Early Childhood Education Journal
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-01896-w

Dyadic Examination of Children's Emotion Regulation in Family Context: Contributions of Coparenting and Parents' Self-Compassion

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Accepted: 17 February 2025
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Abstract
The purpose of the current study was to examine the dyadic association between parents' self-compassion and children's emotion regulation in early childhood, with a specific focus on the mediating role of the coparenting relationship (cooperation, conflict, and triangulation). The sample of this study consisted of 333 parental dyads (333 mothers and 333 fathers) who had at least one child between 36 and 96 months ($M = 68.89$, $SD = 15.03$). Both mothers and fathers reported their level of self-compassion, the coparenting quality, and their child's emotion regulation. The Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) and Actor- Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM) were used to investigate the effects of the actor and partner on the study variables. The results from the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) revealed a significant and positive association between parents' self-compassion and their respective reports of child emotion regulation. Notably, fathers' self-compassion was significantly associated with mothers' reports of child emotion regulation, but mothers' self-compassion did not show a significant association with fathers' reports of child emotion regulation. Results also demonstrated that fathers' coparenting cooperation mediated the relationship between mothers' self-compassion and fathers' reports of child emotion regulation, as well as the relationship between fathers' self-compassion and their own reports of child emotion regulation. However, conflict and triangulation within the coparenting relationship did not mediate the association between parents' self-compassion and children's emotion regulation.

Keywords Parent self-compassion · Coparenting · Child emotion regulation · Actor-partner interdependence model · Actor-partner interdependence model of mediation

Introduction

Emotion regulation (ER) is the ability to manage and modulate intensive emotional arousal and reactions effectively (both positive and negative) in order to attain one's goals (Denham et al., 2003; Gross, 2008). ER involves intrinsic and extrinsic processes that enable individuals to evaluate and reinterpret emotional stimuli, thereby modulating the occurrence, intensity, and expression of emotions in a given context to respond flexibly and adaptively to ongoing experiences (Cole et al., 1994; Morris et al., 2007). Briefly, being able to regulate undesired emotions adaptively and not allowing them to interfere with fulfilling personal goals and basic needs is a crucial life skill (Bridges et al., 2004). In early childhood, developing emotion regulation abilities, including coping with anxiety in distressful situations and tolerating frustration, is a developmental task for children to accomplish (Cole et al., 1994). Children undergo significant changes in emotion regulation abilities during early childhood. Younger children, particularly those aged 3 to 5, are in the early stages of developing skills such as tolerating frustration and coping with distress (Cole et al., 1994). At this stage, they often rely on external support from caregivers and teachers to manage their emotions. Caregivers play a critical role during this early developmental period, scaffolding the development of children's self-regulation skills via co-regulation (Morris et al., 2007; Thompson & Meyer, 2007). As children approach the later years of early childhood, around ages six to eight, they begin to exhibit more

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Published online: 24 March 2025

sophisticated self-regulation strategies, including cognitive reappraisal and problem-solving (Zeman et al., 2006). This progression reflects a developmental shift from reliance on external regulation to more autonomous, internalized forms of emotion regulation. Nevertheless, the fundamental factor that affects children's accomplishment in early childhood and the development of emotion regulation skills is social interactions, particularly in the family context (Morris et al., 2007). A child learns the nature of interactions and the way of approaching problems firstly in his/her own family. So, the family environment and parent–child interactions become a rehearsal stage for children to learn to modulate emotions and respond appropriately, which then spills over to other social interactions in life (Denham et al., 1997). For instance, children growing up in homes where marital discord is frequent interact with their peers more negatively (Gottman & Katz, 1989). Also, parents become the first models for children to show them how to deal with emotional difficulties. For example, children with difficulties in coping with stress-arousing situations and having anxiety disorders are observed to have more anxious parents (Reeves et al., 1987). Briefly, the child's family environment plays a vital role in developing adaptive skills and healthy functioning.

In the family context, there are different components that play a role in the development of emotion regulation, such as the emotional climate of the family or the parents' well-being (Morris et al., 2007). Coparenting relationship, which is defined as an interparental relationship based on their parenting role and child-rearing duties and is characterized by support and coordination (or lack of them), is one dimension that reflects the emotional climate of the family (Feinberg, 2003; Morris et al., 2007). Interparental interactions around this role and duties may create various emotion-eliciting situations between parents, and the degree of displayed emotions during these interactions determines the emotional climate of the family.

For children to develop healthy adaptive skills, they need to feel emotionally secure in the family environment (Davies & Cummings, 1994). But coparental conflict constitutes a risk factor for children's social-emotional development, which results in developing aggression at preschool age (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). Another fundamental factor for children's development of emotion regulation is the parents' well-being, such as mental health or how they handle emotional arousal (Morris et al., 2007). Self-compassion, which is defined as approaching oneself with kindness during emotional difficulties and not allowing oneself to get lost in negative feelings, can be interpreted as a useful emotion regulation strategy in adulthood (Neff, 2003a). Therefore, self-compassionate parents may be a good model for children to learn how to cope with emotional arousal.

Theoretical Framework

Family systems theory offers a comprehensive framework for studying human development and functioning. It examines the processes of child development in relation to family subsystems and interactions, such as the parent–child subsystem, couple subsystem, or triadic subsystem (i.e., mother-father-child subsystem) (Minuchin, 1985). Family systems theorists also put emphasis on the interdependence of subsystems, suggesting that "changes can arise at any level of the family system, and a change at one level can stimulate further change in individuals, relationships, and the whole family system" (Cox & Paley, 2003, p. 195). For example, even if negative interactions between parents may not directly involve the child, this certainly has an impact on the child's emotional development and undermines his/her sense of emotional security when being exposed to these kinds of interactions repeatedly (Cox & Paley, 2003; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Witnessing quarrels between adults, even in the background, evokes emotional distress in children and challenges their adaptive skills (Cummings, 1987). So, while studying children's development of emotion regulation, multiple levels of family systems and transactions between them should be considered.

While family systems theory suggests a scope to discuss the family context about various components of human development, the tripartite model by Morris and her colleagues (2007), complimentarily, which is also based on the family systems view, specifically examines the impact of the family on children's emotion regulation and adjustment. Morris and her colleagues (2007) argue that the family context influences children's ER through three processes: observation of parents' emotion regulation (e.g., modeling, social referencing, emotion contagion), emotion-related parenting practices (e.g., emotion coaching, reactions to emotions) and emotional climate of the family (e.g., attachment/parenting style, marital relations, emotional expressivity). Based on the model of Morris and her colleagues (2007), the current study involves the coparenting relationship as reflecting the emotional climate of the family and parents' self-compassion as being a model for children in coping with difficult emotions. Since the frequency and amount of positive or negative emotions in relationships color the emotional climate of the family (Thompson & Meyer, 2007), the coparenting relationship is one of the interparental systems where parents reflect the emotional atmosphere between them (Feinberg, 2003). As to being a model in emotion regulation, children observe their parents in order to know how to react in certain situations (Denham et al., 1997), and the attitude of parents in the face of emotional difficulty or personal

failure, whether self-compassionate or self-critical, may be a reference for children in similar situations (Morris et al., 2007). Further, parental self-compassion is important in shaping children's emotional development (Moreira et al., 2015). Self-compassionate parents tend to engage in more supportive and emotionally responsive parenting, fostering a home environment that encourages children to develop healthy emotion regulation skills. According to social learning and emotion socialization theories (Morris et al., 2007), children internalize emotion regulation strategies by observing and interacting with their caregivers. Parents who practice self-compassion are more likely to model adaptive coping strategies, such as acceptance, problem-solving, and mindful emotional regulation, which children then adopt in their own regulatory processes (Neff & Faso, 2015).

