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Self-Regulation and Prosocial Behavior in Early Childhood Following Parental Divorce: A Case Study of Grandparent Care

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objective: Parental divorce can reorganize young children's caregiving ecology, particularly when grandparents assume primary daily care. This study examined how self-regulation and prosocial behavior were expressed in a five-year-old child receiving grandparent care following parental divorce. **Methods:** A qualitative single-case study conducted in June 2026 in Jember, Indonesia used naturalistic observation, semi-structured interviews with the grandmother and a neighboring informant, and supporting documentation. Data were analyzed through reduction, display, and conclusion verification, supported by source and technique triangulation and member checking. **Results:** Self-regulation was comparatively stronger in familiar routines: the child showed emerging responsibility and rule-following but inconsistent turn-taking and frustration tolerance. Prosocial behavior was relationship- and context-sensitive: empathy and helping were more evident toward close family members, whereas sharing, sustained cooperation, and conflict-free peer interaction were less stable. **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that competencies established in predictable grandparent-led routines may not automatically generalize to peer settings. Coordinated home-school routines may help extend waiting, sharing, emotion regulation, and cooperative play across contexts; causal effects of divorce or grandparent care cannot be inferred from this single case.

Keywords: Early childhood; Grandparent care; Parental divorce; Prosocial behavior; Self-regulation

INTRODUCTION

Self-regulation and prosocial behavior are central to early childhood functioning because they shape how young children manage impulses, follow routines, respond to others, and participate in learning and peer interactions. Self-regulation involves coordinated control of attention, emotion, and behavior in goal-directed situations; in the preschool years it becomes visible in responsibilities, rule-following, delay of gratification, and turn-taking. Its developmental relevance is well established, with links to school readiness, interpersonal functioning, mental health, and later achievement (Blair & Raver, 2015; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Robson et al., 2020). Prosocial behavior includes voluntary actions intended to benefit others, such as helping, sharing, cooperating, caring, and responding empathically. These behaviors develop through socialization, including emotion-related communication, caregiver warmth, modeling, and repeated interactions with peers (Brownell et al., 2013; Xiao et al., 2018). Peer contexts are especially important because they require reciprocity, resource sharing, negotiation, and conflict repair; observational research indicates that early peer socialization shapes both the form and context of prosocial responses (Salerni & Caprin, 2022). Recent international evidence similarly shows that young children's prosocial behavior is embedded in caregiving relationships and emotionally meaningful contexts (Padilla-Walker et al., 2024; Partington & Hastings, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024).

Parental divorce can reorganize the ecology in which these competencies are practiced. The relevant developmental issue is not divorce as an isolated event, but changes in relationships, caregiving arrangements, routines, conflict exposure, economic conditions, and access to attachment figures after separation. Reviews show average elevations

in psychological, social, behavioral, and academic risk after parental divorce, but also substantial heterogeneity associated with parenting quality, interparental conflict, continuing parent-child relationships, and protective resources (Amato, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rhoades, 2008; Harold & Sellers, 2018). When daily care shifts to grandparents, the child enters a grandfamily system that may offer continuity, affection, cultural transmission, and practical security while also presenting caregiver demands related to health, energy, finances, and role strain (Hayslip et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022). Research on custodial grandchildren likewise documents heterogeneous outcomes shaped by relational closeness, family history, contextual resources, caregiver stress, and grandparenting practices rather than by grandparent care alone (Li et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019; Xu & Harrison, 2023; Kaylor-Tapscott & Sullivan, 2024). For early childhood research, grandparent care following parental divorce is therefore best treated as a caregiving context within which self-regulation and prosocial behavior can be observed, not as a deterministic cause of either strength or difficulty.

Despite this literature, less is known about how self-regulation and prosocial behavior are expressed across everyday contexts in a preschool child whose parents have divorced and whose grandmother has assumed primary daily care. Much grandfamily research relies on broad mental-health or behavior-problem outcomes, school-age samples, population datasets, or caregiver-report measures. Such approaches estimate group-level risk but can obscure within-child variation. A young child may demonstrate responsibility and rule-following in familiar household routines yet struggle with waiting, sharing, or cooperative negotiation during peer play. Similarly, helping may be readily expressed toward a close caregiver but not generalized to less familiar partners. For early childhood education, this distinction matters because self-regulation and prosocial behavior are teachable, context-sensitive competencies rather than a single global indicator of adjustment. Examining responsibility, discipline, and turn-taking alongside care/empathy, cooperation, joint play, helping, and sharing can therefore show which competencies are relatively stable, which remain fragile, and the relational conditions under which each is expressed (Fabes et al., 1999; Spinrad et al., 2006; Flook et al., 2015). Indonesian studies provide relevant background but leave a focused gap at the intersection of early childhood, parental divorce, and grandparent care. Existing work has described early childhood social-emotional behavior (Dewi et al., 2020), social interaction among children affected by parental divorce (Hasanah et al., 2023), social-emotional problems in broken-home contexts (Mahendra et al., 2022), family influences on child development (Rahmalia & Laeli, 2024), social-emotional development through play (Mukhlis & Mbelo, 2019), and psychosocial consequences of parental divorce (Titalessy & Kusumiati, 2021). However, these studies do not provide a fine-grained account of how self-regulation and prosocial behavior coexist and vary across family and peer contexts in a preschool child receiving long-term grandparent care following parental divorce. The gap is therefore both substantive and analytic: the caregiving context and the focal competencies are often studied separately, and within-child variation across relational settings is rarely made explicit. A qualitative case study can address this gap by preserving contextual detail while comparing observable competencies across close-family routines and broader social interactions.

