Examining the Relationship Between Parental Stress and Children's Ability to Regulate Emotions in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

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Declaration

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

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Approval Form

This research paper attached hereto, entitled "Examining the Relationship Between Parental Stress and Children's Ability to Regulate Emotions in Klang Valley, Malaysia" prepared and submitted by Liew Ying Ping in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Hons) is hereby accepted.

_____ Date: 29th September 2025

Supervisor

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between parental stress and preschool children's emotional development, focusing on two key aspects: emotional regulation and emotional negativity. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, it examines how stress within the multilayer of systems influence children's ability to manage emotions. Although there is a raise of concern on parental stress, limited attention has been given to the parents of preschool children. Existing research largely examines parents of children with special educational needs, leaving a gap in understanding the stress faced by parents of typically developing children. A quantitative, correlational design was adopted by collecting data from 60 parents of children aged 4–6 years in Klang Valley, Malaysia, using convenience sampling. The Parenting Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995) and Emotion Regulation Checklist (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997) were utilized to assess parental stress and children's emotional regulation. Findings revealed a significant negative correlation between parental stress and children's emotional regulation ($r = –.656$, $p < .001$), and a strong positive correlation between parental stress and emotional negativity ($r = .797$, $p < .001$). This suggests that higher parental stress links with weaker emotional regulation and greater negative emotional expression in children. The discussion highlights the possibility of a bidirectional relationship: parental stress undermines caregiving, while children's poor emotional control may increase stress. The findings underscore the need for more effective parental support programs, stress management resources, and collaborative efforts between families, childcare providers and communities as improving parental well-being may foster healthier emotional regulation and reduce emotional negativity in children.

Keywords: Parental stress, children, emotional regulation, emotional negativity

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Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction

This research aims to examine the potential connection between parental stress levels and children's emotional regulation capabilities within the Klang Valley area. The chapter one will present the background of the study, clearly outline the problem statement, and justify for the research objectives. Subsequently, the chapter will formulate research questions and hypotheses to guide the investigation. Additionally, it will explain the significance of research and define key terms, encompassing both conceptual and operational definitions to establish clarity and framework for the research.

Background of Study

Stress is the body and psychological response to perceived threats or demands, which can lead to emotional, cognitive, and physical disturbances (Scott, 2024). Chronic stress can impair daily functioning and contribute to mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. Stress is often associated with work pressures, financial difficulties, and family responsibilities which affect nearly 29% of Malaysians (National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), 2022) in Malaysia. According to WHO (2022); Mechling (2024); O'Connor (2025), stress is one of the leading contributors to the global burden of mental health disorders, particularly among the groups such as caregivers and children. This global insight reinforces the urgency of addressing parental stress.

Among these stressors, parenting stress has become an increasingly prominent concern, especially parents with young children. As Malaysian society becomes more

urbanized and fast-paced, parents are navigating higher expectations within a multicultural context, where diverse cultural norms and fewer traditional support systems make it more challenging to manage parenting demands effectively (Masiran, 2022). A 2023 UNICEF Malaysia report highlighted that post-pandemic economic instability, limited access to affordable childcare, and disruptions to work-family balance have added new layers of difficulty for caregivers of young children (Beh, 2024).

Parental stress describes the mental, emotional, and physical burden that parents face due to the demands of raising children. It involves experiencing overwhelming emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and fatigue, typically triggered by various challenges like parenting duties, financial strain, relationship issues, limited social support, difficulties balancing work and family life (Cusinato et al., 2020; Friedline et al., 2020; Aktaş & Çiçek, 2023). Societal and cultural pressures, such as the ideal of being a "perfect parent" intensify stress. An Ipsos Malaysia survey (2021) found that 86% of Malaysian parents feel they are sometimes judged by others, with scrutiny over children's behaviour being a primary source of anxiety. This statistic reflects the increasing pressure faced by Malaysian parents particularly in urban settings, as they juggle personal and financial responsibilities while also contending with societal expectations and external judgment, which can heighten stress levels and diminish their emotional presence for their children (UNICEF Malaysia, 2024). Managing children with emotional or attention-related difficulties often requires more time, patience, and resources, increasing parental stress and impacting overall family well-being (Yazicioğlu et al., 2024). National data from Malaysia shows that about 11.1% of children aged 5-15 years suffer from emotional, conduct or attention disorders (Sahril et al., 2021). 1.6%-4.6% of school-age children suffer from attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder (PP Health Malaysia, 2024). These statistics highlight a significant proportion of Malaysian children experiencing mental health and behavioural challenges, which can place additional strain on parents.

When parents are stress, they may become emotionally unavailable, harsh, or inconsistent, which limits the child's opportunity to develop healthy emotional coping strategies (Fu et al., 2025; Mahiswar, 2024). Children's emotion regulation refers to the evolving ability to manage emotional arousal through both internal and environmental processes, shaped by developmental stages and influenced by positive interactions with caregivers (Crowell, 2021; Ogelman & Fetihi, 2021). Effective emotion regulation helps children cope with frustration, express their feelings appropriately, and interact positively with peers and adults (Thümmler et al., 2022). On the other hand, emotional negativity reflects a child's tendency to display intense or unstable negative emotions such as anger, sadness, or mood swings, often indicating poor emotional control (Paulus et al., 2021; Van Liefferinge et al., 2018).

Parental stress is strongly connected to children's emotion regulation, as children often model their emotional responses based on their parents' behaviours. (Paley & Hajal, 2022). Over time, this may lead to emotional and behavioural problems such as become more prone to emotional outbursts, anxiety, aggression, and long-term behavioural or mental health problems, which can negatively affect their social relationships and academic success in childhood that persist into adulthood (Ribas et al., 2024). Children emotional regulation skill is closely related to the mental health of their families, especially their parents (Peet et al., 2024). Therefore, managing parental stress is crucial not just for the well-being of parents, but for fostering emotionally resilient and mentally healthy children.

Problem Statement

In the context of current studies in Malaysia, there has been a growing awareness and focus on various types of stress, such as stress experienced by students, working professionals, and educators (Johar et al., 2015; Kassim et al., 2018; Tai et al., 2019). Despite the growing attention to mental health in Malaysia, the stress experienced by parents those with preschool-aged children has received relatively limited focus. Many local studies focus on parents of older children (Arshat et al., 2016; Mui et al., 2020; Sahril et al., 2021; Ghaffar, 2023), while studies on parental stress among preschool children aged 0-6 years old are less. This gap highlights the need for more targeted studies on early parenting stress, especially during the critical preschool years.

This study was specifically designed to examine and assess parenting stress levels among all parents, not just those raising children with special needs. While previous research has predominantly focused on the stress experienced by parents of children with disabilities or developmental challenges (Kamaruddin et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Mohamed et al., 2017; Clauser et al., 2020; Rahman & Jermadi, 2021; Anuar et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2019; Quetsch et al., 2018), there has been comparatively little attention given to the stress levels of parents with typically developing children. This oversight suggests a broader lack of concern for the mental and emotional well-being of these parents. By including parents of typically developing children in this study, the aim is to fill this research gap and provide a more comprehensive understanding of parenting stress. According to Holly et al. (2019), parenting stress occurs when the responsibilities associated with the parental role surpass the resources available to manage them, leading parents to feel overwhelmed. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the stress experienced by all parents, regardless of their child's developmental

status.

A recent tragic case in Melaka, where a 17-year-old boy was charged with killing his mother and brother and injuring his younger sibling (The Star, 2025), serves as a grim reflection of the long-term consequences of unresolved emotional and behavioural problems in childhood. This incident underscores the urgent need to address mental health issues early in life, as children who struggle emotionally in their preschool years are more likely to face severe psychological challenges during adolescence (Black et al., 2017). Although previous research, such as Suhaimi's (2012) study, identified a link between parental stress and children's emotional issues, there remains a significant lack of comprehensive and updated studies in Malaysia. Most existing studies tend to focus on various aspects of children's development, such as school readiness and academic achievement (Mulyadi et al., 2016; Ward & Lee, 2020; Saracho, 2021; Neha & Pal; 2022; Lanjekar et al., 2022), while relatively few have specifically examined children's emotional regulation. As highlighted by Sahril et al. (2021) and Rahim et al. (2023), emotional problems are common among children, and their rising prevalence is alarming. This case further illustrates how parental stress will potentially be due to life or work pressures can lead to neglect or a lack of awareness of their child's emotional needs, potentially resulting in devastating outcomes. Therefore, conducting this research is crucial, as the issues addressed are of significant concern particularly to the targeted parents in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Research Objectives

To examine the relationship between parental stress and children's ability to regulate emotions in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Research Questions

To achieve the objective stated above, the following research questions are formulated:

(1) Is there any significance relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation?