Furthermore, self-compassionate parents may respond more calmly and supportively to their children's emotional distress, reducing harsh or overly reactive parenting behaviors that could otherwise hinder the development of effective emotion regulation (Moreira & Canavarro, 2016). This parental emotional stability contributes to a more secure and predictable emotional climate, which is essential for young children's ability to develop their own regulatory skills.

Studies on within-family processes, parenting, and child development have traditionally emphasized the impact of mothers on children while often excluding fathers. However, since the family consists of interconnected individuals and subsystems that continuously and reciprocally influence each other (Cox & Paley, 1997), it is essential to consider both parents when examining child outcomes. Although a strong relationship with one parent is beneficial, it cannot fully compensate for the absence or weakness of a relationship with the other parent. Instead, both parental relationships play complementary roles in shaping child outcomes (Doyle et al., 2000). For example, supportive coparenting between mothers and fathers contributes to different emotional developmental outcomes in infants (Brown et al., 2010). Fathers, in particular, play a significant role in children's peer relationships, helping them learn emotional expressions and become more competent and accepted in peer interactions (Parke et al., 2004). Because mothers and fathers are not isolated but interdependent entities within the family system, each exerting distinct influences on children, we aimed to collect dyadic data from both parents.

In addition to parent–child relationships, sibling dynamics also play a role in shaping children's development, particularly in conflictual family environments. In families with high interparental conflict, children may develop various maladaptive responses, such as antagonistic behaviors toward parents, anxious bids to distract them, or freezing (Davies et al., 2022). The effects of interparental conflict can also extend to sibling relationships. Some children may exhibit heightened hostility or rivalry toward their siblings, as stress from parental disputes spills over into sibling interactions. Conversely, others may develop increased emotional closeness with their siblings, using these relationships as a source of emotional security and support in response to family tensions (Davies et al., 2022; Kramer, 2010). Although sibling relationships are not the primary focus of the present study, acknowledging their role within the broader family system provides a more comprehensive understanding of how family dynamics influence child emotion regulation.

In order to capture a more comprehensive perspective on a child's emotional regulation and discover what kind of developmental pathways the mothers and fathers have a role in, conducting a dyadic analysis will be more appropriate. Hence, this study aimed to investigate different family dynamics from both mothers' and fathers' perceptions.

Parent Self-Compassion and Child Emotion Regulation

Parents, as social agents in the immediate environment of children, are the main drivers for child development. Parents, as part of the family system, acquire personal well-being to initiate and sustain healthy within-family functioning (Ford & Gross, 2018). For example, parents' psychological well-being is the greatest predictor of children's psychological well-being (Newland, 2015). It affects children directly and indirectly by influencing the entire family system, such as their parenting skills, coparenting, and family resiliency (Regalado et al., 2004). A burgeoning body of research included in the meta-analysis of Zessin and his colleagues (2015) proposes that one of the important contributors to individuals' psychological well-being is self-compassion. Self-compassion is defined as "offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies, and failures", "not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness" (Neff, 2003a, p. 87). When experiencing personal failure or emotional hardship, self-compassion manifests itself with three components: (a) self-kindness—approaching oneself with kindness and understanding as opposed to self-criticism and harsh judgment, (b) common humanity—recognizing that challenges and emotional difficulties are common to everyone as opposed to feeling alone and isolating oneself, and (c) mindfulness—responding to difficult emotions with balanced awareness as opposed to emotionally overwhelming or suppressing (Neff, 2003a). These are actually emotion regulation strategies (e.g., awareness and acceptance of emotions) that are consciously activated in order not to be dragged along by an emotional "tornado." Relatedly, in several studies, self-compassion was found to be an important contributor to adaptive emotion regulation for clinical and nonclinical adult populations (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018).

Fundamental beliefs about emotions are a factor that shapes parents' emotion regulation and determines whether they initiate extrinsic emotion regulation processes with their children (De Castella et al., 2013). Ford and Gross (2018) suggest that when individuals have the ability to evaluate the emotions within the frame of the context -whether useful or harmful- and believe in the controllability of emotions rather than uncontrollability, this impacts their emotion regulation processes, as well as predicts the way they encourage children's emotion regulation. Since self-compassion adopts an attitude that approaches one's own negative emotions with understanding and responds to them mindfully, this may affect how parents perceive and direct their children's emotions in stressful situations. Self-compassionate parents may be more accepting of the difficult emotions of their children as they are of their emotions. Therefore, the parents' self-compassion may help children cope with the difficulties by initiating extrinsic emotion regulation processes due to its potential contribution to fundamental positive beliefs about emotions.

As the previous literature suggests, one of the important predictors of children's ability to regulate emotions and exhibit appropriate responses to emotional experiences is how parents regulate their emotional arousal (Denham et al., 1997). Observing and modeling parents are essential learning mechanisms for children (Morris et al., 2007). Children reference their parents in emotion-eliciting situations in order to know how to interpret the situation and respond (Hajal & Paley, 2020). For example, children of anxious parents become more fearful, and due to parents' transmission of anxiety, these children elicit increased negative reactions in novel and ambiguous situations (Aktar & Bögels, 2017). Because self-compassion is a useful coping strategy against distressing feelings (Neff, 2003a), the self-compassion of parents may reinforce children's development of emotion regulation mechanisms through observation of handling difficult emotions (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). However, the link between parents' self-compassion and children's emotion regulation skills is unexplored.

Given that the current study will explore both mothers and fathers' self-compassion pertaining to children's emotion regulation, it is important to understand whether there are gender differences in self-compassion. Findings from previous work suggest that women report less self-compassion than men (Yarnell et al., 2015). Women are found to be more self-critical and use more poor coping self-talk than men (DeVore & Pritchard, 2013), whereas using positive self-talk is one of the strategies that enhance individuals' self-compassion (Georgakaki & Karakasidou, 2017).

Children also display differences in their emotion regulation depending on their gender. Research suggests that gender differences in emotion regulation emerge early in development, with girls generally exhibiting more advanced regulatory abilities compared to boys. Girls tend to demonstrate greater use of adaptive ER strategies, such as seeking social support and cognitive reappraisal, while boys are more likely to display externalizing behaviors and rely on less effective strategies, such as avoidance or impulsivity (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014).

Coparenting Relationship and Child Emotion Regulation

Coparenting as part of the family system is an aspect of interparental relationships that involves parents'/parental figures' sharing responsibility for child-rearing, supporting (or undermining) each other's parenting, and collaborating with each other. It excludes romantic and sexual aspects of a couple's relationship and refers to how parents handle the childrearing duties together (Feinberg, 2002). Coparenting is investigated in three dimensions: (a) cooperation—supporting each other's parenting and exchanging information regarding the child, (b) conflict—parents' dispute about principles and demands in child-rearing, and (c) triangulation—dragging the child into interparental conflict and leading the child to take the side of one parent (Pinquart & Teubert, 2015). The present study adopts the three-dimensional framework of coparenting as conceptualized by Pinquart and Teubert (2015), which identifies cooperation, conflict, and triangulation as core aspects of the coparenting relationship. Coparenting relationship is central to family functioning and has a stronger impact on parents' parenting and child outcomes than other aspects of interparental relationships, such as marital relationships (Feinberg, 2003). It is described as "the executive subsystem" regulating different family subsystems by family system theorist S. Minuchin (1974, p. 145). Cooperation in their parental role leads both parents to a warmer, more committed, and communicative relationship with their children, as well as predicts higher social-emotional functioning in children, such as self-esteem and positive play behavior with peers, compared to children with uncooperative parents (Camara & Resnick, 1989). A meta-analysis examining the effect of coparenting on children revealed its significant role in changes in children's psychological adjustment (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010).

