

## Coparenting and Children's Developmental Adjustment: Exploring Direct and Indirect Pathways<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study investigates the direct and indirect relationships between coparenting, parenting behaviors, family conflict, family cohesion, and children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic adjustment. Social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment are considered core indicators of children's healthy development, while school adjustment is recognized as a key factor for long-term academic and psychosocial well-being. Previous research highlights that family dynamics—particularly the consistency, emotional warmth, and discipline strategies parents adopt—play a central role in shaping children's adjustment. Within this context, coparenting has been conceptualized as a critical parental subsystem that directly and indirectly affects child development through parenting practices and family relationships. The study was conducted using a correlational research design. Children ( $n = 1,206$ ) from different developmental stages (late childhood, early, middle, and late adolescence), as well as both maternal ( $n = 1,206$ ) and paternal ( $n = 1,206$ ) reports, across urban and rural settings were included as participants. A hypothetical model was proposed to test the direct and indirect relationships between coparenting, family conflict, family cohesion, positive and negative parenting behaviors and children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic adjustment. The results indicated that supportive coparenting was associated with higher family cohesion and positive parenting, lower conflict and negative parenting, and consequently with better child adjustment across domains. The findings provide culturally specific insights into how coparenting functions in the local context, offering empirical evidence to inform the development of family-based intervention and prevention programs.

**Keywords:** *Child adjustment, coparenting, family cohesion, family conflict, parenting behaviors, school adjustment.*

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## Introduction

Children's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment is critically important for healthy development and lifelong well-being. Social adjustment is associated with children's ability to form positive relationships with peers (Cavell, 1990); emotional adjustment is related to the recognition, expression, and regulation of emotions (Bardack & Widen, 2019; Saltali, 2013); and behavioral adjustment refers to the absence of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and the exhibition of responsible behaviors in line with social rules (Eisenberg et al., 2001). Children who are well adjusted in these areas are more likely to form healthier relationships in family and school settings, feel secure, and develop self-confidence (Bardack & Widen, 2019; Cavell, 1990; Eisenberg et al., 2001). Acquiring these skills at early ages serves a protective function for mental health in later life (Smokowski et al., 2004).

School adjustment is defined not only as academic success but also as the child's ability to develop an emotional bond with the school environment, comply with rules, and maintain positive relationships with teachers and peers (Wentzel, 2003). Children who successfully adjust to school are more likely to demonstrate openness to learning, high levels of motivation, and collaborative behaviors (Durlak & Weissberg, 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Moreover, school adjustment enhances children's capacity to cope with stress encountered during schooling (Choi et al., 2023) and reduces risky behaviors such as school disengagement (Gubbels et al., 2019). Therefore, supporting children's social-emotional development starting from preschool and primary school is seen as critical for long-term academic success and psychosocial development.

The decisive role of family dynamics in children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic adjustment has long been established in developmental psychology research (e.g., Ani, 2024; Härkönen et al., 2017). Relationships, especially with parents form the basis for children's relationships with the outside world; parental consistency, emotional warmth, disciplinary practices, and the quality of communication influence children's self-concept, coping skills, and social adjustment (Frosch et al., 2021). Children raised in secure, supportive, and structured family environments tend to be more successful in peer relations, adapt more easily to school, and develop as more emotionally well-regulated individuals (Katz & Low, 2004; Li & Qiu, 2018). In this context, the healthy functioning of family dynamics emerges as a central factor in children's developmental adjustment processes.

The quality of intra-familial relationships is a key determinant of how family dynamics shape child adjustment. In particular, unresolved, violent, or child-witnessed interparental conflicts undermine emotional security and lead to adverse emotional and behavioral responses such as anxiety, anger, withdrawal, or aggression (Davies et al., 2002; Fincham, 1994). Such conflict environments also negatively affect school adjustment, contributing to inattention, academic withdrawal, and social isolation (McCoy et al., 2013). Conversely, family cohesion, emotional support, attachment, cooperation, and a sense of belonging among family members, assumes an important protective function for children's psychosocial adjustment (Richmond & Stocker, 2006). In such family contexts, empathy, sharing, and problem-solving skills are more readily cultivated. Positive parenting behaviors (e.g., warmth, open communication, consistent limits) support children's success in social relations, emotion regulation, and the development of adaptive behaviors (Martínez-González et al., 2016). In contrast, negative parenting (e.g., neglect, excessive authoritarianism, inconsistent discipline) undermines self-esteem, leads to behavior problems, and lowers school achievement (Kou, 2022; Pinguart, 2016; Pinguart & Kauser, 2018). Among the structures at the heart of these interactions, the concept of coparenting has gained increasing prominence in family research (Feinberg, 2003; McHale & Lindahl, 2011).

