Emotional Regulation Ability in Early Childhood: Role of Coparenting and Mindful Parenting

Mafaza¹*, Septi Mayang Sarry²
Universitas Andalas, Padang, Indonesia
¹mafaza@med.unand.ac.id, ²septimayangsari.mp2@gmail.com
*Correspondence

Abstract
Most of the demands and tasks necessary during the development of early childhood center around children’s emotional regulation ability. At this time, parents have an important role in socializing the emotional development to children during parenting practices. This study aimed to determine the role of mindful parenting and coparenting competence simultaneously towards emotional regulation ability in early childhood. 370 parents of children in early childhood participated in this study (173 fathers and 197 mothers) chosen using a purposive sampling method. Parents completed the emotional regulation skill questionnaire, Bangor mindful parenting scale, and coparenting competence scale. The results of multiple linear regression analysis indicated that mindful parenting and coparenting competence have a significant role in predicting children’s emotional regulation competence simultaneously (R² = 0.121, F (2,369) = 23.01, p < .001). This indicates that improving children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood is related to the children’s internal factors and the ability of parents to carry out parenting practices and form a good family emotional climate.

INTRODUCTION
Children in early childhood are children over two years old to six years old (Berk, 2018). This period becomes one of the most critical and very important developmental periods in the individual’s life (Naudeau et al., 2011). This is related to the magnitude of the influence of early childhood development in adolescence and adulthood, where the child’s experience at this time will have a long-term impact. Suppose the tasks and demands of development are not achieved or not maximal. In that case, it will have an impact on academic achievement (Gayden-Hence, 2016), behavioral disorders and potential for criminality (García et al., 2019), health conditions (Moore, 2006), jobs and careers (Masten et al., 2010), and the formation of character and personality (Gilbert et al., 2019) in the future.

Demands and developmental tasks in early childhood are adjusted to the increase in the social environment and stimulation children receive (Brooks, 2013). This includes the ability to regulate emotions, communicate and follow learning, and establish friendships (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000). Furthermore, the
national standard of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) contained in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 137 of 2014 also states that children in early childhood have achievements related to socio-emotional, cognitive, religious and moral abilities, language, motor, and art.

Most of these children’s development tasks in early childhood appear to be closely related to the ability to regulate emotions, especially when interacting and entering new social relationships, which are more complex (Perry & Calkins, 2018). Emotional regulation is an individual's ability to identify, control, and manage his or her emotions, including understanding the exact circumstances, times, and ways to feel and express and express the emotions (Gross, 2015). The emotions they feel (such as happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, and anger) have an important function in assessing the environment, performing motor control, making decisions, giving clues about the intentions of others, and ultimately being able to direct their thoughts and actions (Sukatin et al., 2020).

By regulating emotions, there will be changes in the dynamics of the response and consequences of these emotions in the form of behavior and physiology (intensity and duration) by involving a series of cognitive processes, such as attention, interpretation, and evaluation (Sabatier et al., 2017). Individuals can reduce, strengthen, and maintain the positive or negative emotions they experience depending on their goals and needs (Gross, 2002). For example, suppose the child is angry when his toys are taken away by his friend. In that case, he will respond to the situation in different ways and strategies depending on his emotional regulation ability. He could have reclaimed, shouted, cried, stopped playing or even continued playing regardless of his friends.

Children who can regulate emotions adaptively will have more positive relationships with peers, better achieve in academic fields, and better able to adjust to the social environment and also to the school (Herndon et al., 2013), and have a positive character and personality (Zhang, 2019), so the risk of behavior problems will be reduced (Woltering & Shi, 2016). In line with the ability to regulate emotions, children will also be able to regulate their behavior, center their concentration, share, empathize, wait their turn, and no longer rely entirely on adults (Widiastuti, 2017). In contrast, maladaptive emotion regulation will have an impact on various aspects of a child's life, such as emotional and mental disorders (Braet et al., 2014), excessive feelings of shame, lack of confidence, aggressive behavior, and antisocial (Mullin & Hinshaw, 2007).