Children observe how parents interact with each other and handle problematic situations. They are a constant audience of their parents' relationships, disagreements, and reconciliations (or lack there of) (Minuchin, 1985). Exposure of children to unsolved, hostile, and frequent interparental conflicts has detrimental impacts on the development of children. In this kind of environment, children observe aggression as a way to deal with interpersonal discordance. As a result, coparenting conflict and triangulation appear to be contributing factors to the development of externalizing and internalizing symptoms in children, which are associated with

emotion regulation problems (Halligan et al., 2013; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Experiencing hostile parental interactions also constitutes a risk factor for children by decreasing their sense of security in their immediate environment, which is crucial for buffering the outcome of anxiety-arousing situations (Bowlby, 1973). Reduced sense of emotional security weakens children's ability to cope effectively with daily stresses and display emotional and behavioral regulation (Davies & Cummings, 1994). While these studies reveal the influence of negative coparenting relationships on children's functioning, which results in emotion dysregulation, positive and supportive coparenting relationship was found to be positively associated with children's emotion regulation abilities (Park & Nahm, 2015; Qian et al., 2020).

Previous work has shown that mothers and fathers differ in their coparenting practices (Acar et al., 2022; Therbon, 2004). The divergence in coparenting may be more salient in patriarchal cultures, given parenting roles of mothers and fathers are distinctly determined (Seward & Rush, 2015; Therbon, 2004). From this point of view, mothers' and fathers' coparenting could be differently related to children's emotion regulation (Brown et al., 2010). Nevertheless, studies investigating the distinctive influence of mothers' and fathers' perceived coparenting relationship on child outcomes have been limited.

Bringing All Together: Indirect Association from Parents' Self-Compassion to Children's Emotion Regulation through Coparenting Relations

As family systems theory suggests, there are many components in the social context of a child that affect the development of emotion regulation. The subsystems and individuals in the family cannot be considered as independent entities. That is, different subsystems (e.g., parent–child subsystem, couple subsystem) affect each other within and across levels. Individuals in the family are a system all by itself, as well (Cox & Paley, 1997). Therefore, the psychological state of parents determines how they affect other individuals and subsystems (Regalado et al., 2004; Williams, 2018). As a significant contributor to parents' psychological well-being (Zessin et al., 2015), self-compassion was found to contribute to within-family functioning, including parental warmth, greater emotional awareness of child's emotional states and self-regulation in the parenting relationship (Gouveia et al., 2016). These are important parental attitudes for children to acquire adaptive emotion regulation abilities (Cassidy, 1994). Also, previous studies revealed that children of mindful parents, which is associated with parents' self-compassion, exhibit higher adaptive emotion regulation (Zhang et al., 2019). Therefore, each parent's self-compassion, as an aspect of their psychological well-being, may contribute to the development of children's emotion regulation by shaping the emotional climate of the family and influencing parenting behaviors.

Although the self-compassion of parents may be influential on child outcomes, it may be an underlying mechanism for supporting or inhibiting interparental relationships within a family (Regalado et al., 2004). In detail, considering the interdependence across family systems, the parents also determine the quality of couple subsystems (Cox & Paley, 2003). Individual characteristics and psychological states of mothers and fathers are significant in predicting their coparenting quality (McDaniel et al., 2018). In the current study, we examine self-compassion as an important aspect of parental functioning and its impact on both parents' coparenting relationship, which represents the interparental subsystem. This subsystem is recognized as one of the most influential couple systems affecting children's development (Camara & Resnick, 1989; Minuchin, 1974). However, we acknowledge that positive couple relationships do not automatically lead to positive coparenting dynamics, as these two aspects of the parental relationship can function independently. Overall, parents' psychological well-being is important for the quality of interparental relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013); the self-compassion of individuals may also predict a more positive coparenting relationship reported by themselves because self-compassionate people view the couple relationship more positively and feel happier in the relationship than individuals with low self-compassion (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Further, self-compassionate individuals were found to have more empathic concern for others, which refers to considering others' well-being, such as they do to themselves (Neff & Pommier, 2013). Therefore, a self-compassionate individual may support their partner more in coparenting regarding their partner's well-being, which may lead the partner to perceive and report a better coparenting relationship.

Overall, dynamics in the couple subsystem are substantial for children's healthy functioning. Although findings from previous studies suggested that a coparenting relationship could contribute to children's emotion regulation (Park & Nahm, 2015; Qian et al., 2020), the dyadic approach that involves both parents' perception of a coparenting relationship has not yet been examined. Therefore, we will examine the coparenting reported by both mother and father predicting children's emotion regulation. More specifically, we will examine the impact of both parents' self-compassion on children's emotion regulation by testing the mediator effect of the coparenting relationship.

The Current Study

The current study extends previous research by examining how various family subsystems, such as parents' self-compassion and coparenting relationships, contribute to the children's

emotion regulation. While the role of parents' self-compassion in family and parenthood studies is relatively new, its impact on child emotion regulation and coparenting relationships remains unexplored. Parents' self-compassion can potentially mitigate the negative effects of adverse family experiences by reducing emotional stress, thereby promoting healthy family relationships and functioning (Lathren et al., 2020, 2021).

Prior studies on parental roles in child outcomes often neglected fathers due to data collection challenges and fathers' reluctance to participate. Mothers have typically been treated as the primary caregivers, but relying solely on mother reports provides an incomplete view of children's functioning and their environment. This study considers both mothers' and fathers' perspectives on coparenting relationships and self-compassion, exploring how the self-compassion levels of both parents influence the family dynamics and the child. This approach allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the child's family environment and how these patterns may differ or converge for both parents.

Furthermore, mothers and fathers perceive children's emotional states differently. Therefore, by examining child emotion regulation through reports from both parents, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the distinct pathways related to self-compassion and coparenting relationships (Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007; Morey & Gentrzler, 2017).

This study, grounded in family systems theory and Morris et al.'s (2007) emotion regulation model, investigates how parents' self-compassion and coparenting relationships contribute to the children's emotion regulation. We focus on the indirect effects of parents' self-compassion on children's emotion regulation via coparenting relationships. To address the purpose of the current study, we hypothesized that mothers' and fathers' self-compassion would be positively associated with children's emotion regulation (H1). We posited that there would be a positive association between mothers' and fathers' coparenting cooperation and children's emotion regulation, while coparenting conflict and triangulation would be negatively associated. (H2). Lastly, we hypothesized that high levels of self-compassion in mothers and fathers would lead to a supportive coparenting relationship (cooperation), which, in turn, could increase children's emotion regulation (H3a). Conversely, we expected that a lack of self-compassion might undermine partners' coparenting cooperation or induce negative effects of coparenting triangulation and conflict, adversely contributing to children's emotion regulation (H3b).