### Coparenting and Child Adjustment

Coparenting has been conceptualized as a framework for understanding how the parenting relationship influences child development. Specifically, it refers to the dyadic relationship in which adults responsible for a child's care coordinate, manage, and share child-related responsibilities (Feinberg, 2003; Margolin et al., 2001). In structural family systems theory, Minuchin defined this dyadic relationship as the family's executive subsystem (Minuchin, 1985). Although the marital relationship—another subsystem—has indirect effects on child-rearing (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007), the coparenting relationship is a stronger predictor of family functioning and child well-being (Feinberg, 2002; McHale & Lindahl, 2011),

because coparenting does not include nonchild related aspects of the marital relationship (Feinberg, 2002). Accordingly, interactions displayed within the coparenting structure have been shown to exert direct positive effects on children's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment (Dopkins Stright & Neitzel, 2003; Zemp et al., 2018). Through consistent and supportive parenting, children feel secure; this sense of security is associated with emotion regulation (McHale et al., 2001), the display of adaptive behaviors in social relations, and the development of appropriate behavior patterns (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Open communication and joint decision-making between parents provide clear boundaries for the child and support learning and internalizing social rules (Pan et al., 2025).

Coparenting also plays a decisive role in school adjustment. Parents' shared involvement in the educational process and their collaborative relationships with the school and teachers increase children's academic motivation; delivering consistent messages about school facilitates secure bonding with the school environment (Schoppe et al., 2001). In addition, coparenting practices foster constructive responses to challenges encountered in school life and support the development of children's stress-coping skills (Cabrera et al., 2012). A study by Yılmaz-Hiçde and Özdemir (2023) found that in families where both parents work and have similar workloads, mothers largely shoulder child-related domestic responsibilities (e.g., housework, childcare, school activities, school preparation), while fathers' roles remain mostly supportive. Research shows that such an imbalanced division of labor leads to chronic fatigue in mothers and decreased tolerance toward their children (Roskam & Mikolajczak, 2020). Ineffective coparenting processes can yield inconsistent discipline, reduced parental warmth, and harsher or neglectful parenting practices (Margolin et al., 2001). Problems in coparenting may also increase conflicts in family relationships and undermine spousal harmony; inconsistencies, communication difficulties, or lack of support in child-rearing, reduce marital satisfaction and negatively affect parenting (Feinberg, 2003; McHale, 1995).

The effect of coparenting on children's adjustment is proposed to occur not only directly but also via mediating mechanisms such as family relationships (Zemp et al., 2018) and parenting behaviors (Parkes et al., 2019). Cooperation between parents serves to preserve the integrity of the family system, contributing to psychological security (Cummings & Davies, 1996; Davies & Martin, 2014; Feinberg, 2003). In relationships where mothers and fathers assume mutually respectful, consistent, and complementary roles, family balance is more easily achieved and the emotional security environment is strengthened for children (McHale, 1995; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004).

Families with a well-functioning coparenting relationship exhibit lower conflict levels, as skills such as effective communication, empathy, and mutual understanding are better developed (Negrini, 2020). Such an environment supports constructive conflict resolution. Coparenting also facilitates the development of positive parenting behaviors (e.g., warmth, emotional support, open communication, consistency in setting limits) and reduces negative parenting behaviors (e.g., punitive attitudes, emotional neglect, inconsistency) (Choi et al., 2019). Parental alignment provides modeling for the child and offers a secure developmental context. Thus, coparenting is considered a protective, strengthening structure not only for child development but for the psychosocial health of the whole family (Campbell, 2023).

### **Study Aim and Hypotheses**

The present study examined the direct and indirect relationships among coparenting, parenting behaviors, family conflict, and family cohesion, and children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic (school) adjustment. Specifically, we investigated direct relationships between coparenting and children's adjustment and indirect relationships via positive and negative parenting behaviors, family conflict, and family cohesion. The hypotheses were:

- H1.** Coparenting is negatively related to family conflict and negative parenting and positively related to family cohesion and positive parenting.
- H2.** Coparenting is positively related to children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment.
- H3.** Family conflict and negative parenting are negatively related to children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment; family cohesion and positive parenting are positively related.

**H4.** Coparenting is indirectly related to children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment via lower family conflict, higher family cohesion, lower negative parenting, and higher positive parenting.

## Method

### Design

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the mediating effects of parenting behaviors, family conflict, and family cohesion on the relationship between coparenting and children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment. A cross-sectional design allows the examination of variables measured at a single point in time across different groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Accordingly, children from different age groups were included in the study to investigate whether the proposed structural relationships among coparenting, parenting behaviors, family conflict, family cohesion, and children's adjustment outcomes varied across developmental stages. Based on the relevant literature, a structural model incorporating these variables was tested.