The present study therefore centers specifically on self-regulation and prosocial behavior in early childhood following parental divorce within a grandparent-care arrangement. It makes three bounded contributions. First, it provides a contextual account of a five-year-old child in Indonesia whose grandmother became the primary daily caregiver after parental separation. Second, it compares self-regulatory competencies—responsibility, discipline, and waiting for turns—with prosocial behaviors—care/empathy, cooperation, joint play, helping, and sharing—across familiar family routines and peer or less familiar interactions. Third, it identifies a hypothesis-generating pattern concerning the extent to which competencies practiced in predictable grandparent-led routines generalize to broader social contexts. The study is deliberately limited to one child, one primary grandparent caregiver, one neighboring informant, and observations conducted in June 2026; it seeks contextual depth and analytic transferability rather than statistical generalization. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to examine how self-regulation and prosocial behavior were expressed in a five-year-old child receiving grandparent care following parental divorce, with particular attention to variation across family and peer contexts.

THEORETICAL OR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An integrated developmental-ecological perspective provides a useful framework for interpreting these patterns. Self-regulation develops through co-regulation: caregivers establish routines, set limits, model emotion management, and gradually transfer behavioral responsibility to the child (Dennis, 2006; Morawska et al., 2019). Prosocial behavior is socialized through emotional discourse, modeling, inductive guidance, and opportunities to respond to others' needs (Brownell et al., 2013; Xiao et al., 2018). Peer interaction creates a distinct test of these competencies because children must negotiate turns, possessions, rules, and competing intentions under conditions that are less predictable than household routines (Fabes et al., 1999). In post-divorce grandparent care, caregiving consistency and relational closeness may support competence in familiar routines, while caregiver capacity, parent

contact, and opportunities for peer socialization may shape whether those competencies are expressed beyond the immediate family. This framework treats family reorganization after divorce as part of the child's relational ecology rather than as a direct causal mechanism. It is also consistent with grandfamily research emphasizing the simultaneous presence of protective and constraining processes and with evidence that caregiver self-regulation and dyadic co-regulation matter for discipline-related development (Hayslip et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022; Lunkenheimer et al., 2023).

METHOD

Research Design and Reporting Standard

This study used a qualitative single-case design to examine how self-regulation and prosocial behavior were expressed within a specific early childhood caregiving context following parental divorce. The case-study approach was appropriate because the aim was not to estimate prevalence or establish causal effects, but to integrate direct observation, caregiver accounts, and contextual documentation while preserving the situations in which behaviors occurred. The unit of analysis was one five-year-old child whose grandmother had assumed primary daily care after parental separation. The study was conducted during June 2026 in the child's home environment in Jember, Indonesia. The available study documentation does not specify the number or duration of observation sessions, total observation time, the duration or mode of the semi-structured interviews, or whether the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; these details are therefore not reconstructed retrospectively and are acknowledged as reporting limitations. For this revised manuscript, reporting was organized with reference to the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR); prospective use of SRQR was not documented in the original study materials.

Context, Setting, and Study Period

The study was conducted during June 2026 in the child's home environment in Jember, Indonesia. The available dataset did not systematically document school attendance, detailed household composition beyond the primary caregiving arrangement, or socioeconomic conditions; these contextual characteristics are therefore not inferred.

Participants, Sampling, or Data Sources

The child was selected purposively because the case met four criteria aligned with the study purpose: early-childhood age, parental divorce, ongoing grandparent care, and observable opportunities to examine self-regulation and prosocial behavior in everyday settings. The child had lived under the grandmother's daily care since the parents separated when the child was approximately one year old. Contact with the father continued but was infrequent after the father remarried, while the available study record reported no direct contact with the biological mother since the separation. The grandmother, who had long-standing knowledge of the child's routines and behavior, served as the primary informant. A neighboring adult who regularly observed the child's interactions around the home served as a supporting informant, enabling comparison between family-based descriptions and behavior in the surrounding social environment. School attendance, detailed household composition beyond the primary caregiving arrangement, and socioeconomic conditions were not systematically documented in the available dataset and therefore are not inferred.

