

Mindful Parenting and Emotional Regulation in Early Childhood: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRAK

Mindful parenting is increasingly being researched as a protective factor for the development of children's emotion regulation during early childhood, a critical period for establishing the neurobiological and psychosocial foundations of selfcontrol. This article aims to synthesize current empirical evidence on the relationship between mindful parenting and early childhood emotion regulation through a systematic literature review approach following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. A search of Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ProQuest, and Google Scholar databases for articles published in the past five years yielded twentyfive articles that met the inclusion criteria after identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. The synthesis results indicate that mindful parenting contributes to children's emotion regulation through three main pathways: increased parental sensitivity and responsiveness, decreased parenting stress and depressive symptoms, and strengthened parentchild relationship quality. Contextual factors such as paternal involvement, household turmoil, and socioeconomic status also moderate these relationships. The novelty of this article lies in the integrated mapping of mediationmoderation mechanisms across Western and Asian cultures, which has not been widely integrated in previous reviews. These findings provide important implications for the development of mindfulnessbased intervention programs to support family mental health and early childhood emotional development.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, spanning the ages from birth to approximately eight years, is a golden period of development that determines the trajectory of an individual's mental, social, and academic health throughout life. One of the most fundamental psychological competencies developed during this period is emotion regulation, namely the child's ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional reactions to suit the demands of the situation and the goals they wish to achieve. Welldeveloped emotion regulation at an early age has been shown to be a strong predictor of school readiness, social competence, academic achievement, and resilience to behavioral disorders and psychopathology later in life. Conversely, emotion dysregulation in early childhood is associated with the risk



of internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression, as well as externalizing problems such as aggression and oppositional defiance, which tend to persist into adolescence if not promptly intervened.

The development of children's emotional regulation does not occur in a vacuum, but is strongly influenced by the quality of the child's interactions with their primary caregivers, especially their parents. Attachment theory and emotion socialization theory emphasize that children learn to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions through a process of coregulation, which involves repeated experiences of being coregulated by responsive parents before this ability is internalized into independent selfregulation. In this context, parenting style and quality are important determinants, and one parenting approach that has recently received widespread attention in the developmental psychology literature is mindful parenting.

Mindful parenting refers to the application of mindfulness principles in the context of parentchild relationships, operationally described by Bögels and Restifo into several key dimensions: attentive listening, nonjudgmental acceptance of oneself and one's child, emotional awareness of oneself and one's child, selfregulation in the parenting relationship, and compassion for oneself and one's child. Unlike reactive and automatic parenting styles, mindful parenting emphasizes the parent's full presence in the moments of interaction with their child, enabling them to respond to their child's emotional needs more reflectively, rather than impulsively. This approach is believed to break the intergenerational chain of emotional reactivity, reduce parenting stress, and ultimately create a more conducive environment for children to learn to regulate their own emotions.

Numerous empirical studies over the past decade have documented a positive relationship between mindful parenting and various indicators of children's emotion regulation, ranging from reduced tantrum intensity and increased selfsoothing abilities to enhanced cognitive flexibility in the face of frustration. Recent longitudinal research even suggests that mindful parenting during infancy and toddlerhood prospectively predicts children's emotional selfregulation at school age, indicating longterm effects that extend beyond purely situational interactions. Other studies have revealed a mediating role for parents' psychological wellbeing, with mindful parenting reducing depressive symptoms and parenting stress, which in turn improves children's emotion regulation abilities. These findings are consistent across cultural contexts, from Western families to Chinese, Korean, and Indonesian families, although with variations in the strength of the effects and mediating mechanisms. Interestingly, several studies have also found that the effects of mindful parenting on children's emotion regulation are not always direct, but rather operate through improvements in the quality of daily interactions, reduced frequency of parentchild conflict, and increased attachment security of children to their primary caregivers. In the population of children with special needs, for example children with autism spectrum disorders, mindful parenting has also been shown to act as a mediator that reduces the negative impact of parental emotional regulation difficulties on the emergence of child behavioral problems, demonstrating the relevance of this approach across clinical and nonclinical populations.