The development of the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood is very closely related to the closest figures in the family environment. Most experts argue that the main factor is the family, especially parents (Zhang, 2019). In the early days of life, the child's interaction with parents becomes a process of external emotional regulation. Over time, the child will be able to develop the regulation of these emotions independently. The family, especially parents, can affect a child's emotional regulation ability through three mechanisms, namely 1) observation through modeling, 2) parenting
practices, and 3) family emotional climates, such as parenting style, attachment, and relationships within the family (Morris et al., 2007).

Previous research has addressed the important role of parenting styles using dyadic interactions on the ability to regulate children's emotions (Bahrami et al., 2018), such as authoritative parenting, which was found to have a positive correlation to the children's ability in early childhood to regulate emotions (Boediman & Desnawati, 2019; Haslam et al., 2020). However, there is still limited discussion about the role and competence of parents in parenting practices and building the family system as a whole toward the development of children’s emotional competence in early childhood. The relationship between family members becomes a source of information for children related to social behavior, in which the relationship between the two parents is the main model (Mendez et al., 2015). One parenting competency involving both parents is coparenting. This competency refers to how both parents coordinate, communicate, support each other, manage conflicts, and form relevant collaborative relationships for raising children (Atherton, 2017).

This competency focuses not only on the relationship between parents but also on the ability to build complex triadic relationships where father, mother, and children work together. The triadic relationship has three different relationships: mother-children, father-children, and parents-children relationships. Reviewing coparenting is expected to shed more light on the development of children’s emotional regulation, which cannot be explained by research related to dyadic relationships of parents. Coparenting allows children to have a close relationship with both sides of the parents. When the mother and father support and encourage each other, they will be more sensitive to the needs and development of the children. The ability of coparenting in parents who support each other can create full opportunities for children to interact and learn from their parents' parenting style. A child's emotional development is one of the most affected dimensions of development (May et al., 2017).

Furthermore, as previously stated, parenting practices studied in previous studies have focused more on parenting. However, researchers have not integrated it with competence in carrying out parenting as described in the concept of mindfulness. The individual's full attention to ongoing events or moments with a non-judgmental attitude is an understanding of the principle of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). When it is associated with the concept of parenting, mindful parenting can be interpreted as mindful parenting in carrying out interactions between parents and children, receiving affectionately, not judging themselves or children, developing emotional awareness, and being able to control themselves and behaviors that are in accordance with values and goals when carrying out parenting (Duncan et al., 2009). Or in other words, parenting that applies the principle of mindfulness shows mindful behavior, warmth, and awareness of every moment. The concept of mindfulness is considered important to be applied to the
implementation of parenting, especially in the current era, which is synonymous with technological developments and shifts in interaction or communication patterns.

Mindfulness in parents will facilitate the parenting that is calmer, consistent, and responsive. It improves the parents’ emotional regulation ability and makes children become more reliable in regulating their emotions independently (Duncan et al., 2009). Emotion socialization occurs when parents carry out mindful parenting. Parents will be better able to be aware of the behavior and emotions felt by their children and provide a response in accordance with the children's condition. They also provide support so that the children can express emotions, solve problems, and help the children to calm down when they express negative emotions (McKee et al., 2018). Thus, children are assumed to be able to apply the ability to regulate themselves, especially their emotions.

As previously stated, research on parenting and children’s emotional regulation ability is more focused on parenting styles or patterns (Alegre, 2011; Bahrami et al., 2018; Boediman & Desnawati, 2019; Haslam et al., 2020). In fact, competence in carrying out parenting, such as coparenting and mindful parenting, is also an important thing that needs to be studied to understand the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. Previous research examines the relationship of coparenting ability to the development of children's socio-emotional abilities (Ren & Xu, 2019). Besides, research on mindful parenting is widely associated with parenting stress (Gani & Kumalasari, 2019), well-being in children (Medeiros et al., 2016), and psychological disorders in children (Han et al., 2021).

However, studies on the role of the two variables specifically on the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood were still limited, especially regarding the role of coparenting and mindful parenting simultaneously in the triadic family system. Thus, this study aimed to determine the effect of coparenting competencies and mindful parenting simultaneously on the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. Based on the explanation above, this study proposed a hypothesis that coparenting competence and mindful parenting can simultaneously predict children's emotional regulation ability in early childhood.