### Participants

Data were collected using stratified sampling across the 12 Level-1 subregions in the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TurkStat) Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. We reached 2,412 parents living together (of 1,206 children aged 6–18). Considering Turkey's urban–rural distribution (Yilmaz, 2015), 77.30% of the population lives in urban areas and 22.70% in rural areas; accordingly, 77% of our sample was urban and 23% rural. We reached 1,868 parents (934 couples) in urban centers and 544 parents (272 couples) in rural areas, proportioned to population densities of the 12 Level-1 provinces. Children and parents were accessed through primary, middle, and high schools in both urban and rural areas. Inclusion criteria were: (i) voluntary participation, (ii) both partners being the child's biological parents, (iii) being married and cohabiting, and (iv) having a child aged 6–18. Measures of child adjustment were obtained from parents for primary-school-aged children and from adolescents themselves for secondary/high school participants.

The mean age of child and adolescent participants was 12.30 years ( $SD = 3.39$ ) in urban areas and 12.21 years ( $SD = 3.35$ ) in rural areas. In the urban sample, 58.7% of the children were girls and 41.3% were boys, whereas in the rural sample, 56.6% were girls and 43.4% were boys. The mean age of parents was 41.36 years ( $SD = 5.30$ ) in the urban group and 39.88 years ( $SD = 5.61$ ) in the rural group. Additionally, the average duration of marriage was 17.59 years ( $SD = 5.22$ ) among urban participants and 15.52 years ( $SD = 5.63$ ) among rural participants. Educational attainment was generally higher among urban parents, whereas a substantial proportion of rural parents had completed middle school education or below. Daily working hours differed across groups, with urban men and women reporting average working hours of 9.42 and 8.42 hours per day, respectively, compared to 9.77 and 8.43 hours among rural men and women. Similarly, the average number of weekly working days was higher in rural areas (men: 5.81 days, women: 5.65 days) than in urban areas (men: 5.62 days, women: 5.26 days). Complete satisfaction with parenting roles was reported by 60.4% of rural participants and 48.1% of urban participants. Likewise, marital satisfaction was higher among rural participants (69.6%) than among urban participants (55.8%).

### Measures

#### ***Demographic Information Form (DIF)***

The DIF was developed by the researchers to gather descriptive information (parent age, years married, education, occupation, daily/weekly work hours and shifts, number/ages of children, satisfaction with life/marriage/parenting, target child's age/sex, etc.).

#### ***Coparenting Scale (CPS)***

The CPS (Özdemir et al., 2021) was used to assess coparenting experiences. The scale includes 46 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all true for us*; 4 = *Completely true for us*). It comprises six subdimensions: coparenting agreement, coparenting conflict, coparenting support, demeaning/undermining coparenting, division of labor in coparenting, and joint management of family relationships. High reliability coefficients are reported for the CPS ( $\alpha = .87-.95$ ).

**Parenting Behaviors Scale (PBS)**

The PBS was developed by Özdemir and Sağkal (2022). The scale measures two basic parenting dimensions with 18 items: Positive Parenting (9 items) and Negative Parenting (9 items), using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all true of me*; 4 = *Completely true of me*). Higher scores reflect higher levels of the respective behavior. The PBS has high reliability ( $\alpha = .82$  for positive parenting,  $.88$  for negative parenting).

**Family Conflict Scale (FCS)**

The FCS was used to measure family conflict. It was developed by Kelly et al. (2016) and adapted into Turkish by Özdemir and Sağkal (2022a). It has 3 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all true*; 4 = *Completely true*), with higher scores indicating higher conflict. The FCS has a unidimensional factor structure and high reliability ( $\alpha = .80-.81$ ).

**Family Cohesion Scale (FCoS)**

The FCoS was used to measure family cohesion. The FCS was developed by Park, Unützer and Grembowski (2014) and adapted into Turkish by Özdemir and Sağkal (2022b). It has three items rated on 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly agree*; 4 = *Strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicate higher family cohesion. The FCoS has a unidimensional factor structure and high reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

**School Happiness Scale for Primary School Children (SHS-PSC)**

The SHS-PSC was developed by Özdemir, Yılmaz Hiçde, and Sağkal (2021) to assess primary school children's school happiness. It is a brief, 4-item, single-factor scale using a face-aided 3-point Likert scale (1 = *Never*, 2 = *Sometimes*, 3 = *Always*). Higher scores indicate greater school happiness. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for SHS-PSC is  $.61$ .

**Brief Adolescent Subjective Well-Being in School Scale**

This scale was used for middle and high school samples to assess school adjustment. The scale was developed by Tian, Wang and Huebner (2015) and adapted into Turkish by Özdemir and Sağkal (2016). It has a two-factor structure: School satisfaction and affect in school. The scale has good validity and reliability indices ( $\alpha$  for school satisfaction  $.93$ ,  $\alpha$  for affect in school  $.57$ , and  $\alpha$  for total scale  $.87$ ).

**Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) – Parent Form**

For primary school sample, the Emotional Problems, Conduct Problems, and Prosocial Behavior subscales were used to assess emotional, behavioral, and social adjustment outcomes. The scale was developed by Goodman (1997) and adapted into Turkish by Güvenir et al. (2008). The scale includes 25 items, uses a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *Not true*, 2 = *Somewhat true*, 3 = *Certainly true*). Total and subscale scores can be computed. Reliability was high for all subscales and total (except peer problems), and significant correlations with criterion measures were reported.

**SDQ – Child Form**

For middle and high school samples, the Emotional Problems, Conduct Problems, and Prosocial Behavior subscales were used to assess emotional, behavioral, and social adjustment outcomes. Developed by Goodman (1997), adapted to Turkish by Güvenir et al. (2008). The questionnaire includes 25 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *Not true*, 2 = *Somewhat true*, 3 = *Certainly true*). The scale was developed by Goodman (1997) and adapted into Turkish by Güvenir et al. (2008). The scale includes 25 items, uses a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *Not true*, 2 = *Somewhat true*, 3 = *Certainly true*). High internal consistency was found for most subscales (except peer problems), and significant associations with criterion measures were observed.

**Data Analysis**

Analyses were conducted in SPSS 25.0 and Mplus 7.0. First, correlations among variables were computed. Second, a path analysis was used to test the hypothesized model. The dataset was examined across three grouping variables: parent gender (mother–father), residential context (rural–urban), and developmental period (late childhood–early adolescence–middle adolescence–late adolescence). In

order to assess significance of indirect effects, we used the resampling (bootstrapping) approach recommended by MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams (2004), generating 5,000 samples and evaluating significance via asymmetric confidence intervals.

### Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Aydin Adnan Menderes University. All research procedures were reviewed and approved in accordance with the committee's decision (No. 31906847/050.04.04-08/09).

### Findings

Path analysis was used to test the theoretical model linking coparenting with family conflict, family cohesion, positive and negative parenting, and children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment. Prior to path analysis, the correlation matrix based on data from mothers and fathers is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Correlation Coefficients for Mother and Father Data*

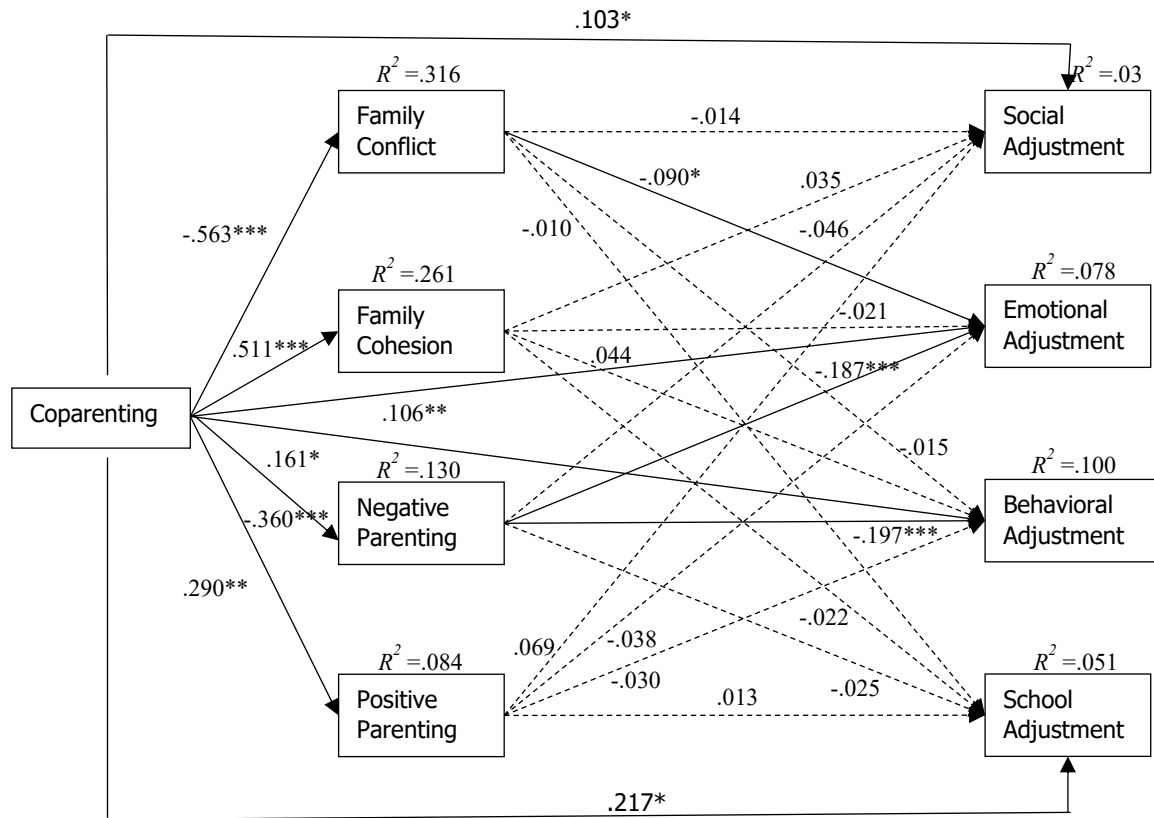
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Coparenting	–	–.56**	.51**	–.36**	.29**	.17**	.20**	.25**	.22**
2. Family conflict	–.60**	–	–.41**	.48**	–.34**	–.13**	–.22**	–.21**	–.14**
3. Family cohesion	.47**	–.42**	–	–.35**	.57**	.15**	.11**	.18**	.11**
4. Negative parenting	–.39**	.46**	–.31**	–	–.56**	–.14**	–.24**	–.26**	–.11**
5. Positive parenting	.55**	–.33**	.46**	–.34**	–	.15**	.12**	.16**	.08**
6. Social adjustment	.17**	–.16**	.13**	–.15**	.12**	–	.06	.23**	.19**
7. Emotional adjustment	.20**	–.21**	.10**	–.17**	.08**	.04	–	.26**	.27**
8. Behavioral adjustment	.21**	–.18**	.15**	–.22**	.11**	.21**	.24**	–	.22**
9. School adjustment	.25**	–.15**	.13**	–.10**	.08**	.19**	.25**	.22**	–