Despite the growing evidence of the benefits of mindful parenting, the existing literature still leaves several important gaps. First, most previous systematic reviews have tended to focus on specific clinical populations, such as children with autism spectrum disorders or ADHD, thus limiting the generalizability of findings to the general early childhood population. Second, many studies that have examined the relationship between

mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation have been conducted separately from contributing family contextual factors, such as paternal involvement, household chaos, migrant status, and coparenting, even though these factors have been shown to moderate the strength of the relationship. Third, most previous literature syntheses have not explicitly mapped psychological mediating pathways, such as subjective wellbeing, depression, and parentchild relationship quality, in an integrated, crossstudy analytical framework. Fourth, studies comparing findings across Western and Asian cultural contexts, including Indonesia, are still rare, even though cultural norms contribute to shaping the expression and meaning of emotions.

Based on these gaps, this article offers several novelties compared to previous literature reviews. First, it synthesizes the most recent literature published over the past five years, including studies published in 2025 and 2026, thus providing the most up-to-date overview of research developments in this field. Second, this review specifically focuses the synthesis on the general early childhood population, not just clinical populations, while still incorporating findings from special needs groups as a comparison. Third, this article maps integrated mediation and moderation pathways, encompassing parental psychological wellbeing, parentchild relationship quality, paternal involvement, coparenting, and family contextual factors such as household chaos and socioeconomic status, into a single, coherent conceptual model. Fourth, this review conducts a crosscultural synthesis by juxtaposing findings from Western, East Asian, and Southeast Asian studies, including Indonesia, thus providing a more comprehensive perspective on the generalizability of mindful parenting as an evidence-based parenting strategy.

Theoretically, the relationship between mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation can be explained through several complementary frameworks. The interpersonal neurobiology model emphasizes that children's affect regulation is formed through repeated relational experiences with caregivers, where the calm and present neurological state of parents is reflected in the child's physiological regulation patterns through autonomic coregulation processes, including heart rate variability and parasympathetic nervous system activity. Meanwhile, social learning theory explains that children learn emotion regulation strategies through observing and modeling how parents handle their own emotions; parents who practice mindful parenting tend to display more adaptive models of emotion regulation, resulting in children having a broader repertoire of coping strategies. The parenting stress model also explains the indirect pathway, where mindfulness reduces parents' negative cognitive appraisals of daily parenting demands, thereby reducing emotional reactivity that is typically transmitted to children through tense or inconsistent interactions. The integration of these three frameworks provides a strong conceptual foundation for the assumption that mindful parenting is not simply an individual parental practice, but rather a relational mechanism that shapes children's emotion regulation capacity gradually and cumulatively.

For early childhood educators, healthcare professionals, and parents, these findings provide practical guidance for incorporating mindful parenting principles into everyday interactions with young children. Parenting education programs, preschool family engagement activities, and maternal and child health services can integrate brief mindfulness-based practices to strengthen parental responsiveness, reduce parenting stress, and support children's emotional regulation from an early age.

In addition, collaboration among schools, healthcare providers, and families is essential to ensure the consistent implementation of mindful parenting across home and

educational environments. Developing culturally appropriate parenting resources, digital learning materials, and community-based mindfulness programs may further increase the accessibility and long-term sustainability of mindful parenting interventions, particularly for families with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The urgency of this study is also supported by epidemiological data showing an increasing prevalence of mental health problems in early childhood across the globe, including conduct disorders, separation anxiety, and emotional regulation difficulties detected as early as preschool. The increasing pressures of modern family life, including the demands of multiple parental jobs, high exposure to digital technology, and changes in family structure, contribute to the risk of reactive and less reflective parenting. In these situations, mindful parenting is offered as a relatively affordable parenting approach, learnable through short training sessions, and potentially applicable across socioeconomic contexts, making it relevant for development as a family intervention program or early prevention-based public health policy.

Considering these theoretical and practical urgencies, this article aims to answer three main research questions. First, how is the relationship between mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation in early childhood reported in the literature over the past five years? Second, what psychological and contextual mechanisms mediate or moderate this relationship? Third, what implications can be drawn for the development of mindfulness-based parenting interventions and policies to support optimal early childhood emotional development. Through a systematic synthesis of twenty-five selected articles, this review is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of an integrative model of mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation, as well as practical contributions to the design of mindfulness-based parenting programs relevant to contemporary family contexts, including families in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This article was prepared using a systematic literature review approach, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines as a reporting framework. A systematic approach was chosen because it allows for transparent, replicable evidence synthesis and minimizes literature selection bias compared to conventional narrative reviews.

Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted in five major databases Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ProQuest, and Google Scholar to reach articles from the fields of psychology, health, and early childhood education. Keywords were compiled using a combination of Boolean operators as follows: ("mindful parenting" OR "mindfulness in parenting") AND ("emotion regulation" OR "emotional regulation" OR "self-regulation") AND ("early childhood" OR "preschool" OR "young children"). The search was limited to articles published within the last five years (2021-2026), written in English or Indonesian, and peer-reviewed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the synthesis if they met the following criteria: (1) they were empirical articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or scoping reviews; (2) they discussed mindful parenting and/or children's emotion regulation in the early childhood age range (0-8 years), including studies involving a broader population but reporting findings relevant to early childhood; (3) they had an active and accessible digital object

identifier (DOI); (4) they were published in reputable and indexed journals. Articles were excluded if they were opinion pieces, editorials, unpublished theses, duplicates, or had no direct conceptual link to mindful parenting or children's emotion regulation.

Data Selection and Extraction Procedures

The selection process followed the four stages of PRISMA: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and determination of included articles. In the identification stage, all searched articles were collected and duplicates were removed. In the screening stage, titles and abstracts were examined to assess topic suitability. Articles that passed the initial screening were then assessed for eligibility through fulltext reading based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data extraction was conducted in a structured manner, including author name, year of publication, country/research context, study design, sample characteristics, main variables, and key findings. Synthesis was conducted narratively and thematically by grouping findings into broad themes, namely the direct relationship between mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation, psychological mediation mechanisms, and family contextual moderating factors.

The article selection flow is presented in the following diagram.

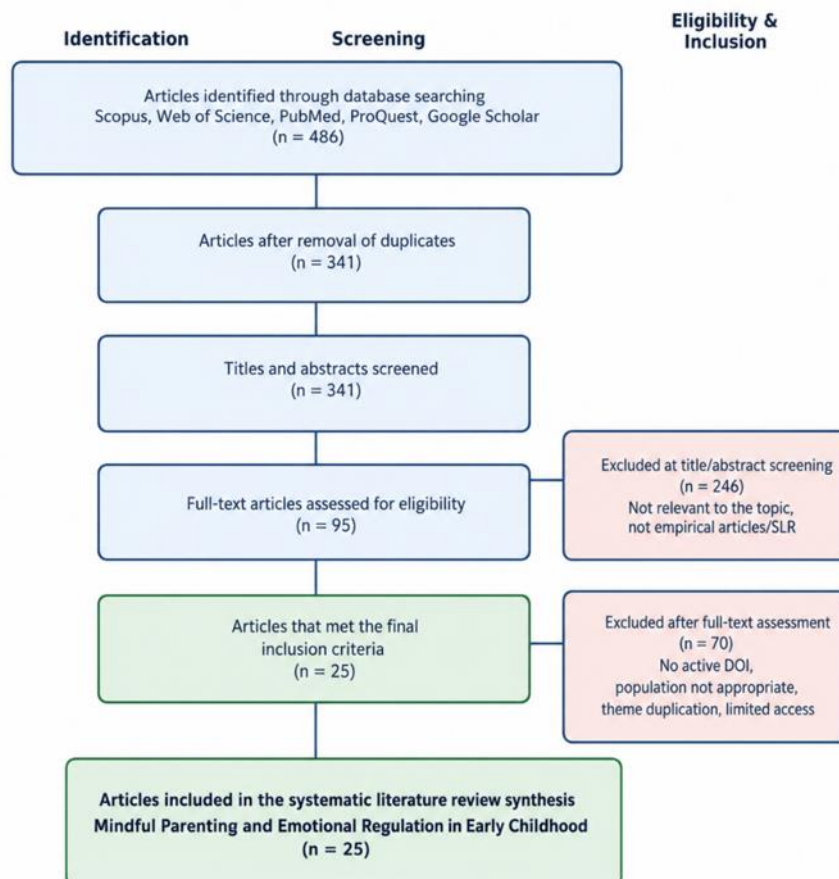


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of the article selection process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Characteristics of Included Studies