METHOD

The study used the quantitative method. In this study, there were several variables, namely variable X1: coparenting competence, X2: mindful parenting, and Y; emotional regulation ability. The research was conducted by spreading google form links on various social media and online communication. Besides, the research was also conducted directly (offline) on several Early Childhood Education (PAUD) located in ten districts in Padang city. The data were chosen using the purposive sampling technique by using criteria for the research sample, such as fathers or mothers who had children aged 3-6 years and lived together with children and partners. A total of 370 people, namely 173 fathers (M_{age}= 38 years) and 197 mothers (M_{age}= 35 years), who had children in early
childhood (M_{age} = 5 years 5 months), participated in this study. Here is an overview of research subjects based on the level of education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior High School (SMA)</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3 (Diploma)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 (Bachelor Degree)</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2 (Master Degree)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study used the Emotional Regulation Skill Questionnaire (ERSQ), Bangor mindful parenting scale, and coparenting competence scale. These instruments were adapted into Indonesian following the ITC Guidelines on Adapting Tests, namely by performing backward translation and using a qualified translator representing a balance of language skills, psychological concepts, and culture (Sireci et al., 2006). Also, all items were considered valid and reliable, with the total value of corrected items for each item above 0.200 with the Cronbach alpha values greater than 0.6 (Ursachi et al., 2015). Besides, three experts also considered and assessed of the translation results to evaluate the construct validity through expert judgment (Sireci & Faulkner-Bond, 2014). The following is a brief explanation of each measuring instrument along with the results of the rehabilitation test after the trial.

The ERSQ was adapted from Mirabile (2014), which aims to know the emotional regulation ability of children. This questionnaire consists of statements about four emotions generally felt by children in early childhood, including anger, sadness, fear, and too happy or excited. There are 13 statements for each type of emotion, so the total statement is 52 items (α = 0.88). Available answer options are never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and almost always (5). The question refers to the emotional regulation strategies used by children in early childhood, which can be grouped as adaptive and maladaptive strategies. The children’s emotional regulation was obtained by reducing maladaptive scores from adaptive scores.

Measurements of emotional regulation ability in children in early childhood used the parents’ report described by Miller (et al. 2017), which can be used in research in early childhood. To ensure the accuracy of the data and reduce bias in parents’ reports, researchers asked parents to report the children’s behavior and abilities at the latest or within a certain period to facilitate the recall process. Besides, the format and terminology used in this study were described descriptively and concisely to make it easier for parents to understand the behavioral targets to be measured (Moellar et al., 2019).

The coparenting competence scale was adapted from Atherton (2017) to measure relationships between parents that become models of behavior for children. The scale consists of 10 statements of favorable and unfavorable (α = 0.745), with answer options from the range of 0 (completely inappropriate) to 4 (very appropriate). A total of 6 items
measured the ability to carry out parenting in triadic interaction, and 4 items about running parenting without involvement from a partner.

The Bangor mindful parenting scale was adapted from Jones et al. (2014), which aims to know how parents’ awareness is in carrying out parenting interactions. The scale consists of 15 statements with favorable and unfavorable responses ($\alpha = 0.658$). The choices of answers are incorrect (0), rarely (1), often (2), and always (3). These items refer to five domains of mindfulness in the context of parenting, i.e., acting with awareness, non-reactivity, non-judgment, observing, and describing.

The data analysis technique performed was a multiple linear regression analysis to know the role of the variables of coparenting and mindful parenting simultaneously on the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. The statistical calculation process used the SPSS 24 program.

**RESULTS**

Assumption tests were carried out using normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity test. Normality tests using Kolmogorov Smirnov showed that residual of coparenting competence ($p = 0.72$) and mindful parenting ($p = 0.20$) are normally distributed, ($p > 0.05$). Furthermore, the linearity test showed significant values of deviation from linearity of coparenting competence and mindful parenting, respectively $p=0.082$ and $p = .382$ (see Table 2), then it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between coparenting competence and mindful parenting with emotional regulation ability.