(2) Is there any significance relationship between parental stress and children's emotion negativity?

Research Hypothesis

The research hypotheses are posed as below:

(1) *Ha1*: There is a significance relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation.

(2) *Ha2*: There is a significance relationship between parental stress and children's emotion negativity.

Significance of Study

This study is expected to provide valuable insights into the relationship between parental stress and children's ability to regulate emotions in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The findings will primarily benefit parents, preschool teachers, operators, the community and professionals who work with families and future researchers by deepening their understanding of how parental stress influences a child's emotional development.

For parents, recognizing this connection may encourage the adoption of healthier coping strategies, as interventions aimed at reducing stress, improving

parental self-efficacy, and enhancing coping skills are essential (Iida et al., 2018). Parents can seek support by connecting with others, openly discussing parenting challenges, accessing community and societal resources, and advocating for policies that value and empower caregivers (General, 2024). Furthermore, parents may benefit from participating in stress reduction programs that incorporate mindfulness, cognitive-behavioural techniques, relaxation exercises, and social support (Urbanowicz et al., 2023). Such programs help parents develop stress management skills, strengthen emotional regulation, and build resilience, enabling them to handle parenting challenges more effectively while supporting their children's emotional growth.

When children experience heavy and low-pressure home environments from their parents, they may exhibit emotional disturbances in preschool settings, which makes it more challenging for teachers to effectively manage the classroom (Oktaviani et al., 2023). These challenges affect not only the child's learning but also the classroom environment and the educator's ability to manage and support all children effectively. For educators, understanding how parental stress contributes to emotional difficulties in children can help in identifying at-risk students early. This awareness allows teachers to implement targeted strategies, such as emotion coaching, consistent routines, and social-emotional learning (SEL) activities, to support these children (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Emotion regulation in early childhood is closely tied to school readiness, peer relationships, and positive classroom behaviours (Murray et al., 2015; Helm et al., 2019), making it a key area for teacher intervention.

For preschool operators, the findings emphasize the importance of engaging families and addressing parental well-being as part of a holistic approach to early

childhood development. Programs such as parenting workshops, stress management resources, and mental health referrals can help reduce parental stress, thereby improving children's emotional outcomes. This study also provides indirect reference for educators and operators, offering evidence-based insights that can guide the design of school policies, classroom strategies, and family engagement programs. By supporting families in this way, operators contribute to more stable and responsive learning environments and strengthen relationships between teachers, children, and parents (Hansel, 2018).

Moreover, this research can aid community education and outreach efforts. Organizations can use these findings to raise public awareness through workshops or parenting events to promote emotion regulation and stress management (Children's Health, 2024). This is particularly important for vulnerable families who may not yet be aware of how their own stress levels affect their children. According to Lunkenheimer (2022), counsellors and family-oriented practitioners can use the evidence base for the relationship between parental stress and child emotion dysregulation to screen parents when children present with emotional or behavioural problems and tailor-made support strategies for them so that families, not just children, are supported.

For future researchers, this study contributes to addressing the gap in local literature on how parental stress relates to children's emotional regulation. Although most existing studies focus on parental stress in various situations or children's emotional development (Kiel and Kalomiris 2015; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Danişman et al., 2016; Holly, 2019; Shahril, 2022; Adynski, 2024), few studies have explored the relationship between the two in a specific cultural context. This study provides empirical data from the Klang Valley region, which can provide some

direction for future researchers.

Definition of Terms

Conceptual Definition

Parental Stress: Parental stress refers to the psychological burden experienced by caregivers that extends beyond child-rearing responsibilities to encompass broader life challenges. This multidimensional stress results from socioeconomic pressures, relationship difficulties, lack of social support, financial strain, and the cumulative weight of daily caregiving demands (Nithya et al., 2021).

Children's Emotion Regulation: Emotion regulation is a child's capacity to observe, assess, and adjust their emotional responses in order to manage behaviour and achieve goals. It involves strategies to manage the intensity, duration, and expression of emotions in socially appropriate ways, critical for cognitive and social development (Thompson, 1994).

Operational Definition

Parental Stress: Parental stress is operationally defined through scores obtained from the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS) (Berry & Jones, 1995), an 18-item self-report questionnaire that measures stress levels across three domains which are parental distress, parent-child dysfunctional interaction, and difficult child characteristics. Parental distress refers to the stress experienced by parents as a result of challenges in their parenting role, including feelings of being overwhelmed, exhausted, or emotionally burdened. It includes the parent's perception of their own competence, support systems, and the impact of parenting on their personal life (Driscoll et al., 2018). Next, parent-child dysfunctional interaction describes the parent's perception that interactions with their child are unpredictable, unresponsive behaviour towards their

child or that their child does not meet their expectations (Stuart et al., 2021). Lastly, Difficult child characteristics refers to the parent's view of their child as challenging to manage due to behavioural or emotional difficulties such as negative mood, withdrawal, low adaptability, high intensity, and low regularity (Micalizzi et al., 2015).

Children's Emotion Regulation: Children's emotion regulation is operationally defined through scores obtained from the Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC) (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997), a 24-item caregiver-report measure assessing two key dimensions, emotion regulation and emotional negativity. Child's emotional regulation captures the child's ability to express and manage emotions appropriately which are including emotional awareness, empathy, self-soothing, and flexible emotional responses in various situations (Weir, 2023). Emotional negativity refers to the child's tendency to display intense, unstable, or negative emotions (Sousa, 2020). It reflects poor emotional control and high emotional reactivity (Van Liefferinge et al., 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study's focus on examining the relationship between parental stress and children's ability to regulate emotion in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Key concepts were defined operationally using validated tools which are Parenting Stress Scale (PSS) and Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC), establishing a clear framework for measurement. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform support strategies for families and contribute to child development literature.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 provides a literature review that examines key concepts and previous research on parental stress and children's emotional regulation. It discusses subtopics such as parental stress, emotion regulation and emotion negativity in children aged 4–6, and the link between parental stress and children's emotional regulation. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework underpinning the study, offering a basis for understanding how parental stress may affect children's emotional regulation and emotional negativity. Finally, the conceptual framework is introduced to the key variables and the hypothesized relationships between them to guide the direction of the research.

Subtopics

Preschool Parent's Stress

Parental stress is defined as the distress experienced by caregivers when they perceive that the demands of parenting exceed their available resources (Rusu et al., 2025). Over the past decade, parents have been more likely than other adults to report experiencing high levels of stress (American Psychological Association, 2024). This stress can arise from a range of challenges, including financial pressures, worries about children's health and safety, insufficient time, Feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by parents, difficulties face in overseeing and regulating technology use and social media, and cultural expectations (Office of the Surgeon General, 2024).

Smith et al. (2022) found that parents, especially those raising preschool-aged

children, frequently experience elevated stress, which can contribute to family dysfunction, diminish the quality of caregiving, and create greater emotional distance in the parent–child relationship. In the Malaysian context, most previous studies on parental stress among parents of preschoolers have concentrated on families of children with special needs or disabilities, with comparatively less attention given to parents of typically developing children (Kamaruddin et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Isa et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2018; Rahman & Jermadi, 2021; Anuar et al., 2021; Cheng & Lai, 2023).

Preschool Children's Emotional Regulation

Emotion regulation (ER) refers to the capacity to identify, assess, adjust, and control emotional responses in a manner that is both personally appropriate and socially acceptable, enabling individuals to maintain emotional stability and achieve healthy psychological functioning (Thompson, 1994; Paulus et al., 2021). Guided by the work of Thompson (2017) and Eisenberg & Morris (2017), ER can also be understood as the process of modulating the occurrence, duration, and intensity of both positive and negative emotions, as well as related physiological processes. Research has shown that emotional problems in adulthood can often be traced back to early childhood, with 10% to 20% of children and adolescents worldwide experiencing emotional problems that significantly impact their future behaviours and life outcomes (Li et al., 2020).

Given these long-term implications, managing both positive and negative emotions effectively is crucial for young children's emotional growth, cognitive development, and future academic success (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). During the preschool years, emotion regulation becomes a central developmental task as children begin to experience more complex emotions such as embarrassment, pride,

frustration, and empathy.

Strong ER skills during this stage lay the foundation for children's social and psychological adjustment. This ability not only enables them to manage impulsive behaviours, delay gratification, and engage in cooperative social interactions, but also shapes their self-concept, self-esteem, and sense of control over life events (Thümmler et al., 2022). Consequently, children who develop effective ER skills are more likely to build positive peer relationships, perform well academically, and exhibit fewer behavioural problems (Housman, 2017).

Preschool Children's Emotional Negativity

Fu et al. (2025) highlighted that preschoolers' emotional reactions, including anxiety, irritability, and aggression, have become growing concerns in clinical settings. Emotion negativity refers to emotional patterns or expressions that disrupt a person's ability to engage in purposeful or goal-oriented behaviour (Thompson, 2019).