(Note. Correlations for mothers appear above the diagonal; correlations for fathers appear below the diagonal. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .)

Correlations indicated significant small-to-moderate associations, with highly parallel patterns across mothers and fathers. Coparenting is negatively correlated with family conflict (mothers  $r = -.56$ ; fathers  $r = -.60$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and negative parenting (mothers  $r = -.36$ ; fathers  $r = -.39$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and positively with family cohesion (mothers  $r = .51$ ; fathers  $r = .47$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and positive parenting (mothers  $r = .29$ ; fathers  $r = .55$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Coparenting also showed positive relations with all child adjustment domains. Family conflict was negatively related to all adjustment domains while family cohesion and positive parenting is positively related. All interrelations among child adjustment domains were significant, except that social and emotional adjustment were not significantly related in either group (mothers  $r = .06$ ; fathers  $r = .04$ ;  $p > .05$ ). We then conducted group-specific path analyses. In the path analysis based on data obtained from mothers, the standardized path coefficients for the variables are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Relationships Between Variables for the Mother Data Set*



(Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Non-significant paths are depicted as dashed lines.)

Figure 1 revealed that coparenting had a moderate negative direct relationship with family conflict ( $\beta = -.56$ ;  $p < .05$ ), a moderate positive direct relationship with family cohesion ( $\beta = .51$ ;  $p < .05$ ), a moderate negative direct relationship with negative parenting behavior ( $\beta = -.36$ ;  $p < .05$ ), and a low positive direct relationship with positive parenting behavior ( $\beta = .29$ ;  $p < .05$ ). In addition, family conflict, one of the mediating variables, was found to have a low negative significant effect ( $\beta = -.09$ ;  $p < .05$ ) only on the child's emotional adjustment. The mediating variables of family cohesion and positive parenting behavior did not have a significant effect on any of the outcome variables, while negative parenting behavior had a low negative significant effect on the child's emotional adjustment ( $\beta = -.19$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and on the child's behavioral adjustment ( $\beta = -.20$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Additionally, coparenting was found to explain 31.60% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in family conflict, 26.10% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in family cohesion, 13% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in negative parenting behaviors, and 8.40% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in positive parenting behaviors, respectively. Following the direct effects for the mother data set, the indirect effects are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