Method

Participants

Given the absence of prior research examining the proposed conceptual model, our determination of the required sample size drew from analogous previous studies (Breitenstein et al., 2017; van den Brink et al., 2018; Yuan, 2016) and a power analysis for the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) based on the work of Ackerman and Kenny (2016). This analysis was grounded in APIM power analyses, considering medium effect sizes (Actor: 0.29 and Partner: 0.20).

The sample encompassed 333 parental dyads with a child in early childhood, comprising 178 boys and 155 girls aged between 29 and 118 months ($M = 68.89$, $SD = 15.03$). All children were typically developing, with no special developmental or educational needs. In cases where parents had more than one child within this age range, both were instructed to provide information regarding the same child in early childhood. To create a family socioeconomic status (SES) variable, we averaged standardized monthly household income and educational level of parents (z-transformations). See Supplementary Table 1 for detailed demographic information of participants.

Measures

Child Emotion Regulation

We used the Emotion Regulation Subscale of the Emotion Regulation Checklist, which consists of 8 items (ERC; Shields & Cicchetti, 1997). The subscale consists of socially appropriate emotional displays (e.g., *"My child responds positively to neutral or friendly overtures by adults"*). Both parents reported the child's emotion regulation to capture the dyadic view of the children's emotion regulation. Parents rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 4 = *always*. We averaged the items to create the composite score, and higher scores indicated higher levels of emotion regulation. The Emotion Regulation Checklist has been used and validated among Turkish children (Yagmurlu & Altan, 2010). In the current research, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for the Emotion Regulation subscale reported by mothers was 0.65 and by fathers 0.63. Even though we found low internal consistency, these values were similar to previous studies ($\alpha = 0.62$ in Çelebi & Acar, 2024; $\alpha = 0.55$ in Seçer, 2017 and $\alpha = 0.59/0.66$ in Blandon et al., 2008).

Coparenting Relationship

To measure the quality of the coparenting relationship, The Coparenting Inventory for Parents with Preschoolers (CI-PP; Pinquart & Teubert, 2015), which consists of 12 items, was used. Both mothers and fathers reported their perception of coparenting quality in terms of three subscales: (a) cooperation (4 items) (e.g., *"If there is a problem with our child, we search for a solution together*"), (b) conflict (4 items) (e.g., "*My partner and I disagree on fulfilling our child's wishes*

and demands"), and (c) triangulation (4 items) (e.g., "*My partner and I discuss our problems regarding child-rearing in front of our child*"). Responses were given on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all true* and 4 = *completely true*). The Coparenting Inventory for Parents with Preschoolers has been used and validated among Turkish parents (Acar et al., 2021). We averaged the items to create the composite score, and higher scores indicated higher levels of that construct. In the current study, all dimensions showed satisfactory internal consistency for mothers and fathers (for mothers; cooperation: α = 0.83 & conflict: α = 0.75 & triangulation: α = 0.77; for fathers; cooperation: α = 0.78 & conflict α = 0.74 & triangulation: α = 0.74).

Self-Compassion of Parents

To measure parents' self-compassion, the Self-Compassion Scale: Short Form (SCS-SF; Raes et al., 2011), which is a shortened version of the long version by Neff (2003b), was used. The Turkish adaptation of SCS-SF was done by Yıldırım and Sarı (2018). The adapted version consists of one dimension and 11 items (e.g., "*When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need"*). We averaged the items to create the composite score, and higher scores indicated higher levels of self-compassion. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* and 5 = *always*). In the current study, the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) by mothers was 0.85 and by fathers 0.81, which indicates acceptable reliability.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethical approval for the study protocol was obtained from the Özyeğin University Research Ethics Committee. Couples with children in the early childhood years were contacted through online platforms, kindergartens, and primary schools. Qualtrics was used for online data collection by utilizing made-up matching codes for couples. Hardcopies of measures, along with consent forms, were distributed to parents via kindergartens and primary schools for in-person data collection. Completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher in an enclosed envelope in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. In online data collection, after filling out the informed consent form, participants were presented with the survey questions. Participation in this study was voluntary. Parents who had children with developmental disabilities were not included due to the nature and purpose of the study. For both online and hardcopy data collection, participants were asked to form a Couple ID to match the couples, which included a common nickname with a word, number, and punctuation.

Data Analytical Approach

Missing values ranged from 0.3 to 1.4% across variables. We conducted Little's (1988) MCAR (Missing Completely at Random) test, which resulted in $\chi 2\ (41) = 41.280$, $p = 0.458$. The result of the applied missing value analysis (MVA) demonstrated that the missing values were completely random. In addressing missing data, we employed Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) estimation, a robust statistical technique that harnesses all available information to provide unbiased parameter estimates (Enders, 2010). We analyzed the data in order to assess the multivariate outliers using the Mahalanobis Distance method (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). We found 7 outliers, $\chi 2\ (10, N = 368) = 35.5640$, $p = 0.0001$. After deleting the outliers, 361 parent dyads (722 participants) remained for further analysis. Also, in order to assess the normality assumption, we tested skewness and kurtosis. To meet the criteria for the assumption of normality, while the values of skewness are considered to be between + 2 and -2, the values of kurtosis are to be + 7 and -7 (Byrne, 2010; George & Mallery, 2019). See Table 1 for details.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

We performed Pearson's bivariate correlation to evaluate the associations between focal study variables, which were both parents' coparenting (cooperation, conflict, and triangulation), self-compassion, and both parents' report of their child's emotion regulation, as well as demographics (i.e., child age, sex, and family SES). See Table 1 for detailed correlation results.

Actor–Partner Interdependence Models (APIM)

In this study, we used the actor–partner interdependence model (APIM) to investigate the actor and partner effects of study variables, as well as to show the interdependence between partners (Cook & Kenny, 2005). We examined the relationship between both parents' self-compassion (predictor variable) and the emotion regulation of children in early childhood (outcome variable). To analyze the APIM model, we employed the structural equation model and the program lavaan by using a website which enables to conduct dyadic data analysis, APIM_SEM (Rosseel, 2012; Stas et al., 2018) (see https://apimsem.ugent.be/shiny/apim_sem/). In the current study, we only conducted one APIM model analysis.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Self-Compassion													
1. Mothers	-												
2. Fathers	.33**	-											
Coparenting Cooperation													
3. Mothers	.29**	.14**	-										
4. Fathers	.21**	.20**	.65**	-									
Coparenting Conflict													
5. Mothers	−.41**	−.22**	−.48**	−.43**	-								
6. Fathers	−.29**	−.33**	−.41**	−.49**	.62**	-							
Coparenting Triangulation													
7. Mothers	−.30**	−.22**	−.41**	−.34**	.56**	.42**	-						
8. Fathers	−.22**	−.33**	−.29**	−.29**	.44**	.50**	.68**	-					
Child Emotion Regulation													
9. Mother reported	.21**	.22**	.23**	.26**	−.18**	−.17**	−.09	−.10	-				
10. Father reported	.17**	.27**	.21**	.26**	−.24**	−.24**	−.17**	−.18**	.68**	-			
Demographics													
11. Child age	.04	.05	−.03	−.04	.06	.08	.02	.06	−.04	−.01	-		
12. Family SES	.07	.07	.02	.05	−.11*	−.12*	−.07	−.09	.18**	.11*	−.27**	-	
13. Child Sex	−.03	−.00	.08	.03	−.02	.00	−.02	−.02	−.03	−.00	.07	−.12*	-
N	332	332	333	333	333	333	333	333	332	330	333	332	333
Mean	3.44	3.62	3.63	3.65	1.90	1.81	1.38	1.36	3.31	3.28	68.89	−.026	
SD	.679	.64	.50	.44	.67	.65	.48	.48	.40	.39	15.93	.88	
Min–Max	1.27–5.00	1.18–5.00	1.50–4.00	2.00–4.00	1.00–3.75	1.00–3.75	1.00–3.00	1.00–3.75	2.00–4.00	2.13–4.00	36–96	− 2.45 -2.00	
Skewness	−.212	−.487	− 1.62	− 1.52	.460	.542	1.44	1.61	−.629	−.461	−.216	−.751	
Kurtosis	.004	.495	2.15	1.99	−.580	−.549	1.62	2.68	.077	−.318	− 1.07	−.126	

*=p < .05, **=p < .01 (two-tailed). Child sex (girls = 1, boys = 0)

SES Socioeconomic Status

Association Between Parents' Self-Compassion and Child's Emotion Regulation reported by Both Parents

The association between parents' self-compassion and their child's emotion regulation was tested through the APIM model using APIM_SEM (Stas et al., 2018).