In the literature, several related concepts are often described using overlapping terms. For instance, emotional lability describes rapid and unpredictable shifts in mood, which often co-occur with emotional negativity but emphasize instability rather than persistent negativity (Rosen, Walerius, Fogleman, & Factor, 2015). Emotional dysregulation, another closely related concept, refers to difficulties in managing emotional responses appropriately, where emotional negativity may be one symptom (Paulus et al., 2021). Irritability, characterized by being easily annoyed or angered by minor triggers, is a frequent outward sign of emotional negativity (Krieger et al., 2015).

Beyond definitions, research has also examined how parenting behaviours shape children's emotional outcomes. Morris et al. (2013) found that children may struggle to control their emotions and react with anger or withdrawal if their parents

frequently yell, impose strict rules without explanation, and disregard their feelings. Such parenting behaviours can undermine children's sense of autonomy and lead to long-term emotional difficulties, including heightened negative emotions and reduced overall well-being.

The Relationship between Preschool Parent's Stress and Children's Emotion Regulation.

The family plays a central role in the development of children's behaviour and emotions, with the home parenting environment being particularly influential. Among these factors, parental stress is closely associated with children's behavioural and emotional problems (Pratt & Sonney, 2020; Fields et al., 2020). Children's emotion regulation is strongly shaped by their parents, whose sensitive and consistent responses influence both temperament and neurobiological development (Repetti et al., 2015). However, when parents experience high levels of parenting stress, children face an increased risk of both internalizing and externalizing problems (Beckmeyer et al., 2022; Yoon et al., 2015), and their academic performance may also be adversely affected (Tan et al., 2017). Furthermore, many parents juggle multiple jobs, leaving limited time for meaningful engage with their children and may hinder the children's emotional and behavioural development (Rahmatullah, 2021).

Extensive research has demonstrated a consistent negative association between parental stress during the preschool years and children's emotion regulation abilities. High parenting stress can undermine parents' capacity to provide responsive and supportive interactions, which in turn leads to greater emotional and behavioural difficulties in children (Mathis & Bierman, 2015). The way parents express and manage their own emotions also plays a crucial role in shaping children's regulatory abilities.

Positive parental emotional expressivity, such as warmth and empathy, is associated with higher levels of effortful control and adaptive regulation in children, whereas frequent expressions of anger or hostility tend to impair children's ability to manage emotions effectively (Tsotsi et al., 2021).

Previous research similarly reports that higher levels of parental stress are significantly related to greater emotional and behavioural difficulties in young children, reinforcing the connection between parental stress and challenges in preschoolers' overall well-being. (Field et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2025). Parental stress also influences children's emotional development indirectly by affecting the quality of parenting behaviours. Under stressful conditions, parents may become more irritable, less patient, and more likely to use coercive or harsh disciplinary strategies, which can hinder the development of adaptive emotional skills in children (Fu et al., 2025).

In contrast, parents with greater psychological flexibility—defined as the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain value-driven behaviours despite stress—are better able to buffer the negative impact of stress on parenting quality and child adjustment (Rutherford et al., 2015). This highlights the potential value of interventions aimed at enhancing parents' coping strategies and stress management skills to mitigate the adverse effects of parental stress on children's emotional growth. In sum, the emotional state of parents and the overall emotional climate of the family play a decisive role in shaping children's emotion regulation patterns and psychological adjustment. The evidence consistently shows that higher parental stress is associated with poorer emotional and behavioural outcomes in preschool children, underscoring the need for early support systems that address parental well-being as a means of promoting healthy emotional development in young children.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory claims that children's development is influenced by multiple interconnected environmental systems from the immediate environment, such as the family, to broader social influences, such as culture (Guy-Evans, 2024).

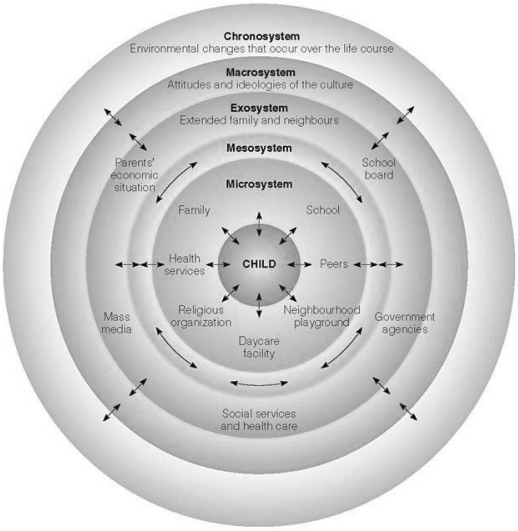
Bronfenbrenner's ecological model outlines five interconnected systems that influence child development. The microsystem is the child's immediate environment, including close relationships with parents, teachers, peers, and caregivers, all of whom engage in direct and reciprocal interactions with the child (Guy-Evans, 2020). The mesosystem refers to the connections between these immediate environments such as home, school, and peer groups, demonstrating how experiences in one setting, like family life, can influence outcomes in another, such as school performance (Guy-Evans, 2024). The exosystem includes broader social settings that the child may not directly interact with but that still impact their development, such as parents' workplaces, work schedules, social networks, and friendships (Sadownik, 2023). The macrosystem encompasses the wider cultural and societal context, including economic, legal, political, and educational systems, as well as the values and ideologies that shape a child's overall environment (Guy-Evans, 2024). Finally, the chronosystem accounts for the role of time in development, including life transitions, personal experiences, and broader historical or societal changes. Events like parental divorce, moving to a new location, or the death of a family member can disrupt family dynamics and significantly influence a child's development. (Cherry, 2023).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is highly relevant to this study

because it emphasizes that children's development interacts with various environmental systems such as family, school, and community. This theory provides a practical framework to better show that emotional development is not only influenced by direct relationships within the microsystem, but also by broader influences such as the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Note. Source from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, by S. McLeod, 2023, *Simply Psychology*. https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html

At the **microsystem** level, high levels of parental stress can directly impact the quality of parent-child interactions, potentially leading to caregivers being unresponsive, inconsistent, or emotionally absent, all of which can hinder children emotional regulation effectively (Sabalbal et al., 2025).

The **mesosystem** refers to the links between different aspects of a child's life, such as home and school. The quality of communication between parents and educators can either buffer or intensify the impact of parental stress. (Pirchio et al., 2023). For example, if parents and teachers communicate well and support each other, this can help protect children from the negative effects of family stress (Lin & Faldowski, 2023).

The **exosystem**, which includes factors such as work pressures or lack of social support, operates outside the child but can significantly affect the care environment (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Although children do not participate in these contexts directly, they remain deeply influenced by them. For example, parents who experience supportive social networks are more likely to foster a positive home environment for their children, whereas those facing high work–home conflict may transmit stress into their parenting, leading to greater emotional and behavioral difficulties (Chung et al., 2022; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2024).

The **macrosystem**, which encompasses cultural values, societal norms, and economic conditions, indirectly shapes the family environment and influences parental stress. Cultural pressures such as expectations for academic success or traditional parenting roles which can increase stress levels, especially when parents feel judged by their child's performance (Ipsos Malaysia, 2021). Additionally, factors like socioeconomic inequality and limited access to childcare or mental health support further contribute to parental stress (Condon & Sadler, 2018).

The **chronosystem** focuses on how things change over time. Long-term exposure may affect how children learn to manage their emotions (Wu, 2024). Broader changes, including post-COVID employment concerns, increased digital exposure to children, and shifts in parents' work-life balance, could also impact parental stress

levels and children's emotion regulation abilities (Yakub et al., 2024; Brauchli et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2022).

In summary, Bronfenbrenner's theory proposes that various layers of a child's environment interact to shape the way parental stress affects their emotional development.

Conceptual Framework

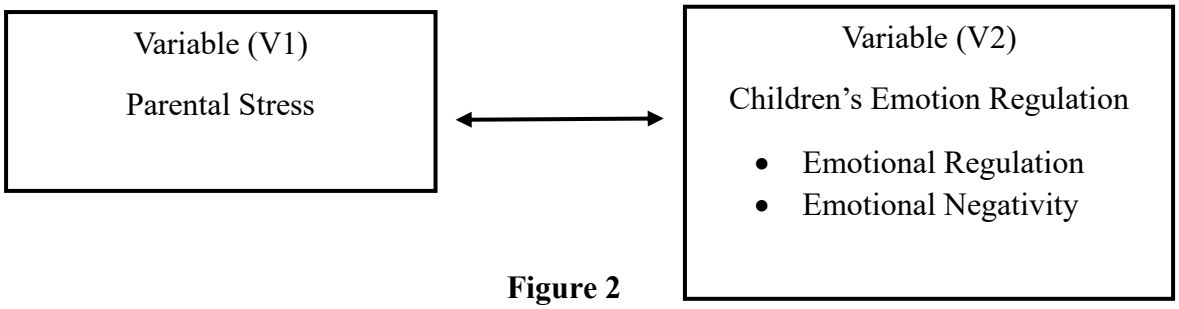


Figure 2

Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 2 shows the variables that involved in this study which parental stress is variable (V1) and the variable (V2) is children's emotion regulation.