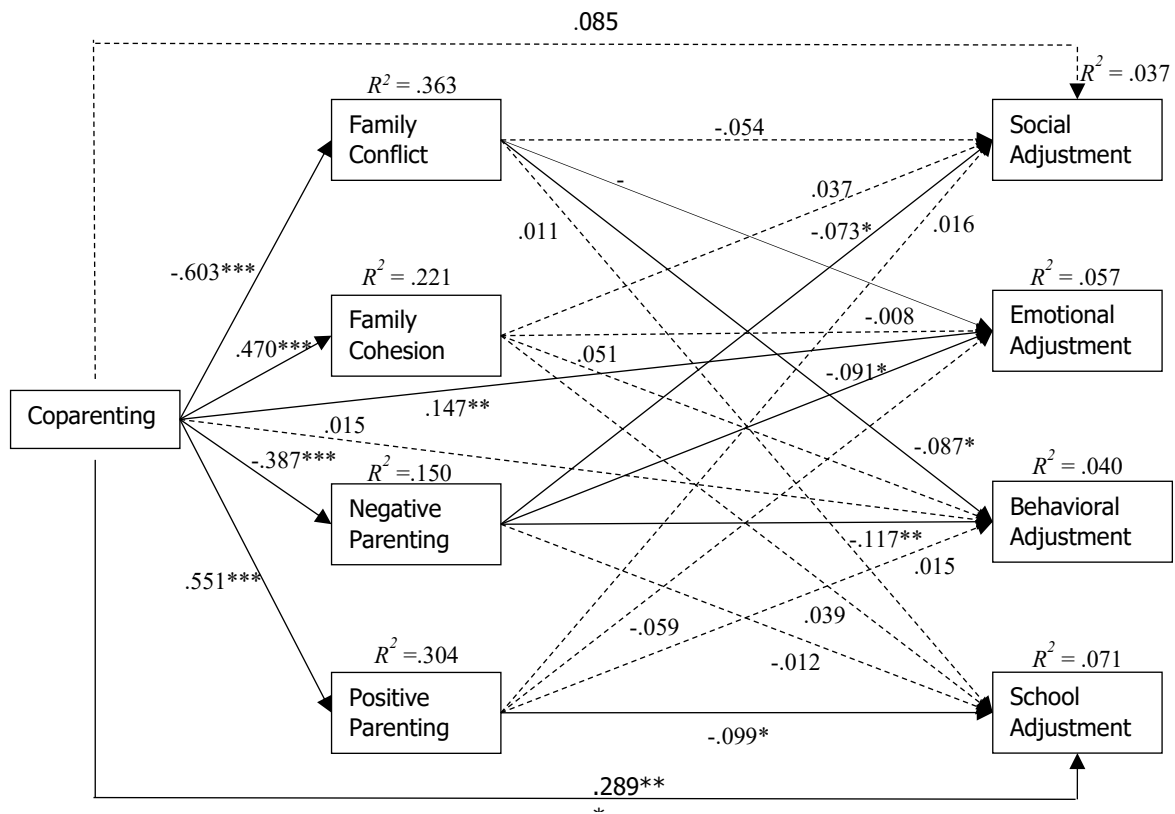
*Direct and Indirect Effects of Coparenting on Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and School Adjustment (Mother Reports)*

Effect	Social $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )	Emotional $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )	Behavioral $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )	School $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )
<b>Direct</b> Coparenting	.10 (.04, .012)	.11 (.04, .005)	.16 (.05, .001)	.22 (.04, .000)
<b>Indirect via</b> Family Conflict	.01 (.02, .714)	.05 (.02, .022)	.01 (.03, .750)	.01 (.02, .784)
Family Cohesion	.02 (.02, .387)	-.01 (.02, .584)	.02 (.03, .413)	-.01 (.02, .613)
Negative Parenting	.02 (.01, .188)	.07 (.02, .000)	.07 (.02, .000)	.01 (.01, .532)
Positive Parenting	.02 (.01, .079)	-.01 (.01, .335)	-.01 (.01, .476)	.00 (.01, .764)
<b>Total</b>	.17 (.04, .000)	.20 (.03, .000)	.25 (.04, .000)	.23 (.03, .000)

As seen in Table 2, although no mediating variables were found to have a significant effect between coparenting and the child's social adjustment, family conflict ( $\beta = .05$ ;  $SE = .02$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negative parenting behaviors ( $\beta = .07$ ;  $SE = .02$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were found to have a mediating effect between coparenting and the child's emotional adjustment. Only negative parenting behaviors ( $\beta = .07$ ;  $SE = .02$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were found to have a mediating effect between coparenting and the child's behavioral adjustment. Although the direct effect of coparenting on children's school adjustment was statistically significant ( $\beta = .22$ ;  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ), the mediating effects of family conflict ( $\beta = .01$ ;  $p > .05$ ), family cohesion ( $\beta = -.01$ ;  $p > .05$ ), negative ( $\beta = .01$ ;  $p > .05$ ), and positive ( $\beta = .00$ ;  $p > .05$ ) parenting behavior variables between coparenting and children's school adjustment were not statistically significant. The standardized path coefficients based on data obtained from fathers are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Relationships Between Variables for the Father Data Set*



(Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Non-significant paths are depicted as dashed lines.)

When Figure 2 was examined, it was determined that coparenting had a moderate negative direct relationship with family conflict ( $\beta = -.60; p < .05$ ), a moderate positive relationship with family cohesion ( $\beta = .47; p < .05$ ), a moderate negative relationship with negative parenting behavior ( $\beta = -.39; p < .05$ ), and a moderate positive relationship with positive parenting behavior ( $\beta = .55; p < .05$ ), respectively. In addition, family conflict, one of the mediating variables, was found to have a significant negative and low effect on the child's emotional adjustment ( $\beta = -.10; p < .01$ ) and a significant negative and low effect on the child's behavioral adjustment ( $\beta = -.09; p < .05$ ). While the mediator variable of family cohesion had no significant effect on any of the outcome variables, negative parenting behaviors had a low level of negative effect on the child's social adjustment ( $\beta = -.07; p < .05$ ) and emotional adjustment ( $\beta = -.09; p < .05$ ), and a low level of negative and significant effect on the child's behavioral adjustment ( $\beta = -.16; p < .05$ ). Furthermore, negative parenting behaviors were not found to have a significant effect on the child's school adjustment ( $\beta = -.01; p > .05$ ). Positive parenting behaviors in fathers were found to have a low level of negative and statistically significant effect only on the child's school adjustment ( $\beta = -.10; p < .05$ ). Additionally, coparenting was found to explain 36.30% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in family conflict, 22.10% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in family cohesion, 15% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in negative parenting behaviors, and 30% of the variance ( $R^2$ ) in positive parenting behaviors, respectively. Following the direct effects for the father data set, the indirect effects shown in Table 3 were examined.