Firstly, in order to test if the sex of parents makes a statistically meaningful difference, a model comparison was performed between a model with distinguishable members and a model with indistinguishable members. This overall test of distinguishability yielded a chi-square statistic with 8 degrees of freedom, which equals 25.76 ($p < 0.001$). Because this test of distinguishability was statistically significant, we concluded that members could be statistically distinguished based on their sex.

The actor effect for the Mothers is equal to 0.090 ($p = 0.007$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.15]). The overall standardized effect for the Mothers is 0.148 (partial $r = 0.157$). The actor effect for the Fathers is equal to 0.144 ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.21]), and the overall standardized actor effect for the Fathers is 0.238 (partial $r = 0.229$). When tested if the two actor effects are equal, the difference was found not to be statistically significant, $p = 0.298$, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.05]. The overall actor effect is equal to 0.117 and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.16]). See Fig. 1 for details.

Thirdly, the partner effect from Fathers to Mothers is equal to 0.098, which is statistically significant (p = 0.004, 95% CI [0.03, 0.17]), and its overall standardized effect is 0.162 (partial $r = 0.161$). The partner effect from Mothers to Fathers is equal to 0.050 and is not statistically significant ($p = 0.129$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.11]), and its overall standardized partner effect is 0.082 (partial $r = 0.095$). When tested if the two partner effects were equal, the difference was found not to be statistically significant ($p = 0.356$, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.15]). The overall partner effect is equal to 0.074 and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.12]). See Supplementary Table 2 for detailed parameters.

Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (APIMeM)

In this section, the results of the three dyadic mediation models are presented. The first model examines parents' self-compassion as a predictor, with coparenting cooperation as the mediator and the child's emotion regulation as the outcome. The second model investigates parents' self-compassion as a predictor, utilizing coparenting conflict as the mediator and the child's emotion regulation as the outcome. Lastly, the third model explores parents' self-compassion as a predictor, employing coparenting triangulation as the mediator, with the child's emotion regulation as the outcome.

In order to conduct APIMeM analyses, we used MEDYAD macro on SPSS 25.0 developed by Coutts et al. (2019). The current study includes three actor and three partner indirect effects.

Association Between Parent Self-Compassion and Child Emotion Regulation via Coparenting Cooperation

Direct Effects

The unstandardized direct effect estimates for the APIMeM with parents' self-compassion as the predictor and child emotion regulation as the outcome via coparenting cooperation are presented in Fig. 2.

The direct effect of mothers' self-compassion on child emotion regulation reported by both the mother ($b = 0.060$, $p = 0.06$) and the father ($b = 0.026$, $p = 0.42$) was not significant. Unlike mothers' self-compassion, fathers' self-compassion was significantly and positively associated with child emotion regulation, reported by both the mother ($b = 0.083$,

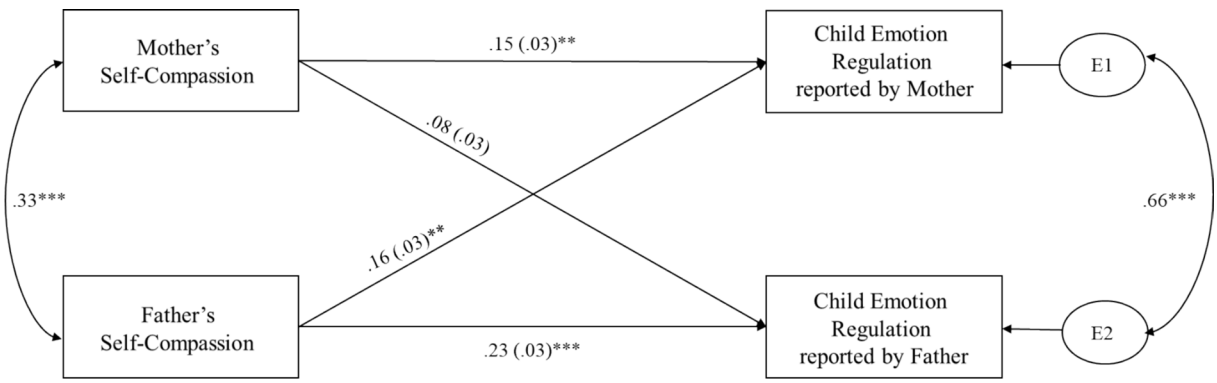


Fig. 1 Basic Saturated APIM with Child Emotion Regulation as an Outcome and Parent Self-Compassion as a Predictor Variable. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed). Standardized coefficients are presented. Family SES was a covariate in the model

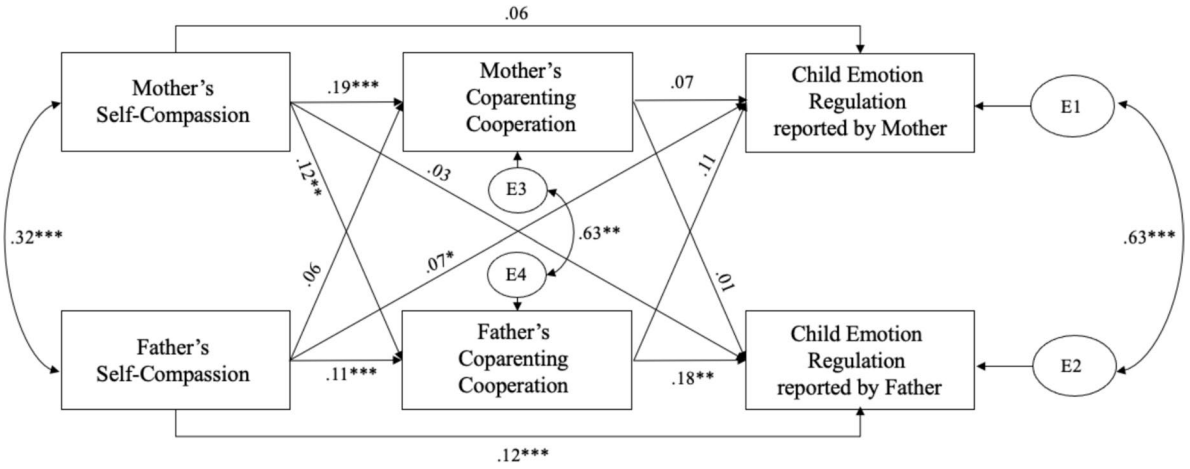


Fig. 2 Parent Self-Compassion and Child Emotion Regulation via Coparenting Cooperation. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed). Family SES was a covariate in the model

$p = 0.01$) and the father ($b = 0.151$, $p = 0.01$). See Fig. 2 for complete results.

