particularly crucial for children with low emotional regulation skills, as supportive teachers can help mitigate the risk of developing mental health problems (Thümmler et al., 2022; Zhong, 2024). Conversely, poor teacher-

child relationships can exacerbate the cumulative impact of children's emotional vulnerability (Zadorozhny et al., 2025).

METHODS

1. Sampling

This study employed a multi-stage cluster sampling technique involving preschoolers, parents, and teachers from three diverse kindergartens in Purwokerto, Central Java, as the primary unit of analysis. The selection of these institutions aimed to capture a broad socio-economic spectrum, thereby enhancing the external validity of the findings across urban Javanese contexts. In the initial data collection phase (T1), 423 valid responses were obtained. However, 11 participants did not participate in the second phase (T2) due to relocation, health issues, or other factors; these were categorized as missing data. To ensure that the attrition did not bias the results, a Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test was conducted. The results confirmed that the missingness was distributed randomly ($\chi^2 = 47.240$; $df = 37$; $p = .121$), supporting the robustness of the longitudinal sample (Enders, 2022). After the cleaning process, the final sample consisted of 412 consistent dyads/triads. The respondent profile included children with an average age of 56.172 months ($SD = 8.026$), comprising 180 girls and 232 boys. To control for potential demographic influences, the child's age and gender, along with the parents' educational background, were included as control variables, further strengthening the generalizability and internal consistency of the model.

2. Data collection

The data collection process was conducted through a longitudinal design in two phases with a six-month interval using structured questionnaires. In the first phase (May 2022/T1), mothers completed a questionnaire on parenting styles, while fathers completed a parent-child relationship scale. In the second phase (December 2022/T2), mothers completed an assessment of their children's emotional regulation. Concurrently, school teachers assessed their children's teacher-child relationships and mental health using a strengths and difficulties questionnaire. To maintain data integrity, cases with too short response times were excluded from the analysis.

3. Measures

This study used a series of validated instruments adapted into a Mandarin version. Maternal authoritarian parenting style was measured using the 11-item Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) (Robinson et al., 2001). This instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "never" to 5 = "always"), where higher scores reflect stronger levels of authoritarian parenting ($\alpha = .793$). The child's emotional regulation ability was assessed by the mother using the Emotion Regulation Checklist which consists of 21 items with a 4-point scale ($\alpha = .857$). The father-child relationship was evaluated using the 30-item Parent-Child Relationship Scale, focusing on the dimensions of closeness and conflict, which were assessed on a 5-point scale ($\alpha = .785$). Meanwhile, the teacher-child relationship was measured using the Teacher Child Relationship Scale (STRS) which includes 28 items to assess aspects of closeness, conflict, and dependency ($\alpha = .757$). Finally, children's mental health was assessed by teachers using the preschool version of

the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which consists of 20 items with a 3-point scale ($\alpha = .820$). All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22.0 software for descriptive statistics and correlations, SPSS PROCESS 4.0 for mediation and moderation tests, and Matlab 2024a for visualization of multiple moderation effects in three-dimensional plots. Prior to the analysis, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and independence were met with a value of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) below 2, which indicates the absence of multicollinearity.

RESULTS

Linearity Test

Based on the results of the significant Pearson correlation, it can be assumed that the relationships between variables are linear. The relationship between the mother's authoritarian parenting style and the regulation of children's emotions showed a negative linear ($r = -0.208$). The relationship between emotion regulation and mental health problems showed a negative linear ($r = -0.175$). Because the $p < 0.05$ in the correlation test, there is a negative linear model between authoritarian parenting and emotion regulation, as well as between emotion regulation and children's mental health problems.

Normality Test

In addition to linearity, normality tests are also considered to ensure that the distribution of data accurately represents the population. Although Pearson correlations have a certain resistance to small deviations, the distribution of data in this study has been examined to minimize the impact of outliers that can distort the correlation coefficient. The fulfillment of these assumptions of normality and linearity provides a strong foundation for interpreting the relationships between variables in a valid and objective manner.