**Table 3**

*Direct and Indirect Effects of Coparenting on Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and School Adjustment (Father Reports)*

Effect	Social $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )	Emotional $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )	Behavioral $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )	School $\beta$ (SE, $p$ )
<b>Direct</b> Coparenting	.09 (.04, .052)	.15 (.04, .000)	.15 (.04, .723)	.29 (.04, .000)
<b>Indirect via</b> Conflict	.03 (.03, .234)	.06 (.02, .008)	.05 (.02, .030)	-.01 (.02, .773)
Cohesion	.02 (.02, .278)	.00 (.02, .806)	.02 (.02, .177)	.02 (.02, .205)
Negative parenting	.03 (.01, .045)	.04 (.02, .011)	.05 (.01, .001)	.01 (.01, .700)
Positive parenting	.01 (.02, .667)	-.03 (.02, .106)	.01 (.02, .690)	-.05 (.02, .012)
<b>Total</b>	.17 (.03, .000)	.21 (.03, .000)	.15 (.03, .000)	.25 (.03, .000)

As seen in Table 3, mediator variables were found to have statistically significant effects between coparenting and the child's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment, as well as the child's school adjustment. Accordingly, it was determined that only negative parenting behaviors had a mediator effect between coparenting and the child's social adjustment ( $\beta = .03; SE = .01, p < .05$ ). Negative parenting behaviors ( $\beta = .04; SE = .02, p < .05$ ) and family conflict ( $\beta = .06; SE = .02, p < .01$ ) were found to have a significant effect between coparenting and the child's emotional adjustment. Family conflict ( $\beta = .05; SE = .02, p < .05$ ) and negative parenting behaviors ( $\beta = .05; SE = .01, p < .01$ ) were found to have a significant effect between coparenting and the child's behavioral adjustment. Among the mediating variables between coparenting and child's school adjustment, only positive parenting behaviors ( $\beta = -.05; SE = .02, p < .05$ ) were found to have a significant effect. Although the direct effect of coparenting on child's school adjustment was statistically significant ( $\beta = .29; SE = .04, p < .01$ ), the mediating effects of family conflict ( $\beta = -.01; p > .05$ ), family cohesion ( $\beta = .02; p > .05$ ), and negative ( $\beta = .01; p > .05$ ) parenting behaviors were not found to be statistically significant.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the direct and indirect effects of coparenting on children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment through family conflict, family cohesion, and positive and negative parenting behaviors using path analysis. Findings revealed that, in both mother and father data, coparenting was moderately and negatively associated with family conflict, moderately and positively associated with family cohesion, and moderately and negatively associated with negative parenting behaviors. While coparenting showed a low positive association with positive parenting in mother reports, this association was moderate in father reports. Regarding direct effects, coparenting significantly predicted all four domains of child adjustment in mother reports, whereas in father reports, only the direct effects on emotional and school adjustment were significant, with direct effects on social

and behavioral adjustment falling short of significance. In terms of indirect effects, family conflict and negative parenting behaviors mediated the relationship between coparenting and children's emotional adjustment in mother reports, while only negative parenting behaviors served as a mediator for behavioral adjustment. In father reports, negative parenting behaviors mediated the relationship between coparenting and social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment, whereas family conflict mediated the effects on emotional and behavioral adjustment. Notably, only positive parenting behaviors emerged as a significant mediator between coparenting and school adjustment in father reports. Family cohesion did not yield significant indirect effects in either parent model. These findings are discussed below in relation to existing literature.

Findings based on mother reports revealed that coparenting is directly and significantly associated with children's social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment. In father reports, a different pattern of direct effects emerged, coparenting was directly and significantly related to children's emotional and school adjustment, whereas the direct effects on social and behavioral adjustment were not significant. Mothers' greater role as the primary managers of daily childcare and family routines may allow them to influence children's social-emotional and behavioral functioning within a broader framework. Indeed, literature frequently reports that mothers' routine caregiving responsibilities are higher than those of fathers (Craig & Mullan, 2011; Nelson & Holub, 2022). In the qualitative study conducted by Özdemir et al. (2020) on perceptions of coparenting in Turkey, it was similarly noted that, particularly in rural regions, mothers are at the forefront of child-rearing, while fathers largely approve the structure established by mothers, reflecting a distinct coparenting pattern. In this context, mothers' tendency to link coparenting more directly with multiple domains of child adjustment may be related both to the intensity of their caregiving responsibilities and to their closer observation of children's daily lives.