Based on the framework, this study hypothesizes a significant relationship between parental stress and children's ability to regulate emotions. This has been supported from the past study conducted by Fu et al. (2025) confirmed that, children with highly stressed parents tend to exhibit poorer emotional regulation, as they may receive inconsistent or emotionally unavailable responses during emotionally challenging situations. Similarly, some studies found that parental stress undermines parents' emotional support and co-regulation practices, which are critical for developing children's emotional regulation (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; Ribas et al., 2024; Çelebi & Acar, 2024). Without a stable and responsive caregiving environment, children are more likely to display heightened emotional reactivity and reduced capacity to manage frustration, anger, or

sadness (Paley & Hajal, 2022).

Given these consistent findings across multiple studies, the present conceptual framework is developed with the understanding that parental stress and children's emotional regulation are inherently interconnected (Mathis and Bierman, 2015; Marwaha, 2020; Ribas et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025; Çelebi & Acar, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). This relationship serves as the foundation for examining how variations in parental stress may influence children's emotional development.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed studies on the relationship between parental stress and preschool children's emotion regulation. Evidence consistently shows that high parental stress is associated with greater emotional and behavioural difficulties in children, while responsive and supportive parenting can foster better emotional regulation. These findings highlight the importance of interventions that reduce parental stress and enhance coping skills to support healthy emotional development in preschoolers.

Chapter III

Research Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the methodology employed in the study. In this chapter, the researcher will explain the research design, sampling method, number of respondents, research instruments, data analysis, and research procedures. The goal is to systematically describe how the study on the relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation in Klang Valley, Malaysia, was conducted.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a quantitative research methodology. Quantitative research is a structured, data-driven approach that focuses on collecting and analysing numerical data (Ghanad, 2023). The quantitative research method emphasizes collecting data from a larger population to address a problem and then analyzing the findings. It employs mathematical, computational, and statistical methods to show a cause-and-effect relationship between two variables (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Given the objective of this study which to examine the relationship between parental stress and children's ability to regulate emotions. A correlational research design was employed. According to Seeram (2019), correlational research is a type of non-experimental design that helps to predict and explain associations between variables without manipulating them.

By using this research design, researcher use survey method in this study through questionnaire and using various sub-scale to capture the complexity of both parental stress and children's emotional regulation. This design enables the researcher

to gather standardized data from a larger population within a limited timeframe. As Ponto (2015) highlights, survey-based research offers flexibility in participant selection, data collection methods, and the application of various measurement instruments.

Sampling and Respondents

The targeted respondents in this study are parents of children aged 4-6 residing in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The researcher collects the data by choosing the respondents using nonprobability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling. Convenience sampling refers to choosing participants based on their easy accessibility and availability. It offers several advantages, such as low cost, efficiency, and ease of implementation (Golzar, 2022).

For this study the researcher expected to have 60 respondents as the sample for this study. The location of survey was situated in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Klang Valley was chosen for its high population density and diverse demographic composition, making it a suitable location for collecting representative data. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023), Klang Valley contributes to 25% of the national population. The area's dense concentration of schools, childcare centres, and healthcare facilities, along with its efficient public transport network, allows for convenient and inclusive participant recruitment across different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research Instrument

This study employed two sets of questionnaires as research instruments to gather data and achieve the research objectives.

The questionnaires will be starting with the demographic section. Demographic questions in a survey provide background information that helps researchers describe

participants and contextualize their data analysis (Dobosh, 2017). In this section, participants are asked to provide details such as their age, gender, monthly household income, level of education, number of children, working status, marital status, and ethnicity. These demographic variables offer important context for interpreting the study's findings and allow for comparisons across different subgroups within the sample.

The first instrument used was the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS), developed by Berry and Jones (1995). It is a widely used tool for assessing the level of stress experienced by parents in their caregiving roles. It exists in one main version and has been used in multiple countries, including the United States, Malaysia, China, Spain, Turkey, Iran, and Portugal. The PSS has been applied in multiple countries, including the United States, Malaysia, China, Spain, Turkey, Iran, and Portugal. The instrument contains 18 self-report items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher total scores indicate greater levels of parenting stress. Although the PSS does not include named subscales, items are often categorized into positive and negative aspects of parenting. Positive items reflect satisfaction, emotional rewards, and the sense of personal growth gained from parenting, whereas negative items represent feelings of role restriction, stress, and parental demands.

Typically, items like 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18 are reversed. To calculate the score, all 18 scores are added together. Total scores range from 18 to 90, with higher scores indicating higher stress levels. The PSS has demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75. In this study, mean scores will be used to interpret overall stress levels.

The second instrument that researcher used is Emotion Regulation Checklist

(ERC), developed by Shields and Cicchetti (1997) and it only one main version. It has been used in many countries, including, United States, Malaysia, China, Spain, Iran, Netherlands, Turkey, and Germany. ERC consists of 24 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 4 = Almost Always). The ERC is divided into two subscales; there are emotion regulation (ER) and emotion negativity (EN). Higher ER scores reflect better emotional regulation skills, whereas higher EN scores reflect greater emotional instability.

The ER subscale contains 8 items (Items 1, 3, 7, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23. Range 8 to 32) and assesses children's adaptive abilities to understand, express, and regulate emotions. It reflects skills such as displaying empathy, emotional awareness, and appropriate emotional expression. The EN subscale includes 15 items (Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24. Range 15 to 60) and measures children's difficulties in managing emotions, such as mood lability, anger dysregulation, impulsivity, and frequent expressions of negative affect. One item (Item 12) is excluded from both subscales but remains part of the full checklist as an indicator of additional child behaviours (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997). The ERC has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.83 for ER and 0.96 for EN. Mean scores will be calculated for both subscales to determine each child's emotional regulation profile.

Data Analysis

In this study, data were collected and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Jamovi version 2.6.44 Statistical Software was employed to perform these analyses. According to Taherdoost (2022), data analysis is the process of gathering, computing, and interpreting data to extract valuable insights.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is used to organize and summarize collected demographic data in a meaningful way (Yellapu, 2018). In this study, descriptive statistics are applied to present a detailed overview of participants' demographic characteristics, which may include gender, age, education level, marital status, household income, and number of children. In addition, descriptive analysis is reporting the overall scores for the independent variable (parental stress) and the dependent variable (children's emotion regulation).

To achieve this, the researcher utilizes Jamovi to generate outputs such as mean, standard deviation, tables, frequencies, percentages, and histograms. This process allows for a concise summary of the sample's characteristics and a clearer understanding of how the key variables are distributed (Sharma, 2019).

Inferential Analysis

To address the research questions and hypotheses, inferential statistical methods are used. According to Guetterman (2019), inferential analysis helps examine relationships between variables and determine differences across groups. Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is applied in this research to examine the relationship between parental stress and children's ability to regulate their emotions. Correlation, in general, is a statistical measure that indicates the strength and direction of the association between two variables. In correlated data, a change in the magnitude of one variable is associated with a change in the magnitude of another, either in the same direction (positive correlation) or in the opposite direction (negative correlation) (Schober et al., 2018).

For instance, a negative correlation between parental stress and children's emotional regulation suggests that higher parental stress is linked to lower emotional

regulation ability in children, or conversely, that lower parental stress is associated with better emotional regulation. On the other hand, a positive correlation would indicate that higher parental stress corresponds with better emotional regulation, which is unexpected and may require further investigation. According to Cohen's framework (1998), as cited in Alwahaibi et al. (2020), an r value between 0.10 and 0.29 indicates a weak correlation, 0.30 to 0.49 represents a moderate correlation, and 0.50 to 1.0 reflects a strong correlation. Therefore, this method is employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between parental stress and children's emotional regulation.

Moreover, inferential statistics are used to test the study's hypotheses (Ali & Bhaskar, 2016). This involves checking if there is a meaningful difference between two sets of data. One common method is using p-values, which help researchers see if the results are likely due to chance. A p-value of 0.05 or lower usually means the result is statistically significant and not just random (Hussain & Ali, 2023).

Researchers often consider p-values below 0.05 or 0.01 as signs that their findings are trustworthy (Shreffler & Huecker, 2023). For example, if the p-value is under 0.05, it shows there is a significant link between parental stress and children's emotional regulation, so the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The alternative hypothesis is rejected when the p-value is above 0.05, meaning no significant connection was found (Kwak, 2023).