Of the twenty-five articles included in this synthesis, the majority were quantitative studies with correlational or cross-sectional designs (six articles), followed by systematic reviews and scoping reviews (six articles), and experimental or quasi-experimental studies in the form of mindful parenting training trials (three articles). The studies were spread across a variety of geographic contexts, including the United States, Australia, China, South Korea, Turkey, Iran, Latvia, Hong Kong, and Indonesia, indicating that the issue of mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation is a cross-cultural concern. Most of the study samples involved mothers as the primary respondents, although a small number of studies have expanded their scope to include fathers or both parents simultaneously. The age range of the children studied ranged from infancy to eight years, with the largest concentration in preschool-aged children, aged three to six. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of ten representative studies that represent the major themes in this synthesis.

Table 1. Summary of characteristics of ten representative studies

No	Author (Year)	Country	Design	Sample	Key Findings
1	Quach et al. (2026)	Australia	Longitudinal	Mother-child, from infancy to school age	Mindful parenting predicts children's emotional self- regulation prospectively.
2	Zhang et al. (2022)	China	Cross- sectional	Parents of early childhood	Mindful parenting reduces daily parenting stress and improves parents' subjective well-being and children's emotional regulation.
3	Cheung et al. (2021)	Hong Kong	Cross- sectional	Mothers and early childhood	Mindful parenting and children's self-regulation mediate the relationship between maternal depressive symptoms and children's behavioral adjustment.
4	He et al. (2025)	China	Cross- sectional	Mother of preschool children	Maternal depression mediates, parent-child relationship quality moderates the mindful parenting-child emotion regulation relationship.
5	Zhu et al. (2025)	China	Cross- sectional	Preschool child migrant family	Mindful parenting buffers the negative impact of household chaos on children's self-regulation.
6	Kakhki et al. (2022)	Iran	Quasi- experiment	Mother of preschool children	Mindful parenting training improves parent-child interactions and mothers' cognitive emotion regulation.
7	Mafaza & Sarry (2022)	Indonesia	Cross- sectional	Parents of early childhood	Coparenting and mindful parenting contribute significantly to children's emotional regulation.
8	Puglisi et al. (2024)	Switzerland	Systematic review	10 studies on father involvement	Father involvement moderates the relationship between responsive parenting and early

					childhood emotion regulation.
9	Dreimane & Vītola (2022)	Latvia	Educational field studies	Early childhood in PAUD institutions	Integrating mindfulness practices into preschool routines improves children's emotional regulation.
10	Aydın (2022)	Türkiye	Cross-sectional	Parents of children with ASD	Mindful parenting mediates the relationship between parental emotion regulation difficulties and child behavioral problems.

Direct Relationship between Mindful Parenting and Children's Emotional Regulation

The most consistent finding from this literature synthesis confirms that mindful parenting is positively associated with children's emotion regulation abilities in early childhood. Longitudinal studies that followed children from toddlerhood through school age found that dimensions of mindful parenting, specifically nonjudgmental acceptance and parental emotional awareness, prospectively predicted children's emotional self-regulation abilities years later, even after controlling for the child's temperament and family socioeconomic status. These findings strengthen the argument that mindful parenting is not simply a cross-temporal correlation but rather a predictive factor that plays a role in the long-term developmental trajectory of children's emotion regulation.

A general population-based study of preschool children confirmed a similar pattern, with mothers who reported higher levels of mindful parenting tending to have children with better self-soothing skills, lower tantrum frequency, and greater cognitive flexibility in dealing with frustrating situations. This pattern was also replicated in Asian cultural contexts, including China and South Korea, suggesting that the benefits of mindful parenting on children's emotion regulation are relatively consistent across cultures, although the strength of the association varies depending on local parenting norms and the level of societal acceptance of mindfulness practices.