Indirect Effects

As seen in Table See Table 2, we only found one indirect actor effect. The indirect fathers' actor effect of their own self-compassion on their report of child emotion regulation through their coparenting cooperation was significant ($b = 0.015$, 95% *CI* [0.001, 0.038]). However, other indirect actor effects were not significant. There was one indirect partner effect. Mothers' self-compassion was indirectly associated with father-reported child emotion regulation through fathers' coparenting cooperation ($b = 0.016$,95% *CI* [0.002, 0.034]). See Table 2 for all estimated parameters.

Association Between Parent Self-compassion and Child Emotion Regulation via Coparenting Conflict

Direct Effects

The unstandardized direct effect estimates for the APIMeM with parents' self-compassion as the predictor and child emotion regulation as the outcome via coparenting conflict are presented in Fig. 3.

The direct effect of mothers' self-compassion on child emotion regulation reported by the mother (b = 0.074, p = 0.03) was significant; however, this was not true for father-reported emotion regulation ($b = 0.013$, $p = 0.39$) was not significant. Fathers' self-compassion was significantly and positively associated with child emotion regulation, reported by both the mother ($b = 0.089$, $p = 0.01$) and the father ($b = 0.125$, $p < 0.001$). See Fig. 3 for complete results.

Table 2 Unstandardized indirect effect estimates of coparenting cooperation between parents' self-compassion as the predictor variable of child emotion regulation

Indirect effects	Estimate	95% *CI*
Mothers actor-actor: *X1* → *M1* → *Y1*	.015	−.010, .041
Fathers to Mothers actor-partner: *X2* → *M2* → Y1	.012	−.002, .035
Mothers to Fathers actor-partner: *X1* → *M1* → Y2	.008	−.013, .031
Fathers actor-actor: *X2* → *M2* → *Y2*	.015	**.001, .038**
Mothers partner-partner: *X1* → *M2* → *Y1*	.013	−.002, .032
Fathers to Mothers partner-actor: *X2* → *M1* → Y1	.003	−.004, .017
Mothers to Fathers partner-actor: *X1* → *M2* → Y2	.016	**.002, .034**
Fathers partner-partner: *X2* → *M1* → *Y2*	.001	−.005, .011

X1 Mother self-compassion, *M1* Mother coparenting cooperation, *Y1* Child emotion regulation reported by mother, *X2* Father self-compassion, *M2* Father coparenting cooperation, *Y2* Child emotion regulation reported by father, *CI* Confidence interval

Bold values represent significant confidence intervals (A confidence interval is significant as it does not include zero)

Indirect Effects

As seen in Table 3, the actor and partner effects of parent self-compassion on child emotion regulation through coparenting conflict were found to be nonsignificant. See Table 4 for all estimated parameters.

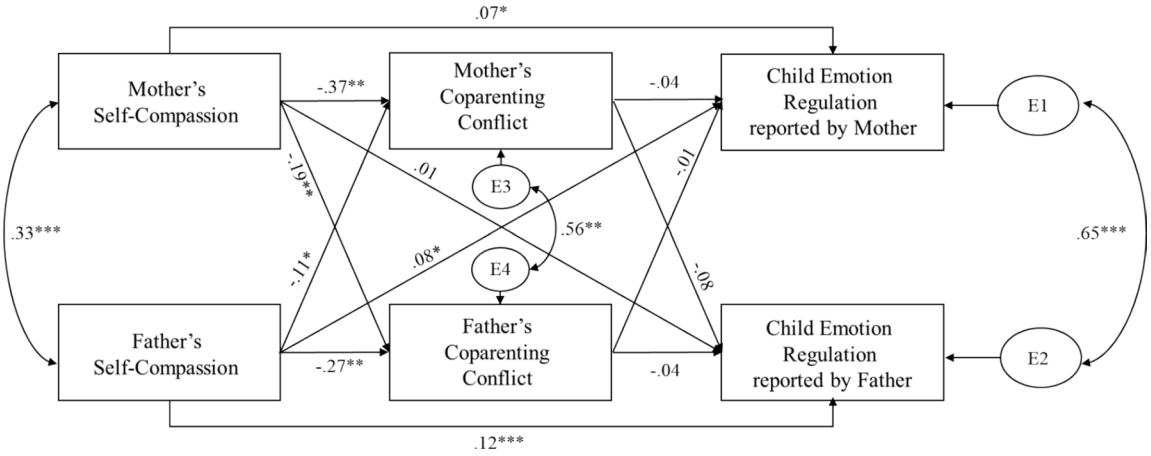


Fig. 3 Parent Self-Compassion and Child Emotion Regulation via Coparenting Conflict. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed). Family SES was a covariate in the model

Table 3 Unstandardized indirect effect estimates of coparenting conflict between parents' self-compassion as the predictor variable of child emotion regulation

Indirect effects	Estimate	95% *CI*
Mothers actor-actor: *X1* → *M1* → *Y1*	.015	−.016, .049
Fathers to Mothers actor-partner: *X2* → *M2* → Y1	.004	−.021, .030
Mothers to Fathers actor-partner: *X1* → *M1* → Y2	.029	−.000, .064
Fathers actor-actor *X2* → *M2* → *Y2*	.011	−.011, .037
Mothers partner-partner: *X1* → *M2* → *Y1*	.003	−.014, .022
Fathers to Mothers partner-actor: *X2* → *M1* → Y1	.004	−.005, .019
Mothers to Fathers partner-actor: *X1* → *M2* → Y2	.008	−.008, .026
Fathers partner-partner: *X2* → *M1* → *Y2*	.009	−.007, .025

X1 Mother self-compassion, *M1* Mother coparenting conflict, *Y1* Child emotion regulation reported by mother; *X2* Father self-compassion, *M2* Father coparenting conflict, *Y2* Child emotion regulation reported by father, *CI* Confidence interval

Association Between Parent Self-Compassion and Child Emotion Regulation via Coparenting Triangulation

Direct Effects

The unstandardized direct effect estimates for the APIMeM with parents' self-compassion as the predictor and child emotion regulation as the outcome via coparenting triangulation are presented in Fig. 4.

Mothers' self-compassion was significantly negatively associated with their coparenting triangulation ($b = -0.171$, $p < 0.001$), as well as fathers' coparenting triangulation ($b = -0.090$, $p = 0.02$). Similarly, fathers' self-compassion was significantly negatively associated with their own coparenting triangulation ($b = -0.226$, $p < 0.001$), as well as mothers' coparenting triangulation ($b = -0.104$, $p = 0.01$). See Fig. 4 for complete results.

Indirect Effects

As seen in Table 4, the actor and partner effects of parent self-compassion on child emotion regulation through coparenting triangulation were found to be nonsignificant. See Table 4 for all estimated parameters.

Sensitivity Analysis

The sensitivity of the results in the current study was assessed by excluding four divorced couples from the analysis to determine their impact on the findings. The removal of these four couples did not alter the significance of the results in both the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) and the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with Mediation (APIMEM). This indicates that the inclusion of these four couples in the analysis did not influence the outcomes; thus, the results reported include these couples as part of the sample.