Research Procedures

This study examines the relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation in Klang Valley, Malaysia, by first, the researcher prepares a consent letter and digitizes the questionnaires using Google Forms for efficient distribution. To reach the target population, parents of preschool children aged 4 to 6 years old, the

researchers planned to recruit participants through a variety of convenient channels. These channels include the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp groups, which are convenient for parents to connect with parenting communities and local interest groups. In addition, kindergartens located in the Klang Valley area, especially those that are convenient for researchers to visit, were identified as locations for recruiting participants. Before commencing any data collection, the researcher needs to obtain permission directly from the parents or through formal approval from the kindergarten principal or school management. Once approval is obtained, the survey link will be distributed to targeted parents in the Klang Valley through schools and social media platforms, with a target of collecting 60 responses within two weeks.

Once data is gathered, the researcher analysed the responses using descriptive and inferential statistical tools to determine the relationship between the two variables. The findings were then synthesized and interpreted in line with the research questions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the research methodology used to examine the relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation in Klang Valley, Malaysia. It explained the quantitative research design, sampling method, research instruments, and data analysis techniques. The use of standardized tools like the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS) and Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC) ensures the reliability and validity of the data collected. The procedures for data collection and analysis were also described to provide a clear understanding of how the study was conducted.

Chapter IV

Findings and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the data, including both descriptive and inferential statistics, followed by a summary of the results. The data were gathered using the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS) and the Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC).Parents of children aged 4 to 6 years completed the questionnaires. Data were analysed using Jamovi version 2.6.44 to explore the relationship between parental stress and children's emotional regulation.

Descriptive Statistics and Analysis

The demographic data gathered included parents' gender, age, ethnicity, education level, number of children, employment status, and household income. These characteristics were analysed using frequencies and percentages, as presented in the tables.

Table 1

Gender of Respondents (N=60)

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	21	35.0
Female	39	65.0
Total	60	100.0

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the 60 respondents, with 21 (35.0%) being male and 39 (65.0%) being female.

Table 2

Age Group (N=60)

Age Group	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
18-25 years	20	33.3
26-35 years	22	36.7
36-45 years	12	20.0
46-55 years	5	8.3
56 years and above	1	1.7
Total	60	100

Table 2 displays the distribution of respondents according to age groups. The largest group is 26–35 years, with 22 respondents (36.7%), followed by the 18–25 years group with 20 respondents (33.3%). Participants aged 36–45 years account for 12 individuals (20.0%), those aged 46–55 years represent 5 respondents (8.3%), and the 56 years and above group is the smallest, with only 1 respondent (1.7%). Overall, the table indicates that most respondents are between 26 and 35 years old.

Table 3

Ethnicity (N=60)

Ethnicity	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Malay	4	6.7
Chinese	54	90.0
Indian	2	3.3
Total	60	100

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of respondents based on ethnicity. Out of the total 60 participants, the majority are Chinese, comprising 54 respondents or 90.0% of the sample. Malay participants account for 4 individuals, representing 6.7%, while Indian respondents make up the smallest group with 2 participants, equivalent to 3.3%. Overall, the table shows that the sample is predominantly Chinese.

Table 4

Level of Education (N=60)

Level of Education	**Frequency (N)**	**Percentage (%)**
SPM and below	8	13.3
UEC/ STPM/ A-Level/ Foundation	0	0.0
Diploma	7	11.7
Bachelor's Degree	37	61.7
Master's Degree	8	13.3
PhD	0	0.0
Total	60	100.0

Table 4 presents the respondents' educational level. According to Table 4, most respondents (61.7%) hold a bachelor's degree (37 out of 60). A smaller proportion reported having a master's degree (13.3%) or SPM and below (13.3%), while 11.7% completed a Diploma. None of the respondents had a UEC/STPM/A-Level/Foundation or PhD qualification.

Table 5

Number(s) of Children (N=60)

Number(s) of Children	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
1	26	43.3
2	26	43.3
3	3	5.0
4 and above	5	8.3
Total	60	100

Table 5 presents the distribution of respondents by number of children. The majority had either one child (43.3%) or two children (43.3%), while a smaller proportion reported having three children (5.0%) or more than three children (8.3%).

Table 6

Working Status (N=60)

Working Status	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Full-time employed	46	76.7
Part-time employed	3	5.0
Self-employed	5	8.3
Unemployed	3	5.0
Homemaker	3	5.0
Total	60	100

Table 6 presents the respondents' working status. Most respondents were full-time employed (76.7%), followed by self-employed (8.3%). A smaller proportion were part-time employed (5.0%), unemployed (5.0%), or homemakers (5.0%).

Table 7

Monthly Household Income (N=60)

Monthly Household Income	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Less than RM3,000 (B40)	15	25.0
RM3,001–RM6,999 (M40)	35	58.3
RM7,000 and above (T20)	10	16.7
Total	60	100

Table 7 shows the respondents' monthly household income. More than half of the respondents (58.3%) reported a monthly household income between RM3,001–RM6,999 (M40). Meanwhile, 25.0% belonged to the B40 group with incomes below RM3,000, and 16.7% were in the T20 group, earning RM7,000 or more.

Table 8

Measure of central tendency for PSS

Variables	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
PSS Total	60	51.5	12.4	23	80

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Min. = Minimum; Max. = Maximum

Table 8 presents the measures of central tendency for the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS). The analysis was conducted with 60 respondents, yielding a mean score of 51.5 (SD = 12.4). The minimum score recorded was 23, while the maximum score was 80. The findings indicate an average level of moderate parenting stress among respondents, with a degree of individual variability.

Table 9

Measure of central tendency of ERC with its subscales

Variables	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.
ERC: Emotional Regulation	60	22.8	3.8	13.0	31.0
ERC: Emotional Negativity	60	35.1	7.29	21.0	49.0

Table 9 presents the measures of central tendency for the Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC). For the Emotional Regulation subscale, the analysis of 60 respondents showed a mean score of 22.8 (SD = 3.8), with scores ranging from 13.0 to 31.0. For the Emotional Negativity subscale, the mean score was 35.1 (SD = 7.29), with a minimum of 21.0 and a maximum of 49.0. These results indicate that most children had an average ability to regulate emotions, but their levels of emotional negativity varied widely.

Inferential Statistics and Analysis

Table 10

Pearson correlation between parental stress and children's emotion regulation

Variables	**Frequency (N)**	***p***	***r***
Parenting Stress Scale	60		
ERC: Emotional Regulation	60	<.001	-0.656***

Note. **p<.05**p<.01*

Ha_1: There is a significance relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation.

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong, negative, and statistically significant correlation between parenting stress and children's emotional regulation. With a correlation coefficient of r = –0.656 and a p-value < .001 (n = 60), the results indicate that higher levels of parenting stress are associated with lower levels of emotional regulation in children.

Table 11

Pearson correlation between parental stress and children's emotion negativity

Variables	**Frequency (N)**	***p***	***r***
Parenting Stress Scale	60		
ERC: Emotional Negativity	60	<.001	0.797***

Note. **p<.05**p<.01*

Ha_2: There is a significance relationship between parental stress and children's emotion negativity.

Pearson correlation analysis showed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between parental stress and children's emotional negativity ($r = 0.797$, $p < .001$, $n = 60$). This suggests that higher levels of parental stress are linked to greater emotional negativity in children.

Summary

Table 12

Summary of the findings

Hypothesis	Results	Decision
Ha_1: There is a significant relationship between parental stress and children's emotion regulation.	r=-.656, n=60, p<0.001	The alternative hypothesis is accepted
Ha_2: There is a significant relationship between parental stress and children's emotion negativity.	r=.797, n=60, p<0.001	The alternative hypothesis is accepted

The results of the Pearson correlation analyses showed significant relationships between parental stress and both aspects of children's emotional development. The higher parental stress was strongly associated with lower emotional regulation ($r = -0.656$, $p < .001$) and greater emotional negativity in children ($r = 0.797$, $p < .001$).

Chapter V

Discussion and Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will present a discussion of the findings and explore potential reasons behind the results. The chapter will also address the implications of the study, followed by its limitations and suggestions for future research. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the overall research.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate significant links between parental stress and children's emotional regulation. More specifically, higher parental stress is associated with lower levels of children's emotional regulation, while greater parental stress is also linked to higher levels of children's emotional negativity.