Regarding indirect effects, mother reports indicated that coparenting indirectly supports children's emotional and behavioral adjustment by reducing family conflict and negative parenting behaviors. In other words, when mothers reported higher-quality coparenting, they simultaneously reported lower levels of family conflict and lower levels of negative parenting patterns, and these processes were associated with children's emotional and behavioral adjustment. Similarly, father reports revealed indirect effects through family conflict and negative parenting, influencing children's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment. For both mothers and fathers, family conflict and negative parenting behaviors emerged as the most consistent and powerful mediators.

The indirect effects observed for family conflict suggest that a substantial portion of coparenting's contribution to child adjustment operates through the reduction of interparental conflict or the constructive resolution of such conflicts. Teubert and Pinquart's (2010) meta-analysis demonstrated that interparental conflict is moderately and consistently associated with both internalizing and externalizing problems in children, and that as the frequency and destructiveness of conflict increase, children's emotional security and adaptive capacities are markedly weakened. In the present study, the finding that coparenting indirectly supports children's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment by reducing family conflict parallels these results.

With regard to negative parenting behaviors, it is likewise suggested for both mothers and fathers that coparenting contributes to child adjustment particularly by limiting harsh, inconsistent, or overly permissive parenting practices. In other words, the coparenting relationship appears to enhance children's social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment by reducing negative parenting behaviors. These findings are consistent with evidence showing that coparenting can support parents' individual parenting skills in their relationships with their children (Altenburger & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2021; Liu et al., 2022).

In contrast, the positive parenting variable displayed a more limited and distinct pattern. In mother reports, positive parenting did not produce a significant indirect effect in any adjustment domain. In father reports, positive parenting yielded a significant indirect relationship only for school adjustment; however, the fact that this association was notably negative diverges from findings in both national and international literature (Erol & Turhan, 2018; Jeynes, 2015). This divergence may reflect that positive parenting behaviors directed toward school adjustment manifest as controlling behaviors among fathers. In a study by Dinn and Sunar (2017), Turkish parents were found to exhibit higher levels of psychological control than their U.S. counterparts, with such controlling attitudes within the family being most

prominently displayed by fathers. In this context, father-specific controlling and norm-setting attitudes may be experienced by children not as support but as pressure or control (Gao et al., 2020). Accordingly, some parenting behaviors labeled as "positive" may have been perceived by children as coercive or controlling rather than supportive.

The family cohesion variable did not exhibit significant indirect effects in either the mother or father models. The literature has demonstrated that family stability and structural transitions are significantly associated with children's externalizing behaviors (Cavanagh & Huston, 2006; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007; Goldberg & Carlson, 2014). However, these studies are based on samples that include structural changes such as marriage, separation, and remarriage. In the present study, only married and cohabiting parents were included, resulting in limited variance in family structure. This constraint may have hindered the emergence of statistically significant indirect effects of family integrity on child adjustment. Thus, this finding points not to the unimportance of family integrity, but rather to the limited testability of this relationship due to the structural characteristics of the sample.

In conclusion, the consistent significance of the total effects of coparenting on child adjustment across both parent reports indicates that coparenting is a fundamental determinant of children's adjustment processes. However, this effect appears to operate through broader direct pathways among mothers, whereas among fathers it emerges through direct effects in specific domains and, more prominently, through indirect mechanisms involving family conflict and negative parenting. The present study contributes to the literature by elucidating the effects of coparenting experiences on children in Turkey and by emphasizing the importance of family system processes that shape healthy child development.

### **Recommendations and Limitations**

Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. The correlational and cross-sectional design of the research model precludes an understanding of the temporal course of coparenting's effects on children's adjustment. Future studies are therefore recommended to employ longitudinal designs with the same variables. In addition, reliance solely on parent reports for child adjustment limits the interpretation of the findings. Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews and observations in future research could provide a more comprehensive and in-depth evaluation. Finally, although a large nationwide sample from Turkey was used, different family types were not included. Accordingly, future studies should encompass divorced parents, unmarried couples, and families in which grandparents play an active role in childcare, in order to offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding how coparenting processes operate across diverse contexts.

### **Disclosure Statements**

This study was carried out as part of the TÜBİTAK project (No. 118K047).

### **Conflict of Interest**

As authors, we declare that there is no financial or non-financial conflict of interest that could influence this study.

### **CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement**

The authors contributed equally to all stages of the study, including conceptualization, data analysis, and manuscript preparation.

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