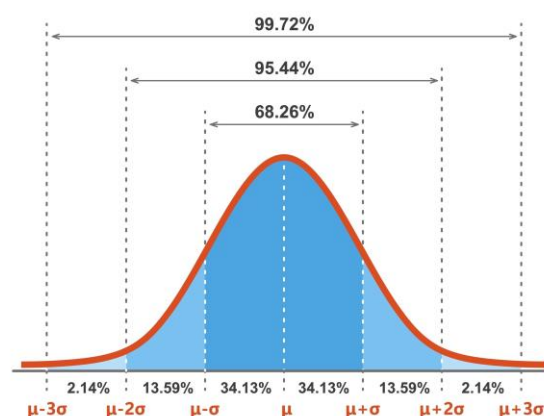


Figure 1. Normality Test

Effect Size

Regarding the strength of the relationship between variables, effect size analysis was carried out by referring to the criteria of Cohen (1988). The results showed that the correlation between authoritarian parenting and emotion regulation ($r = -0.208$) and the relationship between emotion regulation and mental health ($r = -0.175$) were in the category of small

effect size. This indicates that although the relationship is statistically real, they account for only a small fraction of the total variance (4.3% and 3.0%, respectively), so there are still other external factors that affect the child's psychological state.

Common Method Bias Test and Descriptive Statistics

Before testing the hypothesis, this study evaluated the potential Common Method Bias (CMB) using Harman's Single Factor Test as suggested in the latest methodological literature. The results of the factor analysis showed that there were 26 factors with values own greater than 1. The main factor only explains 13.357% of the total variance, meaning that no single factor explains the majority of the covariance between variables (Tehseen et al., 2017). Thus, it can be concluded that common method bias is not a significant problem in this study.

Pearson correlation results showed a significant relationship between the main variables. Maternal authoritarian parenting was found to be significantly negatively correlated with children's emotional regulation abilities ($r = -.208$; $p < .01$) and is positively correlated with children's mental health problems ($r = .097$; $p < .05$). In addition, children's emotional regulation was significantly negatively correlated with mental health problems ($r = -.175$; $p < .01$).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix and Descriptive Statistics

NO	Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1	Maternal Authoritarian	2.14	0.58	-				
2	Emotion Regulation	3.12	0.45	-.208**	-			
3	Father-Child Relationship	3.85	0.62	-.154*	.245**	-		
4	Teacher-Child Relationship	4.02	0.55	-.082	.198*	.112	-	
5	Mental Health Problems	1.85	0.42	.097*	-.175**	-.132*	-.214**	-

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Mediation and Moderation Analysis

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the SPSS PROCESS macro with a bootstrap procedure of 5000 samples. Child age and gender were included as control variables. Initial analysis using Model 4 showed that maternal authoritarian parenting significantly predicted low child emotional regulation abilities ($\beta = -.211$; $p < .001$). Meanwhile, children's mental health is significantly predicted by their emotional regulation abilities ($\beta = -.165$; $p < 0.01$), but is not directly predicted by the mother's authoritarian parenting style ($\beta = .069$; $p > .05$). This indicates that children's emotional regulation acts as a full mediator in the relationship

between maternal authoritarian parenting and children's mental health (95% CI [0.012; 0.065]).

Furthermore, testing the moderating role of father-child relationships using Model 7 showed a significant interaction effect ($\beta = .163$; $p < .05$). Simple slope analysis showed that in the group with low father-child relationship quality, maternal authoritarian parenting had a strong negative effect on emotional regulation ($\beta = -.167$; $t = -2.974$; $p < .01$). On the other hand, in the group with a high father-child relationship, the negative influence became insignificant ($\beta = -.016$; $t = .218$; $p > 0.05$). The Johnson-Neyman technique confirms that the protective effect of fatherhood begins to be significant when relationship quality falls below the standard value of -0.086.

Double Moderated Mediation Model

Analysis using Model 14 shows that the teacher-child relationship also acts as a moderator between emotional regulation and children's mental health ($\beta = .145$; $p < .001$). In the group with low teacher-child relationships, emotional regulation significantly predicted mental health problems ($\beta = -3,116$; $t = -4,916$; $p < .001$), whereas at high correlations, the effect is no longer significant ($\beta = .448$; $t = 0.710$; $p > .05$). The results of the Johnson-Neyman technique show that the significance area is at a teacher-child relationship value < 2.776 .

Finally, testing using Model 21 confirmed the existence of a double moderated mediation model. The father-child relationship mitigated the impact of maternal parenting on emotion regulation, while the teacher-child relationship mitigated the impact of emotion regulation on mental health.