Variables, Constructs, and Operational Definitions

The qualitative sensitizing concepts were self-regulation, prosocial behavior, and caregiving context. Self-regulation was operationalized through responsibility, discipline, and waiting for turns. Discipline referred to adherence to household routines, rules, and corrective guidance rather than punitive discipline. Prosocial behavior was examined through care/empathy, cooperation, joint play, helping, and sharing. Caregiving context included care history, parent contact, household rules, frustration responses, peer relationships, and caregiver challenges.

Instruments, Measures, and Data Collection

Data were collected through naturalistic observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation focused on two major domains. Self-regulation was operationalized through responsibility, discipline, and waiting for turns. In this study, discipline refers to adherence to household routines, rules, and corrective guidance rather than punitive discipline. Responsibility indicators included cleaning or returning used objects, completing simple tasks assigned by the grandparent, and caring for personal or other people's belongings. Discipline indicators included following household rules, carrying out routines when directed, and responding to advice or correction. Waiting-for-turn indicators included waiting to use an object or facility, refraining from forcing one's preference, and showing patience when access was delayed. The observation guide functioned as a qualitative structuring device

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rather than a standardized psychometric instrument. The available study documentation does not record a separate pilot test, external expert review, or formal instrument-validation procedure, so no such procedure is claimed.

Prosocial behavior was observed through five subdomains: care/empathy, cooperation, joint play, helping, and sharing. Indicators included disposing of waste appropriately, showing empathy and friendliness, taking part in family activities, following joint agreements, playing without creating conflict, interacting positively during play, helping family members or others in need, lending toys, and sharing food or belongings. Semi-structured interviews with the grandmother and the neighboring informant explored the same domains while also gathering contextual information about the history of caregiving, current contact with biological parents, household rules, typical responses to frustration, peer relationships, and challenges faced by the caregiver. Documentation and field notes were used to support the interpretation of observed and reported behavior. The interview guide was aligned with the same predefined domains; the available documentation does not describe a separate pilot or external review of the guide, and it is therefore treated as a qualitative interview framework rather than a validated scale.

Table 1. Mapping of qualitative domains and evidence sources

Domain	Main indicators	Evidence sources	Recording/analytic material
Self-regulation	Responsibility; discipline; waiting for turns	Direct observation; grandmother; neighboring informant	Field notes; interview records; supporting documentation
Prosocial behavior	Care/empathy; cooperation; joint play; helping; sharing	Direct observation; grandmother; neighboring informant	Field notes; interview records; supporting documentation
Caregiving context	Care history; parent contact; household rules; frustration responses; peer relationships; caregiver challenges	Grandmother and neighboring informant interviews; supporting documentation	Interview records; field notes; supporting documentation

Procedure or Intervention

The study procedure proceeded through purposive case selection, data collection, analytic coding, interactive analysis, trustworthiness checks, and integrated case interpretation, as summarized in Figure 1.

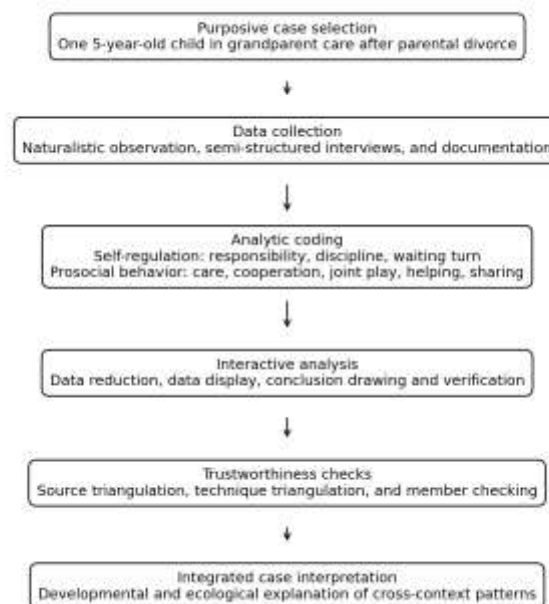


Figure 1. Research procedure and analytic flow

Data Analysis

Analysis followed an interactive qualitative process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The researcher organized and coded interview records and field notes according to the predefined domains of self-regulation and prosocial behavior. Within each domain, behaviors were compared across situations and across direct observation and informant reports. The analysis remained primarily deductive within the predefined indicators; the available study documentation does not identify a separate inductive coding stage or

multiple independent coders, and no inter-coder agreement is claimed. Convergent evidence was used to strengthen pattern interpretation, while divergent evidence was retained as evidence of context dependence rather than forced into a single score or uniform judgment. The analysis did not convert observations into a psychometric score; instead, the indicators served as a structured framework for identifying consistency and cross-context variability in self-regulation and prosocial behavior. Interpretations were repeatedly checked against field evidence so that conclusions remained anchored in what the child did, what informants described, and the context in which the behavior occurred.