Parental Stress and Emotion Regulation in Preschool Children

This present study found a significant, negative association between parental stress and children emotional regulation ($r=-.656$, $n=60$, $p<0.001$). This study also found that higher levels of parenting stress are strongly associated with poorer emotion regulation in children which consistent with previous research (Mathis and Bierman, 2015; Marwaha, 2020; Ribas et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2024; Çelebi & Acar, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025) same as this study. Therefore, lower parental stress is crucial for children's emotional development, as it enables parents to provide stronger and more consistent support across different aspects of their child's growth (Li et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024; Jańczak et al., 2025).

The current finding emphasizes that children who demonstrate higher levels of

emotional regulation often have parents with lower levels of stress. This can be supported from research conducted by Zhang et al. (2025) found that preschool children with stronger self-regulation skills also had better emotional skills, lower parental stress, and fewer behaviour problems. The relationship between parental stress and children's emotional regulation is bidirectional (Wang et al., 2025). It suggests that when children can manage their emotions effectively, parents may feel less overwhelmed in their caregiving role. Conversely, when parents experience lower stress, they are more capable of providing supportive and responsive caregiving, which further promotes the development of emotional regulation skills in children (Bertie et al., 2021). These results highlight the importance of fostering children's self-regulation abilities not only for their own emotional growth but also as a protective factor that reduces parental stress and strengthens the overall parent–child relationship.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) helps explain this dynamic. Within the microsystem, which focuses on everyday interactions, the parent–child relationship plays a central role. Stressful parents may provide less consistent care, which reduces children's chances to practice emotional regulation. At the same time, children who struggle with their emotions can create more tension at home, adding to parents' stress. This creates a cycle that reinforces itself, as noted by Wang et al. (2025).

Moreover, the mesosystem, which reflects the interconnections between different settings (e.g., home and preschool), also plays a part in shaping this dynamic. Supportive parent–teacher relationships can ease parental stress while giving children more consistent opportunities to strengthen their regulation skills (Liu et al., 2024; Ngadni and Shuang, 2024). This ecological perspective underscores that parental stress and children's emotional regulation cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined within the broader system of interactions and influences that surround the

child.

The present results are significant in at least two major respects. First, many of the parents in this study responded to have stable jobs and reliable incomes (Table 7) which likely eased their financial worries and reduced everyday pressures. With less stress about making ends meet, they could dedicate more time, patience, and emotional energy to their children, creating a warmer and more consistent home environment where emotional regulation could grow (Neppl et al., 2015). Second, majority of these parents were also well-educated (Table 6), giving them not only knowledge but also the problem-solving and coping skills needed to handle stress more effectively. According to Bornstein (2023), this ability to manage their own challenges may have allowed them to approach parenting in a calmer, more constructive way. In turn, their children were able to benefit from a more supportive and emotionally steady family atmosphere, which helped strengthen their emotional regulation skills.

Parental Stress and Emotional Negativity in Preschool Children

The study identified a strong positive correlation between parental stress and children's emotional negativity ($r = .797$, $n = 60$, $p < .001$). The strength of this correlation suggests that parental stress is not a peripheral influence but a central determinant of children's emotional negativity. This result is consistent with prior research, a positive link between higher parental stress and preschoolers' emotional difficulties and it can actively increase emotional negativity in young children, leading to anxiety, irritability, and behavioural disruptions (Field et al., 2020; Ribas et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2024).

When parents react to their children's negative emotions in a critical, dismissive, or harsh manner, particularly when the parents themselves are under stress, their

children often show stronger emotional reactions and struggle more with social skills. (Fabes et al. 2001; Pereira et al., 2022; Fernandes et al., 2022). In other words, parental stress shapes how parents respond, which in turn exacerbates negative emotions that children themselves are unable to cope with.

Building on this, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) provides a useful framework for understanding how parental stress interacts with children's emotional development. Within the microsystem, the immediate parent–child relationship is the most influential environment, where stress directly shapes the quality of interactions (Frosch et al., 2019). For example, a stressed parent may become less emotionally available, more irritable, or less patient, creating a less supportive environment for the child to navigate emotions.

At the mesosystem level, the connection between parents and teachers is equally important; teachers who maintain open communication with parents can understand children's needs in different contexts and help alleviate children's emotional difficulties by providing consistent strategies for managing negative emotions in different environments (Liu et al., 2024). This illustrates that emotional negativity is not only a product of individual traits but also of broader relational and contextual factors. In the present context, these findings underscore the importance of addressing parental stress in Malaysian families, where the school and home collaboration help to shape children's capacity to manage negative emotions.

At the exosystem level, factors such as parental work stress and social support significantly shape the emotional climate of the home, parents with greater perceived social support report children with fewer adjustment problems (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2024); while work–home conflict elevates parenting stress, spilling over into harsher

responses and family problems (Chung et al., 2022).

At the macrosystem level, cross-cultural research indicates harsh or hostile parenting is broadly associated with negative child outcomes; warmth, autonomy support, and non-coercive discipline meet children's universal developmental needs (Kong & Yasmin, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Within the chronosystem, developmental transitions such as academic transitions and separations can elevate stress physiology (Parent et al., 2018; Nystad et al., 2021), secure parent bonds and teacher partnerships help buffer children's stress responses and tamp down emotional negativity.

There are several possible explanations for this result. First, most respondents in this study reported being from low income (B=40) to middle -income (M=40) households (Table 7), where the rising costs of childcare, education, and daily living can intensify parental stress. Financial strain often limits parents' access to supportive resources such as quality childcare or enrichment programs, which may restrict opportunities for children to practice and strengthen their emotional regulation skills (Neppl et al., 2015). Second, most parents in the sample were full-time employees, which suggests that work–life imbalance may also contribute to elevated stress levels. Long working hours and limited time at home make it difficult for parents to model or guide proper emotional regulation strategies, reducing their emotional availability, patience, and consistency in caregiving (Hosokawa and Katsura, 2021; Ribas et al., 2024). Together, these socioeconomic and occupational pressures create a challenging environment where high parental stress negatively influences children's emotional development.

Implications

The present study found a significant negative correlation between parental stress and children's emotional regulation ($r = –.656$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher stress levels among parents are linked to lower emotional regulation abilities in children. This suggests that when parents are overwhelmed, they may struggle to provide the emotional support and guidance their children need to develop healthy regulatory skills.

Practically speaking, this underscores the importance of designing interventions that target parental stress reduction, as reducing parental stress may benefit their children's emotional development. Community programs such as parenting workshops, mindfulness and relaxation training, and access to social support networks can help parents manage stress more effectively (Sterland, 2014; Burgdorf et al., 2019; Urbanowicz et al., 2023). According to National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2016), as parents are the partner in early childhood setting, schools and childcare centres can also partner with local organizations to provide parents with counselling, peer support groups, and resources that promote coping strategies and resilience. These efforts may not only improve parental well-being but also indirectly foster stronger emotion regulation skills in children, leading to healthier long-term outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the idea that parental stress can disrupt their parenting style and emotional transmission, impacting children's emotional regulation. It also reinforces ecological systems theory by highlighting how family-level stressors can influence child development and points to the importance of focusing on parental well-being in child-cantered interventions.

The results also revealed a strong positive relationship between parental stress and children's emotional negativity ($r = .797$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that when parents experience higher stress, their children are more prone to express negative emotions such as anger, frustration, or irritability. A possible explanation is that stressed parents may become less emotionally available, less patient, or more inconsistent in discipline, which in turn increases children's vulnerability to emotional dysregulation and negativity.

For practical implications, this highlights the vital role of educators in recognizing and responding to emotional difficulties in children that may stem from stress within the home environment. Teachers can implement targeted classroom strategies, such as emotion coaching, consistent routines, and social-emotional learning (SEL) activities, to help children regulate negative emotions (Domitrovich et al., 2017). Schools can also strengthen collaboration with parents through workshops and parent–teacher engagement sessions that provide guidance on stress management and positive parenting (Hansel, 2018; Kelty and Wakabayashi, 2020; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL.), 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, specifically the mesosystem, which represents the interactions between different microsystems in a child's life. The relationship between the family and the school is a crucial mesosystem link; when educators and parents work together, the negative impact of parental stress on children's emotional development can be reduced (Lin & Faldowski, 2023). This underscores the importance of school–home collaboration in creating a supportive environment that fosters healthier emotional outcomes for children.