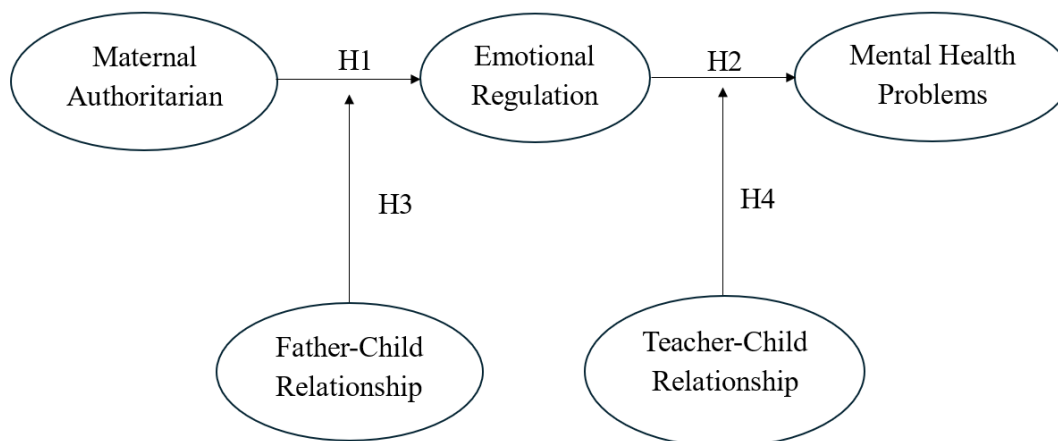


Figure 2. The finalized double moderated mediation model.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate the complex mechanisms behind the association between maternal authoritarian parenting and preschool-aged children's mental health problems, focusing on the mediating role of emotion regulation and the dual moderating roles of father-child and teacher-child relationships. Our findings make an important contribution to the child development literature by highlighting how a supportive ecosystem (fathers and teachers) can mitigate the negative impact of risky parenting.

The Influence of Maternal Authoritarian Parenting on Mental Health

The results of this study indicate that maternal authoritarian parenting does not have a significant direct impact on children's mental health problems. This is interesting because it contrasts with some findings in Western cultures. In the Chinese cultural context, mothers are often the primary caregivers with intense daily interactions, making their role crucial for children's emotional development (Han & Yan, 2025). This stable closeness may make preschool-aged children more likely to adapt and comply to maintain harmony with their mothers, even if the mother adopts an authoritarian style (Bonete et al., 2023).

In addition, the cultural interpretation in China views parental control as a form of affection (*chiao shun*) can reduce children's negative perceptions of maternal authoritarianism (Han & Yan, 2025). However, this does not mean that authoritarian parenting is safe; excessive control still carries the risk of causing emotional distress in children (Będziechowska-Czyżewska et al., 2025), which can develop into more complex mental health problems such as anxiety and depression as children enter adolescence (Thümmeler et al., 2022).

Building on these findings, the next discussion emphasizes that the interaction between maternal authoritarian parenting and broader relational contexts is crucial for understanding children's mental health trajectories. Although preschoolers in Chinese families may temporarily adapt to maternal control due to cultural interpretations of discipline as care, this adaptation is fragile and highly dependent on the presence of other supportive relationships (Cui et al., 2026). Research shows that father involvement—through warmth, sensitivity, and emotional engagement—can buffer the negative effects of maternal authoritarianism, fostering resilience and emotional regulation (Puglisi et al., 2024). Similarly, teacher-child closeness in early education settings provides an additional protective layer, as repeated positive interactions promote self-regulation and reduce the risk of internalizing problems (Duan et al., 2024). Taken together, these findings highlight that children's psychological adjustment is not determined by maternal parenting alone but by the synergy of family and school systems, reinforcing Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective and the cumulative effects theory.

The Mediating Role of Emotional Regulation Ability

This study found that children's emotional regulation abilities functioned as a full mediator. These results are consistent with Morris's tripartite model of family influences, which emphasizes that the family environment influences mental health through children's emotional development. Authoritarian parenting, characterized by high control and low warmth, limits children's ability to express and manage their emotions independently. Failure to develop these emotional regulation skills is a key pathway for the emergence of psychological disorders (Waseem, 2024).