**Table 2. Linearity Test Result**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. Deviation From Linearity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coparenting Competence</td>
<td>1.454</td>
<td>0.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful parenting</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>0.382</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on multicollinearity test, there was no multicollinearity (for the coparenting competence, the emotional regulation ability= 0.77 VIF = 1.29; for the mindful parenting, emotional regulation ability= 0.77, VIF =1.29). Furthermore, the results of the heteroskedasticity test showed significance $> 0.05$, with 0.12 for the coparenting competence and 0.980 for mindful parenting. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data on each variable did not undergo heteroskedasticity, where variants of errors for all observations on regression models tended to be constant. The various assumption tests above suggest that the data can be analyzed with multiple linear regression techniques.

The hypothesis test using multiple regression analysis was subsequently conducted to know the effect of coparenting and mindful parenting simultaneously on the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. The results showed that the two variables could simultaneously explain 12.1% variance in children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood ($R^2 = 0.121, F (2,369) = 23.01, p < .001$). Based on
the results of this study, it was found that coparenting competence and mindful parenting can simultaneously predict children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. When viewed separately, the coparenting competence can significantly predict the ability of emotional regulation ability ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) as well as mindful parenting ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). The effective contribution of the coparenting competency variable was 2.62%, and mindful parenting was 9.48%.

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Regression Equation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coparenting Competence and mindful parenting with emotional regulation ability</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>23.008</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>$Y = .523 + .079X1 + .176X2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, Table 3.3 describes the average use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. It can be seen that parents reported that the children used all different strategies but with varying tendencies. In general, adaptive emotion regulation strategies that children in early childhood often used according to their parents were comfort-seeking ($M = 3.93$). To regulate their emotions, such as sad, happy, angry, afraid, or very happy, children ask parents to calm and comfort them.

Table 4. Adaptive emotion regulation strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Emotional Regulation Strategy</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-directed speech: talking to their selves to respond to intense emotions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Constructive/Instrumental Coping: trying to overcome/change/correct the cause of perceived emotions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Information Collection Collecting information/asking questions about the emotional triggers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Self-Comforting / Soothing: comforting/calming themselves</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Comfort Seeking: Asking parents/caregivers to comfort/calm them down</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Finding support asking for help from parents/caregivers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Verbal / Other-oriented Distraction: talking about other unrelated topics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, Table 4.3 shows the categorization of the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies in early childhood. As many as 60% of parents reported low use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies in early childhood. This shows that the process of forming the proper and effective emotion regulation ability still needs to be improved. As explained earlier, parenting competencies have a role in this case, involving coparenting competence and mindful parenting.

| Table 5. Categorization of The Use of Adaptive Emotion Regulation Strategies |
|----------------------|---------|------|------|
| Value ranges        | Categorization | N   | %    |
| X ≤ 96              | Low     | 221  | 60   |
| X ≥ 96              | High    | 149  | 40   |

DISCUSSION

The results showed that competence in parenting, namely coparenting and mindful parenting, significantly influenced children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. This means both variables can predict children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. In other words, the children’s emotional regulation ability is influenced by the children's internal factors and the parenting ability of both parents. As explained by Morris et al. (2007), parenting practices will be a model and example for children in thinking and acting so that, over time, the children will be able to apply them independently.

Fathers and mothers must be able to commit and cooperate in carrying out optimal parenting or known as coparenting competence (Atherton, 2017). Coparenting of fathers and mothers involves a romantic relationship between partners and focuses on their relationship in carrying out the role of parenting (Margolin et al., 2001). Coparenting emphasizes the importance of supportive, warm, cooperative relationships as parents and minimizes the occurrence of hostile, critical, and competitive behaviors (Feinberg et al., 2012).

Previous research has shown a relationship between coparenting and children’s emotional development (Kwon & Elicker, 2012; Altenburger et al., 2015), and more specifically on emotional regulation ability (Feinberg & Kan, 2008; (May et al., 2017); Machado & Mosmann, 2020). If parents have the coparenting ability, they will realize the role and responsibility to jointly nurture children, divide time, and form emotional bonds with children. This will make them more focused and prioritize the needs of the children. Besides, they will also be more aware and understand the physical and psychological condition of the children so that they can provide the right response. This condition will encourage a warm family emotional climate where the interaction of father, mother, and children is harmoniously intertwined (McHale & Rotman, 2007). Children will be
accustomed to expressing positive and negative emotions that support the formation of self-regulation abilities, especially the ability to regulate emotions.