Overall, this study shows that parental stress significantly relates children's emotion regulation and negative emotions, highlighting the broader role of the family environment in shaping children's emotional development. These two findings further suggest that children's emotional well-being cannot be isolated from the stressors of their parents.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide a valuable foundation for future researchers interested in exploring the relationship between parental stress and children's emotional development in the Klang Valley and beyond. Future studies could build on this work by examining potential mediating factors, such as parenting styles, social support, or socioeconomic status, to better explain how parental stress influences children's outcomes. Additionally, by offering baseline data from the Klang Valley, this study creates opportunities for scholars to conduct cross-cultural comparisons and design intervention studies that address both local and broader contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, particularly at the broader exosystem and macrosystem levels. Exosystemic stressors, such as work demands, community pressures, or limited social support, can indirectly increase parental stress, which in turn can impact children's emotional outcomes (Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Chung et al., 2022). At the macrosystem level, cultural values and societal expectations for parenting may shape how parents perceive and respond to stress, further influencing children's emotional development (Kong & Yasmin, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). By applying Bronfenbrenner's framework, this study emphasizes that parental stress and children's emotional outcomes are embedded in multiple interactive layers, necessitating that future research consider not only individual- or family-level factors

but also broader social and contextual influences.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that most of the respondents were Chinese parents (90%), with much smaller representation from other ethnic groups in Malaysia. Because the researcher employed convenience sampling, the participant pool was drawn mainly from easily accessible networks, such as local preschools and community contacts, which unintentionally led to an overrepresentation of Chinese parents. Since Malaysia is a multicultural country made up of Malay, Indian, and Indigenous communities as well, the findings may not fully capture the wide variety of parenting experiences and cultural practices across the population. Different cultural groups may have unique beliefs about parenting, experience different types of stress, or approach children's emotional development in in different ways (Bakar et al., 2018; Sumari et al., 2019; Zulkefly et al., 2021; Masiran, 2022; Mei-Yi et al., 2025). Because of this imbalance, the results may not be fully generalizable to all Malaysian families.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported questionnaires as the main tool for data collection. Although questionnaires are practical and commonly used in research, they are prone to certain biases (Brenner & DeLamater, 2016; Andrade, 2020; Beck, 2024). Parents may unintentionally give inaccurate answers. For example, they might forget details about how often or how intensely their child shows emotional behaviours like tantrums. On the other hand, some parents may downplay their own stress or their child's difficulties because they want to appear as capable caregivers or avoid revealing sensitive information. These factors may compromise the accuracy of the data, resulting in findings that do not fully reflect the actual relationship between parental stress and children's emotional regulation.

Third, limitation of this study is that it only captured the experiences of parents living in urban areas, specifically the Klang Valley. While this setting provides valuable insights, it may not reflect the unique stressors faced by families in rural or smaller-town communities. For instance, urban parents may struggle with high living costs and work–life balance (Barreto et al., 2024; Salim et al., 2024), whereas rural parents may rely more on community or extended family support (Ferguson et al., 2023), but face challenges related to limited resources or access to services (Han et al., 2023). Without including both urban and rural perspectives, the findings may not fully represent the diverse realities of Malaysian families.

Recommendations

Future research should aim to include participants from all major ethnic groups in Malaysia such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous families as well as households with different cultural and religious traditions. Since each community holds unique parenting beliefs, ways of coping with stress, and approaches to teaching children about emotions, their experiences may influence children's emotional development in different ways. Furthermore, employing random sampling methods in participant recruitment would improve the representativeness of the sample, ensuring that parents from diverse backgrounds are included rather than only those who are most accessible. By including a broader range of cultural backgrounds, researchers can better understand whether parental stress has similar effects across communities or if cultural values act as protective or risk factors. This wider representation would not only strengthen the generalizability of the findings but also provide meaningful insights for developing parenting programs and policies that are more culturally sensitive and relevant to Malaysia's diverse society.

Relying only on parents' self-reports can limit the accuracy of the findings, as some parents may forget certain details, answer in a way that seems socially acceptable, or avoid sharing sensitive issues about their stress or their child's emotional struggles. Because of this, future studies should use a more comprehensive approach that allows parents to express their experiences in greater depth. One useful way is through interviews, where parents can openly describe their daily stressors, coping strategies, and the challenges they face in supporting their child's emotions. Interviews not only provide richer context but also allow researchers to ask follow-up questions and clarify responses, reducing misunderstandings that often happen in questionnaires. In addition to interviews, observational methods such as watching parent–child interactions during play or problem-solving tasks can reveal how stress shows up in real-life situations, beyond what parents might report. By combining interviews, and observational approaches, future research can build a more holistic and accurate picture of how parental stress truly influence children's emotional regulation.

Future research should extend its focus beyond the Klang Valley to more fully capture the diverse realities of parents across Malaysia, since the pressures of city life are not the same as those faced in smaller towns or rural communities. Parents living in different areas struggle with different types of stress. These differences shape how parents experience and cope with stress, which in turn influences how children learn to regulate their emotions. Expanding future research to include families from smaller towns and rural areas would not only make the findings more nationally representative but also shed light on how local resources and community support systems such as extended family networks, village cooperation, or religious institutions help reduce parental stress in ways that differ from urban living. By considering these contextual differences, future studies can provide a more realistic perspective on the relationship

between parental stress and children's emotional development, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the everyday lives of families across Malaysia.

Conclusion

This study examines the relationship between parental stress and preschool children's emotional development, focusing on emotional regulation and emotional negativity. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between parental stress and children's emotional regulation, alongside a strong positive correlation with children's emotional negativity. These results confirm that parental stress is not only a peripheral factor but a central influence on young children's emotional functioning.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study emphasizes that the parent–child relationship, situated within interconnected systems, is central in influencing children's emotional development. Stress within the family microsystem can disrupt consistent caregiving and emotional availability, while broader mesosystem links, such as collaboration between parents and schools, can buffer some of these effects. The study also pointed out that exosystemic factors such as work demands and social support, and macrosystem-level cultural expectations, further influence how parental stress impacts children's emotional development.

The practical implications are clear which is reducing parental stress has the potential to foster healthier emotional regulation and decrease emotional negativity in children. Community-based initiatives, such as parenting workshops, mindfulness training, and social support networks, can provide valuable resources to parents. Schools and childcare centres can also serve as important partners, working alongside families to promote stress management strategies and consistent emotional support for children.

However, the study's limitations such as reliance on self-report data, limited ethnic diversity, and focus on urban parents in the Klang Valley suggest caution in generalizing the findings. Future research should adopt more comprehensive methods, including interviews and observations, and extend its scope to include rural and semi-urban populations as well as diverse cultural groups across Malaysia.

In conclusion, this research underscores the significant impact of parental stress on children's emotional well-being and demonstrates the interconnectedness of family, community, and cultural factors in shaping child development. By addressing parental stress through both individual and systemic interventions, stakeholders can create more supportive environments for children to develop emotional resilience. Ultimately, recognizing the central role of parents' well-being not only benefits families but also strengthens the foundation for healthier emotional and social outcomes in Malaysia's next generation.

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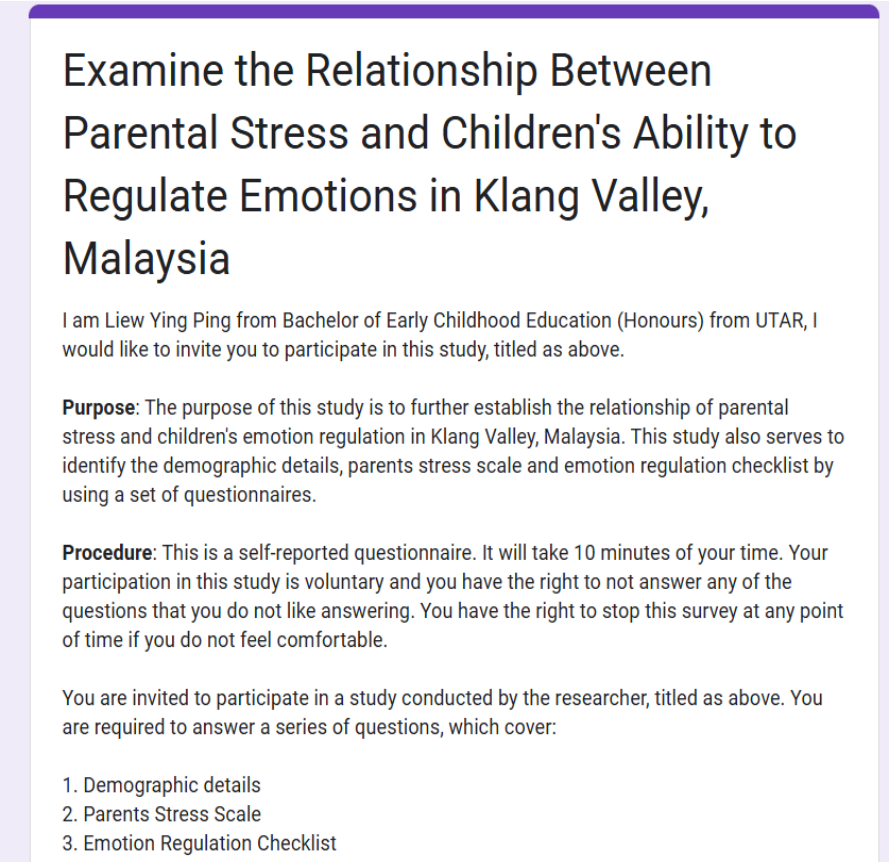
Appendixes

Appendix A

Questionnaire sample



Examine the Relationship Between Parental Stress and Children's Ability to Regulate Emotions in Klang Valley, Malaysia

I am Liew Ying Ping from Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Honours) from UTAR, I would like to invite you to participate in this study, titled as above.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to further establish the relationship of parental stress and children's emotion regulation in Klang Valley, Malaysia. This study also serves to identify the demographic details, parents stress scale and emotion regulation checklist by using a set of questionnaires.