Expanding on the mediating role of emotional regulation, this study demonstrates that children's ability to manage emotions serves as the critical pathway linking parenting practices to mental health outcomes. When maternal authoritarian parenting restricts autonomy and emotional expression, children fail to develop adaptive regulation strategies, which in turn increases vulnerability to psychological disorders. This finding aligns with

Morris's tripartite model, reinforcing that the family environment shapes mental health indirectly through emotional development. Moreover, recent evidence shows that poor emotional regulation mediates the relationship between harsh parenting and internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression (Alcon et al., 2024b). Conversely, supportive father involvement and positive teacher-child relationships can strengthen regulation skills, thereby buffering against risks associated with maternal rigidity (Cui et al., 2026; Ping et al., 2023). These insights highlight that interventions should prioritize enhancing children's emotional regulation capacities as a preventive strategy, while simultaneously addressing parenting styles and relational contexts across home and school.

The Moderating Role of Father-Child and Teacher-Child Relationships

One of the most striking findings in this study was the effectiveness of father-child and teacher-child relationships as protective factors. First, the quality of the father-child relationship moderates the influence of maternal parenting on children's emotion regulation. When the father-child relationship is high-quality, the negative impact of authoritarian mothers is insignificant. This supports the resilience compensation theory, where a warm relationship with one parent can offset the shortcomings of the relationship with the other parent (Y. Liu et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2025). Supportive fathers serve as emotional coaches and role models for children in emotion regulation strategies (Chaq, 2024; Levinson et al., 2017) In China, shifting the father's role to an emotional support figure has been shown to be effective in preventing the negative impact of maternal parenting (Che et al., 2025).

The moderating role of father-child and teacher-child relationships underscores the importance of relational buffers in protecting children's mental health. When fathers engage in sensitive, emotionally supportive interactions, they provide children with models of adaptive regulation and compensate for maternal authoritarian tendencies. This aligns with the resilience compensation theory, which posits that a strong bond with one caregiver can offset risks posed by another. Similarly, teacher-child closeness in early education settings offers an external protective layer, where warmth and consistent support foster emotional regulation and reduce internalizing problems. Together, these findings highlight that children's psychological adjustment is shaped not only by maternal parenting but by the synergy of multiple relational systems, reinforcing ecological and cumulative perspectives on development.

And the teacher-child relationship moderates the relationship between emotion regulation and mental health. In accordance with attachment theory, supportive relationships with teachers at school provide a "safe space" for children to express themselves socially and emotionally (Chen et al., 2021; Iskandar, 2024). Good relationships with teachers serve as a protective factor that enhances children's psychological adjustment, especially for those with poor emotional regulation (Thümmeler et al., 2022; Zhong, 2024).

Compensation Effect and Cumulative Effect

This research confirms the existence of two protective mechanisms: compensatory effects and cumulative effects. The compensatory effect suggests that a single positive relationship (either at home or at school) can mitigate risk. Meanwhile, the cumulative effect (Model 21)

suggests that when support from fathers and teachers is present simultaneously, children's emotion regulation and mental health are additively strengthened (Nilfyr & Ewe, 2025). These findings expand theoretical understanding that protective mechanisms can operate across environments (family and school). The identification of both compensatory effects and cumulative effects in this study provides a deeper theoretical contribution to understanding protective mechanisms in child development (Cimino et al., 2024). The compensatory pathway illustrates that even a single high-quality relationship—whether with a father or a teacher can neutralize the risks of maternal authoritarian parenting, consistent with resilience models that emphasize the buffering role of supportive figures.

In contrast, the cumulative pathway demonstrates that when multiple protective relationships are present simultaneously, their benefits are additive and synergistic, leading to stronger emotional regulation and improved mental health outcomes. This dual mechanism highlights that children's resilience is not only dependent on isolated protective factors but also on the integration of family and school systems, reinforcing Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and extending cumulative effects theory into applied contexts of early childhood mental health (Yiwen et al., 2026).

Managerial and Practical Implications

Practically, these results emphasize the importance of family interventions that focus not only on mothers but also on increasing father involvement. Parents need to realize that building a warm environment is far more effective than authoritarian control. In schools, teachers should be trained to build strong emotional bonds with students, as these relationships have been shown to act as a safety net for children at risk due to their home environment. The managerial and practical implications of these findings highlight the need for multi-level interventions that address both family and school contexts (Wang et al., 2026). At the family level, programs should encourage fathers to take on active, emotionally supportive roles, complementing maternal caregiving and reducing the risks associated with authoritarian practices.

Parenting workshops can emphasize that warmth, responsiveness, and emotional coaching are more effective than rigid control in fostering resilience and emotional regulation. At the school level, teacher training should prioritize building strong emotional bonds with students, equipping educators with strategies to create safe, nurturing classroom environments (Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025). Such relational investments act as protective buffers, ensuring that children at risk due to home stressors still have access to supportive figures who can guide their emotional development. By integrating family and school interventions, policymakers and practitioners can establish a comprehensive safety net that strengthens children's mental health and prepares them for long-term social and academic success.