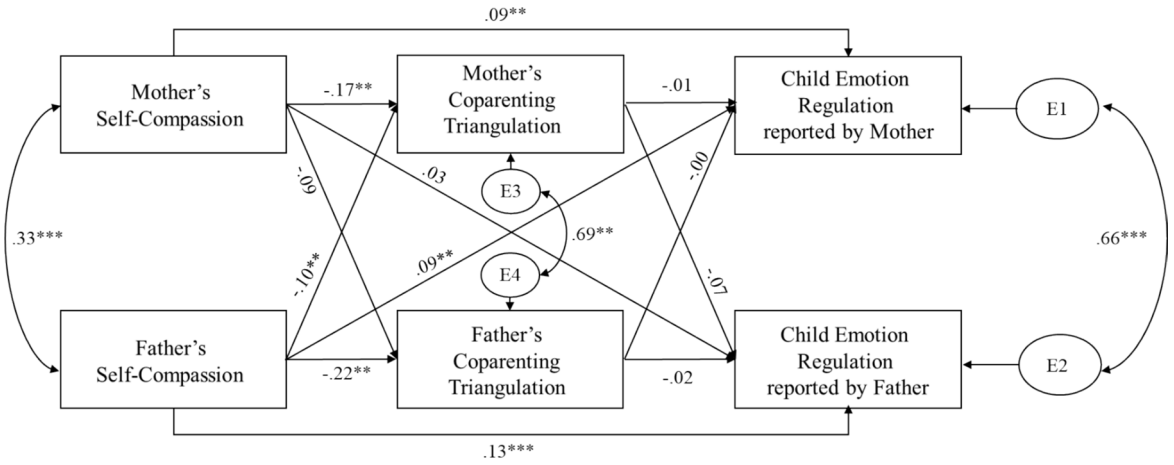


Fig. 4 Parent Self-Compassion and Child Emotion Regulation via Coparenting Triangulation. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed). Family SES was a covariate in the model

Table 4 Unstandardized indirect effect estimates of coparenting triangulation between parents' self-compassion as the predictor variable of child emotion regulation

Indirect effects	Estimate	95% *CI*
Mothers actor-actor: *X1* → *M1* → *Y1*	.001	−.022, .024
Fathers to Mothers actor-partner: *X2* → *M2* → Y1	−.001	−.030, .027
Mothers to Fathers actor-partner: *X1* → *M1* → Y2	.012	−.008, .034
Fathers actor-actor: *X2* → *M2* → *Y2*	.006	−.024, .036
Mothers partner-partner: *X1* → *M2* → *Y1*	−.001	−.014, .011
Fathers to Mothers partner-actor: *X2* → *M1* → Y1	−.001	−.030, .027
Mothers to Fathers partner-actor: *X1* → *M2* → Y2	.002	−.011, .016
Fathers partner-partner: *X2* → *M1* → *Y2*	.007	−.004, .028

X1 Mother self-compassion, *M1* Mother coparenting triangulation, *Y1* Child emotion regulation reported by mother, *X2* Father self-compassion, *M2* Father coparenting triangulation, *Y2* Child emotion regulation reported by father, *CI* Confidence interval

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the associations between parents' self-compassion and children's emotion regulation in early childhood with the mediating role of the coparenting relationship in a dyadic lens. The current study mainly investigated whether parents' self-compassion has a direct effect on children's emotion regulation and whether parents' self-compassion has an indirect effect on children's emotion regulation through the coparenting relationship. Examining both mothers and fathers within a dyadic analysis revealed the unique actor and partner effects.

Parents' Self-Compassion and Children's Emotion Regulation

In this study, fathers reported higher levels of self-compassion compared to mothers, a consistent finding supported by Yarnell and colleagues' meta-analysis (2015), which revealed higher self-compassion in males than females. Concerning the association between parents' self-compassion and child emotion regulation, both mothers' and fathers' self-compassion demonstrated a direct positive impact on their respective reports of child emotion regulation. This finding aligns with the notion that both parents significantly contribute to their child's emotion regulation abilities, as suggested by prior research (Yarnell et al., 2015).

Defined as an individual's approach to emotions in challenging situations, self-compassion may shape how parents respond to their children's emotional expressions, thereby influencing children's emotion regulation development. Parents with higher self-compassion tend to exhibit more positive attitudes toward their children's emotions, fostering a supportive environment for emotional expression and regulation (Neff, 2003a). Conversely, lower self-compassion may lead to a more critical approach when children express negative emotions, hindering emotion regulation development (Snyder et al., 2003).

The study further explored partner effects, revealing a significant association from fathers' self-compassion to mother-reported child emotion regulation. However, the reverse, from mothers' self-compassion to father-reported child emotion regulation, was not significant. This aligns with prior research indicating that mothers and fathers may approach their children's emotions differently, with children often feeling more comfortable expressing emotions to mothers due to their encouragement and engagement in emotional interactions (Klimes-Dougan et al., 2007; Morey

& Gentrzler, 2017). The partner effect from fathers' self-compassion influencing mothers' perception of higher child emotion regulation highlights the importance of fathers' individual characteristics in shaping mothers' assessments of their children (Neff, 2003a).

Overall, this study underscores the significance of both parents' self-compassion in influencing children's emotion regulation and emphasizes the potential impact of fathers' self-compassion on mothers' perceptions of their children's emotional well-being. The findings contribute to our understanding of the dyadic dynamics between parental self-compassion and child emotion regulation in the family context.

Coparenting Relationship and Child Emotion Regulation

Father's coparenting cooperation demonstrated a significant association with father-reported emotion regulation, somewhat aligning with prior research emphasizing the positive impact of cooperative coparenting on child outcomes (Feinberg, 2003; McHale et al., 2002). However, no significant association was found between the father's coparenting cooperation and mother-reported emotion regulation, suggesting potential differences in parental perceptions within the coparenting context (Acar et al., 2022; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). In contrast, the mother's coparenting cooperation did not exhibit a significant association with either father-reported or mother-reported emotion regulation. This finding may be influenced by factors such as maternal sensitivity or direct caregiving practices, which can independently contribute to mothers' assessments of their child's emotion regulation (Kiel & Kalomiris, 2015).

The mother's and father's coparenting conflict was not a significant predictor of child emotion regulation, as reported by both mothers and fathers. One possible interpretation is that coparenting conflict, while certainly relevant to the family dynamic, may not directly impact emotion regulation in children in the way it is often conceptualized in existing research. It is possible that the nature or intensity of the coparenting conflict, as experienced by both parents, may not have been strong enough in this sample to produce a measurable effect on children's emotion regulation abilities. Alternatively, the way in which coparenting conflict is reported (i.e., mothers' and fathers' perceptions) might not fully capture the nuances of how these dynamics influence children. For instance, children may be more resilient or capable of regulating their emotions despite parental discord, particularly if they are provided with other forms of emotional support (e.g., from extended family members, peers, or caregivers).

The results unveiled a non-significant relationship between both fathers and mothers' triangulation coparenting and the reported child emotion regulation by both fathers and mothers. This finding suggests that the level of triangulation dynamics within the coparenting relationship, as perceived by both parents, does not have a discernible contribution to their evaluations of their child's emotion regulation skills. This outcome diverges from previous research emphasizing the importance of coparenting dynamics in shaping various aspects of child development, including emotional regulation (Grych & Fincham, 1990; McHale et al., 2002). The lack of a significant association could be that the triangulation may not reach a discernible level, so it does not predict parents' joint assessments of the child's emotional regulation abilities.