The results also showed that coparenting and mindful parenting simultaneously affected the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. This shows that the children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood is influenced by parents’ ability to cooperate in carrying out parenting functions and the need to implement the concept of mindful parenting. The concept of mindfulness refers to a person's ability to focus full attention on what he is experiencing (Goldstein, 2002). When associated with parenting, mindfulness is interpreted as parents’ full awareness of every activity they do with the children or paying attention to their overall condition, such as thoughts, feelings, sensations, and others.

When parents carry out parenting interactions with full awareness, parents can focus on the child, the relationship between parent and child, and current conditions. If needed, they can associate the present experience with past experiences. Besides, parents can listen to the child attentively, provide affection and warmth, regulate personal emotions and be aware of the child's emotions (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018). As a result, parents will be better able to encourage the child to express emotions appropriately and respond to the child's emotional needs without judging to achieve a more optimal quality of parenting (Zhang, 2019).

McKee et al. (2018) also state that the higher the level of parents’ mindfulness makes them run parenting that supports emotion socialization. Parents and children will increasingly engage in interactions that can train children to solve problems by discussing to find solutions and minimize the application of maladaptive emotion regulation. This can form children's emotional regulation ability, especially if it is done early so that children can internalize and implement it in the future.

It can be known from the explanation above that coparenting and mindful parenting together affect children's emotional regulation ability in early childhood related to family system theory, especially the family’s emotional climate. Both of these abilities can improve the quality of the relationship between children and parents so that a sense of security is built that can develop children's emotional regulation ability. Moreover, the results of this study also show the importance of observational learning involving family members, especially parents, in realizing emotion socialization (Kwon & Elicker, 2012. Overall, these findings show the importance of parents' ability to carry out parenting and the quality of relationships between family members in forming the ability to regulate emotions.

Furthermore, parents reported that an adaptive emotion regulation strategy often used by children in early childhood is comfort-seeking, which is the tendency of children to ask their parents to help manage their emotions. It is in line with the statement of (Zhang, 2019) that at this age, children are more likely to rely on emotional regulation support provided by caregivers, especially parents. This relates to their ability and
cognitive capacity, which is still developing from processing simple to more complex information when they enter school age (Dennis & Kelemen, 2009). Harrington et al. (2020) also explain that in early childhood, children experience a transition period from being almost completely dependent on parents to being more reflexive to regulating their emotions, such as calming down and taking more initiative to solve problems on their own. Therefore, the role of parents is very important in helping children manage their emotions.

The ability of parents to work together to carry out the role of parenting and establish mindful parenting simultaneously can improve the children’s ability in early childhood to regulate their emotions. Coparenting and mindful parenting can predict the variant of children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood by 12.1%. This shows that other factors can affect children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. Further research is suggested to discuss other parenting skills that are also needed by parents, especially in providing instructions and emotion socialization to children.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that parenting skills are very important in forming the children's emotional regulation ability. Coparenting competence and mindful parenting can simultaneously predict the children's emotional regulation ability in early childhood. This means that parents’ ability to build good cooperation and triadic relationships in the family and carry out parenting interactions consciously can help children develop their emotional regulation abilities. Parents are advised to continue learning to improve parenting skills because it impacts themselves and can facilitate children in carrying out developmental tasks, such as regulating emotions. Besides, children in early childhood tend to still depend on the support of emotional regulation of their environment. This shows how important the role of parents is in directing the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. These findings have important implications for developing an understanding of children’s emotional regulation ability in early childhood. Further research can consider other sources of psychological abilities from parents that can affect children's emotional development to gain a comprehensive model and a deeper understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors expressed gratitude to the party who funded this research, Andalas University, through PNPB funds of the Beginner Lecturer Research (RDP) Scheme with the Contract No T/7/UN.16.7/PT.01/03/Soshum-RDP/2021.
REFERENCES