Psychological Mediation Mechanisms

A literature synthesis identified at least three main psychological mediation pathways explaining how mindful parenting influences children's emotion regulation. First, the parental psychological well-being pathway. Several studies have found that mindful parenting reduces depressive symptoms and increases parents' subjective well-being, which in turn improves parents' capacity to respond sensitively and consistently to children's emotional needs, thus supporting the development of more adaptive child emotion regulation. Second, the parenting daily hassles pathway. Research among Chinese parents has shown that mindful parenting reduces perceived daily parenting stress, simultaneously improving parents' subjective well-being and children's emotion regulation, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between parent and child well-being through the mechanism of mindfulness. Third, the parent-child relationship quality pathway. Studies among mothers with depressive symptoms have found that mindful parenting and children's self-regulation jointly mediate the relationship between maternal depressive symptoms and children's behavioral adjustment, indicating that relationship quality is an important bridge between parents' psychological well-being and children's developmental outcomes.

In clinical populations, specific mediating mechanisms have also been identified. A study of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder found that mindful parenting mediated the relationship between parental emotion regulation difficulties and the emergence of child behavior problems, suggesting that increasing parental mindfulness may be an effective intervention target even if parents themselves experience emotion regulation challenges. Similarly, research among mothers with a history of adverse childhood experiences suggests that mindful mothering interventions effectively improve parenting sensitivity, which indirectly contributes to the development of child emotion regulation.

Contextual Moderating Factors

In addition to mediating mechanisms, this synthesis also revealed a number of contextual factors that moderate the strength of the relationship between mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation. Father involvement emerged as an important moderator; a systematic review of ten studies found that high father involvement strengthened the positive association between responsive parenting and children's emotion regulation, although the direct effect was weaker than that of mothers, suggesting that future research should include more fathers in mindful parenting research. Household chaos also served as an important moderator, particularly in migrant families; research with preschool migrant children found that household chaos increased parent-child conflict, negatively impacting children's self-regulation, but mindful parenting acted as a buffer, attenuating this negative impact.

Coparenting has also been identified as a factor that interacts with mindful parenting in influencing early childhood emotion regulation. A study of Indonesian families found that the quality of coparenting and mindful parenting both significantly contribute to children's emotion regulation abilities, with their interaction producing a stronger effect than either factor alone. This indicates the importance of a parenting approach that involves both parents in a coordinated manner, rather than focusing solely on a single caregiver.

Effectiveness of Mindful Parenting-Based Interventions

The experimental studies included in this review provide preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of mindful parenting training in improving parent-child interactions and emotion regulation. Mindful parenting training for mothers of preschool children in Iran demonstrated significant improvements in the quality of parent-child interactions, decreased parenting stress, and enhanced mothers' cognitive emotion regulation strategies after an eight-week structured program. A similar program implemented in an early childhood education context in Latvia also demonstrated that integrating mindfulness practices into preschool routines can directly improve children's emotion regulation abilities, extending the scope of mindful parenting from the family to the educational setting. In addition to these two studies, several studies focusing on instant messaging and digital app-based programs have also shown promising results, with a brief two-week training delivered via daily audio recordings significantly reducing parenting stress compared to a waitlist control group. This concise, technology-based intervention format is relevant for time-constrained urban families, opening the possibility of scalable mindful parenting programs to a wider population, including developing countries like Indonesia.

Diversity of Measurement Instruments and Approaches

One aspect that stands out in this literature synthesis is the diversity of instruments used to measure mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation. Most studies rely on the Interpersonal Mindfulness in Parenting Scale or adapted versions of it to measure mindful parenting, while children's emotion regulation is generally measured through parent report using instruments such as the Emotion Regulation Checklist, or through direct behavioral observation on experimental tasks that elicit mild frustration. This diversity of measurement approaches, while reflecting the methodological richness of the field, also presents challenges in directly comparing effect sizes across studies. Studies using observational measures tend to report more moderate associations than those relying solely on parent self-report, indicating the possibility of common method bias in the largely single-informant research.

Limitations of Included Studies

Despite the consistent findings supporting the protective role of mindful parenting, this synthesis also identified several important limitations of the included studies. First, the majority of studies still used cross-sectional designs, so causal inferences between mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation are still limited, although several longitudinal studies have emerged in recent years. Second, most study samples were dominated by families with middle to upper socioeconomic status and higher educational backgrounds, so generalization of findings to families with limited resources still requires caution. Third, fathers' involvement in the research was still significantly less than that of mothers, so understanding the role of mindful fathering on children's emotion regulation remains much more limited than that of mindful mothering. Fourth, only a small number of studies used experimental designs with randomized control groups, so evidence regarding the causal effectiveness of mindful parenting training programs still needs to be strengthened through larger-scale controlled trials and longer follow-up periods.