Indirect Effects

In this study, we examined the mediating role of coparenting dimensions (cooperation, conflict, and triangulation) between parents' self-compassion and their report of child emotion regulation.

To begin, the findings revealed that mothers' self-compassion indirectly contributed to father-reported child emotion regulation through fathers' coparenting cooperation. Similarly, fathers' self-compassion had an indirect influence on their assessment of child emotion regulation through their own coparenting cooperation. These results suggest that the self-compassion of both mothers and fathers may have a positive impact on a child's emotion regulation by enhancing fathers' engagement in coparenting. Previous research has shown that self-compassion can lead men to exhibit more positive and supportive behaviors within their romantic relationships (Neff & Beretvas, 2013). Therefore, fathers with high levels of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a) are more likely to be understanding and cooperative with their coparenting partner. Additionally, when mothers practice self-compassion, they may approach their partner with greater kindness rather than being critical. This, in turn, could encourage fathers to be more cooperative in matters related to child-rearing.

Combining these results, we found that fathers' coparenting cooperation mediated the association between both parents' self-compassion and child emotion regulation, while mothers' coparenting conflict played a mediating role. This observation aligns with existing literature underscoring the significance of fathers' cooperation and involvement in children's emotional development (Brown et al., 2010; Harris, 2010). The influence of mothers' attitudes towards fathers emerges as a crucial factor, impacting fathers' parenting practices and the quality of the coparenting relationship. Specifically, mothers' criticism towards fathers significantly affects fathers' involvement and coparenting quality (Olsavsky et al., 2020; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). Given that self-compassion involves responding to failures or hardships with kindness rather than self-criticism (Neff, 2003a),

parents' self-compassion levels may shape their approach to their partners, fostering kindness or criticism.

Gender differences in interparental relationships further elucidate the findings. Men, particularly when criticized, tend to withdraw during couple conflict, while women are more inclined to address and resolve issues (Baucom et al., 2010; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). This may explain the observed significant mediating effect of mothers' conflict report and the non-significant effect of fathers' conflict report, suggesting that mothers may actively seek resolution, potentially bringing more issues to light, while fathers may withdraw, contributing to a lower reported conflict.

On another note, the significant mediating effect of fathers' reports of cooperation and the non-significant effect of mothers' reports of cooperation could be attributed to fathers reporting higher levels of involvement in childcare than mothers. Additionally, fathers' cooperation in the coparenting relationship seems to be more influenced by their relationship with mothers compared to the reciprocal influence of mothers (Kuo et al., 2017). Therefore, mothers' attitudes shaped by their self-compassion level may hold more weight in fathers' perception of cooperation than fathers' attitudes to mothers' perception.

Although the present study does not specifically examine the effects of siblings or child gender on emotion regulation, it is important to acknowledge the potential contributions of siblings and child gender on emotion regulation. Parallel to the current association between child gender and their emotion regulation, previous study showed that girls tended to exhibit more advanced emotion regulation skills compared to boys, using strategies such as seeking social support and cognitive reappraisal more frequently. In contrast, boys may exhibit higher rates of externalizing behaviors and rely on less effective strategies, such as impulsivity or avoidance (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014). In addition, one should consider that sibling relationships can play a significant role in shaping children's emotional regulation. Sibling interactions in families with multiple children provide additional opportunities for emotional learning and practice. Siblings may act as models for adaptive or maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, and sibling rivalry or support can influence emotional outcomes (Kramer, 2010). For instance, older siblings may help younger siblings navigate emotional challenges, promoting the development of emotional competence, while sibling conflict may also serve as a context for the development of maladaptive regulation strategies.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The current study made significant contributions to the existing literature by addressing gaps in our understanding of the relationship between parents' self-compassion, coparenting relationships, and their influence on children's emotion regulation during early childhood. This study addresses a notable gap in the existing literature by examining the simultaneous contributions of both mothers' and fathers' self-compassion on coparenting relationships and children's emotion regulation. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has explored these associations, making this research a valuable addition to the field.

A key strength of this study was the collection of data from both mothers and fathers, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the main study variables and enabling the examination of family dynamics and child development from a dyadic viewpoint. Additionally, the study delved into children's emotion regulation by investigating various family subsystems, including parents' psychological well-being (in the form of self-compassion) and the interparental relationship (coparenting). This expansion of knowledge added to the understanding of children's emotion regulation by uncovering the influence of both parents' self-compassion.

Notably, this study contributed to the fatherhood literature by shedding light on fathers' influence on coparenting relationships and children's emotional development. Even though the sample predominantly consisted of well-educated fathers, the findings indicated that fathers were linked to both their relationships with mothers and child outcomes.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents us from establishing causal relationships. Future research could benefit from conducting longitudinal studies to elucidate the direction of associations between parents' self-compassion and coparenting relationships. Second, the use of self-reports to assess parents' self-compassion, the coparenting relationship, and children's emotion regulation may introduce bias. Utilizing observational methods could provide more objective and precise insights into how mothers' and fathers' self-compassion affects coparenting relationships and children's emotion regulation abilities. Third, the sample mainly consisted of well-educated families, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim for equal representation from all socioeconomic groups to ensure broader applicability. Fourthly, the study had a relatively small sample size, which affects its statistical power and representativeness. Examining the study variables with a larger sample size would enable more robust generalizations to the overall population. Finally, the internal consistency of the Emotion Regulation subscale of the Emotion Regulation Checklist was found to be low. Future research should consider additional scales for assessing children's emotion regulation to obtain more reliable results.

Implications of The Current Study

The findings of this study underscore the potential application of self-compassion enhancement in intervention

programs and family therapies to improve family dynamics and children's adjustment. Since the coparenting relationship serves as the "executive subsystem" within the family (Minuchin, 1974), its significance for child development cannot be overstated. By improving parents' self-compassion, couples can cultivate a more cooperative coparenting relationship and foster their children's development of adaptive emotion regulation skills. Moreover, coparenting interventions have proven effective in enhancing various aspects of family functioning, encompassing coparenting support, couple communication, positive parent–child interactions, parents' psychological well-being, and the emotional and physiological regulation of infants (Feinberg & Kan, 2008; Xiao & Loke, 2021). Consequently, nurturing the coparenting relationship stands as a pivotal intervention strategy capable of positively influencing various family dynamics and members, and this study highlights the potential of integrating parents' self-compassion improvement into coparenting intervention programs to strengthen this relationship.

Beyond enhancing family relationships, bolstering parents' self-compassion can have a preventive effect on expectant parents. Previous research suggests that the foundations of the coparenting relationship tend to remain stable over time (McHale, 2007), and this relationship significantly impacts a child's well-being (Feinberg, 2003). By enhancing the self-compassion of both mothers and fathers during the prenatal period, the study reveals a potential to reduce the intensity of conflict in the coparenting relationship and prevent the development of emotional dysregulation in the child. This research further emphasizes the role of both parents in shaping the couple's relationship and child development, challenging the prevailing practice of primarily targeting mothers in child development intervention programs. The study implies that fathers' influence on the family is equally substantial, consistent with previous literature advocating for the inclusion of both parents in intervention programs to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability and improve child outcomes (Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Pruett et al., 2017). Hence, this study provides evidence of the impact of both parents on family dynamics and child outcomes.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-01896-w.

Funding Open access funding provided by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK).

Data Availability The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request without breaching participant confidentiality.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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