Procedure: This is a self-reported questionnaire. It will take 10 minutes of your time. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to not answer any of the questions that you do not like answering. You have the right to stop this survey at any point of time if you do not feel comfortable.

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by the researcher, titled as above. You are required to answer a series of questions, which cover:

1. Demographic details
2. Parents Stress Scale
3. Emotion Regulation Checklist

Potential risks and benefits: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in these studies beyond those encountered in daily life.

Through this study, necessary importance could be given to the relationship of

parental stress and children's emotion regulation in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Confidentiality: All of the information you have given will be kept private and confidential. Your information will be stored only by code, with personal details kept secured in files and computer with access only by the immediate research team. The final results of this study will be presented at our final years project viva exam and written up in report. In this event of publication, no personal identification will be disclosed.

Informed consent:

I have read and understood all the information stated above. I have my questions answered satisfactorily. I, hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this research.

If you agree to participate in this study, please proceed to the questions.

Your sincerely,

Liew Ying Ping, yingping0729@1utar.my

Next Clear form

Section A: Demographic Information

The following questions refer to the demographic profile of the respondents. Please provide the appropriate information below. Thank you.

Parent Details

Age Group *

- ◯ 18 – 25 years
- ◯ 26 – 35 years
- ◯ 36 – 45 years
- ◯ 46 – 55 years
- ◯ 56 years and above

Gender *

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Other/Prefer not to say

Ethnicity *

- ◯ Malay
- ◯ Chinese
- ◯ Indian
- ◯ Other: _____

Level of Education *

- ◯ SPM and below
- ◯ UEC/ STPM/ A-Level/ Foundation
- ◯ Diploma
- ◯ Bachelor's Degree
- ◯ Master's Degree
- ◯ PhD

Number(s) of Children *

- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3
- ◯ 4 and above

Working Status *

- ◯ Full-time employed
- ◯ Part-time employed
- ◯ Self-employed
- ◯ Unemployed
- ◯ Homemaker

Household Income (monthly) *

- ◯ Less than RM3,000 (B40)
- ◯ RM3,001–RM6,999 (M40)
- ◯ RM7,000 and above (T20)

Back Next Clear form

Section B: Parental Stress Scale

The following statements describe feelings and perceptions about the experience of being a parent. Think of each of the items in terms of how your relationship with your child or children typically is. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following items by placing the appropriate number in the space provided.

Note: Scale 1 indicates that you Strongly Disagree with the statement and scale 5 indicates you Strongly Agree with the statement.

[1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided , 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree]

1. I am happy in my role as a parent. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

2. There is little or nothing I wouldn't do for my child(ren) if it was necessary. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Strongly Agree

3. Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

4. I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child(ren). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

5. I feel close to my child(ren). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

6. I enjoy spending time with my child(ren). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

7. My child(ren) is an important source of affection for me. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

8. Having child(ren) gives me a more certain and optimistic view for the future. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

9. The major source of stress in my life is my child(ren). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

10. Having child(ren) leaves little time and flexibility in my life. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

11. Having child(ren) has been a financial burden. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

12. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child(ren). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

13. The behaviour of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

14. If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have child(ren). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

15. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

16. Having child(ren) has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

17. I am satisfied as a parent *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

18. I find my child(ren) enjoyable. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly Agree

Back Next Clear form

Section C: Emotion Regulation Checklist

The following statements describe emotions and behaviors related to how your child manages their feelings. Based on your observations over the past few months, please indicate how frequently your child has displayed each behavior by selecting the appropriate rating.

Use the following scale for your responses:
[1= Rarely or Never, 2= Sometimes, 3= Often, 4= Almost Always]

1. Is a cheerful child. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

2. Exhibits wide mood swings (child's emotional states difficult to anticipate because s/he moves quickly from positive to negative moods). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

3. Responds positively to neutral or friendly overtures by adults (responds positively to polite or friendly adults). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

4. Transitions well from one activity to another; does not become anxious, angry, distressed or overly excited when moving from one activity to another. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

5. Can recover quickly from episodes of upset or distress (for example, does not pout or remain sullen, anxious or sad after emotionally distressing events). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

6. Is easily frustrated. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

7. Responds positively to neutral or friendly overtures by peers (Responds positively to polite or friendly peers). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

8. Is prone to angry outbursts or tantrums easily. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

9. Is able to delay a gratification. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

10. Takes pleasure in the distress of others (for example, laughs when another person gets hurt or punished; enjoys teasing others). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

11. Can modulate excitement (Can control his/her excitement) For example, doesn't get "carried away" in high-energy play situations or overly excited in inappropriate contexts. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

12. Is whiny or clingy with adults. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

13. Is prone to have disruptive outbursts of energy and exuberance (excitement). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

14. Responds angrily to limit-setting by adults. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

15. Can say when she or he feels sad, angry or mad, fearful or afraid. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

16. Seems sad or listless. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

17. Is overly exuberant (excited and energetic) when attempting to engage others in play. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

18. Displays flat affect (doesn't show much emotion when you would expect it). Expression is vacant or inexpressive; child seems emotionally absent. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

19. Responds negatively to neutral or friendly overtures by peers (Responds negatively to polite or friendly peers). For example, may speak in an angry tone of voice or respond fearfully. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

20. Is impulsive (Can't control him or herself). *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

21. Is empathic (sympathetic) towards others; shows concern when others are upset or distressed. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

22. Displays exuberance (energy and excitement) that others find intrusive or disruptive. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

23. Displays appropriate negative emotions (anger, fear, frustration, distress) in response to hostile, aggressive, or intrusive acts by others. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

24. Displays negative emotions when attempting to engage others in play. *

	1	2	3	4	
Rarely or Never	○	○	○	○	Almost Always

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Appendix B

Original Jamovi Output

Table 1

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Gender)

Frequencies of Gender

Gender	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Female	39	65.0 %	65.0 %
Male	21	35.0 %	100.0 %

Table 2

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Age Group)

Frequencies of Age Group

Age Group	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
18 -25 years	20	33.3 %	33.3 %
26 -35 years	22	36.7 %	70.0 %
36 -45 years	12	20.0 %	90.0 %
46 -55 years	5	8.3 %	98.3 %
56 years and above	1	1.7 %	100.0 %

Table 3

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Ethnicity)

Frequencies of Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Chinese	54	90.0 %	90.0 %
Indian	2	3.3 %	93.3 %
Malay	4	6.7 %	100.0 %

Table 4

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Level of Education)

Frequencies of Level of Education

Level of Education	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Bachelor's Degree	37	61.7 %	61.7 %
Diploma	7	11.7 %	73.3 %
Master's Degree	8	13.3 %	86.7 %
SPM and below	8	13.3 %	100.0 %

Table 5

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Number(s) of Children)

Frequencies of Number(s) of Children

Number(s) of Children	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
1	26	43.3 %	43.3 %
2	26	43.3 %	86.7 %
3	3	5.0 %	91.7 %
4 and above	5	8.3 %	100.0 %

Table 6

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Working Status)

Frequencies of Working Status

Working Status	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Full-time employed	46	76.7 %	76.7 %
Homemaker	3	5.0 %	81.7 %
Part-time employed	3	5.0 %	86.7 %
Self-employed	5	8.3 %	95.0 %
Unemployed	3	5.0 %	100.0 %

Table 7

Jamovi output for demographic statistics (Household Income (monthly))

Frequencies of Household Income (monthly)

Household Income (monthly)	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Less than RM3,000 (B40)	15	25.0 %	25.0 %
RM3,001–RM6,999 (M40)	35	58.3 %	83.3 %
RM7,000 and above (T20)	10	16.7 %	100.0 %

Table 8

Jamovi output for Inferential statistics (Pearson correlation analysis between parental stress level and child's emotional regulation (children's emotion regulation and children's emotion negativity)

Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix

		PSS TTL	ER TTL	EN TTL
PSS TTL	Pearson's r	—		
	df	—		
	p-value	—		
ER TTL	Pearson's r	−0.656	—	
	df	58	—	
	p-value	< .001	—	
EN TTL	Pearson's r	0.797	−0.578	—
	df	58	58	—
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—