Limitations And Future Suggestions

A key limitation of this study lies in its cultural specificity, as the findings are drawn from preschoolers in the Chinese and Javanese context, where authoritarian parenting may be interpreted differently than in Western cultures, thus limiting generalizability. Additionally, the reliance on self-report questionnaires from parents and teachers introduces potential bias,

while the relatively small effect sizes suggest that other unmeasured factors such as peer relationships or community support may also play significant roles. The study's focus on maternal authoritarian parenting leaves other styles underexplored, and the cross-sectional measurement of father-child and teacher-child relationships may not fully capture their dynamic changes over time.

Future research should therefore adopt cross-cultural comparative designs, extend longitudinal tracking of family and school relationships, and incorporate broader ecological systems such as peers and community influences. Moreover, intervention-based studies could test the effectiveness of programs aimed at strengthening emotional regulation skills, while integrating neurobiological measures would provide more objective evidence beyond self-report data. Together, these directions would enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of how family and school systems jointly safeguard children's mental health.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of preschool children's mental health by demonstrating that maternal authoritarian parenting exerts its influence indirectly through children's emotional regulation, and that father-child and teacher-child relationships serve as significant protective moderators. The findings confirm the presence of both compensatory and cumulative effects, showing that a single supportive relationship can offset risks, while multiple supportive relationships can synergistically strengthen resilience. However, these conclusions must be interpreted proportionally. The cultural specificity of the sample, reliance on self-report measures, and relatively small effect sizes limit the generalizability of the results. Moreover, the focus on maternal authoritarian parenting leaves other styles underexplored, and the dynamic evolution of father-child and teacher-child relationships was not fully captured.

Despite these limitations, the study advances theoretical perspectives by integrating family and school systems within a multiple moderated mediation framework, reinforcing Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and extending cumulative effects theory into applied contexts. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of interventions that enhance children's emotional regulation skills while simultaneously strengthening father involvement and teacher-child relationships. Future research should broaden the scope to diverse cultural contexts, employ longitudinal and intervention-based designs, and incorporate objective measures of emotional regulation to refine and validate these pathways. By acknowledging its constraints, this study offers a balanced conclusion: supportive relationships across family and school environments are essential buffers that can mitigate the risks of maternal authoritarian parenting and foster healthier developmental outcomes.

As a suggestion for future research, the use of longitudinal methods to monitor children's emotional development from preschool through adolescence is highly recommended to validate the causal relationships in this model. Future researchers are also encouraged to incorporate direct observation techniques to minimize self-report bias. For the general reader, these results emphasize the importance of synergy between home and school; paternal emotional involvement and teacher support have been shown to be effective practical strategies in protecting children's mental health from the risks of authoritarian parenting.

Finally, the statistical outcomes indicate relatively small effect sizes, suggesting that maternal authoritarian parenting and emotional regulation explain only a modest proportion of variance in children's mental health. This implies that other ecological factors—such as peer relationships, socioeconomic stressors, and community support—may also play significant roles in shaping resilience. Additionally, the study's focus on maternal authoritarian parenting leaves other styles (authoritative, permissive, neglectful) underexplored. Future studies should broaden the scope to include these parenting styles and integrate objective measures, such as physiological indicators of emotional regulation, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of child development pathways.

LIMITATION

First, the cultural specificity of this study presents a notable limitation. The findings are derived from preschoolers in Chinese and Javanese contexts, where authoritarian parenting may be interpreted as care or responsibility rather than purely negative control. This cultural lens restricts the generalizability of the results to other settings, particularly Western cultures where authoritarian parenting is often associated with harsher outcomes. Future research should therefore adopt cross-cultural comparative designs to clarify whether compensatory and cumulative protective mechanisms operate universally across diverse cultural environments.

Second, methodological constraints must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-report questionnaires from parents and teachers introduces potential bias, as responses may reflect social desirability rather than actual behaviors. Moreover, the measurement of father-child and teacher-child relationships was cross-sectional, limiting the ability to capture dynamic changes in relational quality over time. These issues reduce the precision of the findings and highlight the need for longitudinal tracking and multi-informant approaches that combine parent, teacher, and child perspectives to strengthen validity.

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