Theoretical Synthesis and Discussion

Overall, the findings from the twenty-five synthesized articles support an integrative model that positions mindful parenting as a multi-pathway protective factor for early childhood emotion regulation. Rather than operating through a single mechanism, mindful parenting appears to influence children's emotion regulation through a combination of improved parental psychological well-being, reduced parenting stress, enhanced parent-child relationship quality, and interactions with family contextual factors such as paternal involvement, coparenting, and home environment stability. This pattern is consistent with the ecological framework of child development, which emphasizes that developmental outcomes are not determined by a single factor, but rather by the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics, family microsystem relationships, and the broader social context.

Compared with previous reviews that tended to focus on clinical populations or a single mediating pathway, this synthesis emphasizes the importance of a multidimensional approach in understanding the relationship between mindful parenting and children's emotion regulation. The consistency of findings across cultures, from Western families to East Asian families to Southeast Asian families, including Indonesia, also strengthens the generalizability of mindful parenting as a universally relevant parenting construct, although its expression and application can be modified according to local cultural values. The practical implications of these findings emphasize the need to

develop mindfulness-based parenting programs that not only target mothers but also involve fathers and coparenting systems in a more integrated manner, while also considering household environmental conditions as part of the intervention design.

The findings of this synthesis also have particular relevance to the context of public health policy and early childhood education. Given the evidence that mindful parenting can be taught through short, relatively affordable programs, integrating mindfulness modules into maternal and child health services, parenting classes at integrated health posts (Posyandu) or early childhood service centers, and preschool curricula has the potential to be an effective early prevention strategy to reduce the prevalence of emotional regulation problems in children. This approach aligns with the shift in the family mental health paradigm from a curative model to a promotive-preventive model that targets the entire family system, not just the child as the individual with the problem. Furthermore, the emphasis on father involvement and the quality of coparenting in several recent studies opens new directions for designing more gender-inclusive programs, given that most existing mindful parenting programs are still implicitly or explicitly oriented toward mothers as the primary target.

Taking all the above findings into account, it can be concluded that mindful parenting functions as a relational node that synergistically connects parents' psychological well-being, the quality of family interactions, and early childhood emotion regulation capacity. A more holistic understanding of the mechanisms and contexts that moderate this relationship provides an important foundation for developing more effective, culturally adaptive, and sustainable family interventions in the future

CONCLUSION

A systematic literature review of twenty-five articles published in the past five years indicates that mindful parenting is consistently positively associated with children's emotion regulation in early childhood, both through direct pathways and through psychological mediation mechanisms such as parental well-being, reduced parenting stress, and parent-child relationship quality. This relationship is also moderated by family contextual factors, including paternal involvement, coparenting quality, and household environmental conditions. Evidence from preliminary experimental studies also confirms that mindful parenting can be practiced through structured programs and digital technology, with promising results for improving the quality of family interactions and children's emotion regulation.

The novelty of this review lies in its synthesis of the most recent literature, comprehensively integrating mediation-moderation pathways and comparing findings across Western, East Asian, and Southeast Asian cultural contexts, including Indonesia, a practice not systematically explored in previous reviews. The theoretical implications of this study strengthen the ecological model of child emotional development, which positions mindful parenting as a connecting link between parents' psychological well-being and children's self-regulatory capacity. Its practical implications emphasize the need to develop mindfulness-based parenting programs that are inclusive of fathers and integrated with maternal and child health services and early childhood education.

Several limitations remain noteworthy, including the predominance of cross-sectional designs, limited father involvement in the study sample, and common method bias resulting from reliance on parental self-reports. Future research is recommended

to expand longitudinal and controlled experimental designs, expand the involvement of fathers and other caregivers, and develop and test mindful parenting programs that are adaptive to the cultural context and family resources in developing countries, including Indonesia, to strengthen causal evidence and practical relevance for efforts to improve family mental health from an early age.

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