Research Quality and Rigor

Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation compared the grandmother's account with the neighboring informant's observations, while technique triangulation compared interview information with direct observation and supporting documentation. The study also reported member checking with the primary informant and re-examination of raw notes during verification. The available documentation did not specify the exact timing or scope of member checking or whether the neighboring informant participated; it is therefore reported conservatively as a supplementary credibility procedure.

Ethical Considerations

Research permission was arranged during the pre-field stage. The available study documentation does not report a formal institutional ethics committee approval identifier and does not specify the form of guardian permission, adult-informant consent, child assent, or data-storage and access procedures; no such details are inferred retrospectively. To reduce re-identification risk, the child's name is not reported and the locality is presented only at the level of Jember, Indonesia. Because this is a single qualitative case, methodological quality is considered in terms of credibility, transparency, and contextual coherence rather than statistical reliability or population representativeness.

RESULTS

Caregiving Context and Cross-Context Pattern

The case showed that self-regulation and prosocial behavior were not expressed uniformly across settings. Competencies embedded in familiar household routines and close relationships were generally more stable than behaviors requiring delay of gratification, reciprocal negotiation, sharing, or conflict management with peers. This cross-context pattern is central to the study because it shifts interpretation away from a global judgment of the child's social-emotional functioning and toward the specific behaviors named in the study title: how the child regulated behavior and acted prosocially, with whom, and under what conditions.

Following parental divorce, the grandmother had served as the child's primary daily caregiver since approximately one year of age. The father remained part of the child's life but contact was infrequent, while the mother was absent from day-to-day interaction according to the available study record. The grandmother therefore organized most daily routines in which responsibility, rule-following, helping, and other behaviors were practiced. The account also suggested that physically intensive supervision could be demanding for the older caregiver, although caregiver capacity was not independently measured. Her caregiving pattern was interpreted as permissive-protective with pockets of structured guidance: the child was expected to complete household responsibilities and follow some rules, but limits were less consistent when the child cried, sulked, or strongly insisted on a preference. This description is an analytic interpretation of observed and reported interactions, not a standardized parenting-style classification or a causal explanation of the child's behavior.

Self-Regulation: Responsibility, Discipline, and Waiting for Turns

Responsibility was the clearest relative strength within self-regulation. During observation, the child was able to put away toys or used objects, although the behavior often required repeated reminders and accompaniment. The child also completed simple household tasks and participated in practical family routines, including helping with firewood and animal-related chores. When the grandmother was unwell, the child was reported to have helped with preparing rice. These behaviors demonstrate that the child could sustain goal-directed action when the task was concrete, familiar, and socially meaningful. However, responsibility did not generalize fully to the management of possessions.

Discipline was also relatively developed, but its quality was mixed. The child usually followed major household rules, such as limits on how far to play from home and expectations regarding bedtime or daily routines. Yet observation and informant reports showed that compliance could depend on the threat of reprimand. When asked to

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return home from play or when corrected, the child sometimes became angry, sulked, or remained silent rather than responding constructively.

Waiting for turns was the most fragile component of self-regulation. On some occasions the child could queue or wait. On other occasions, delayed access triggered insistence, crying, or taking a toy from another child. When the situation was calm and predictable, the child could regulate; when desire and peer competition intensified, regulatory performance deteriorated.

Table 2. Summary of self-regulation findings

Subdomain	Evidence pattern	Analytic interpretation
Responsibility	The child cleaned up toys with repeated prompting, completed simple household tasks, and helped with family chores, but did not consistently care for personal or peers' belongings.	Responsibility was emerging most clearly in familiar routines supported by direct adult guidance.
Discipline	The child generally followed household rules and routines, but sometimes became angry or sulked when corrected or asked to stop playing.	Compliance was present but often externally regulated rather than consistently self-initiated.
Waiting for turns	The child sometimes waited patiently but at other times grabbed toys, insisted on immediate access, or cried when wishes were not met.	Delay of gratification and frustration tolerance remained unstable and highly situation-dependent.

Prosocial Behavior: Care/Empathy, Cooperation, Joint Play, Helping, and Sharing

Prosocial behavior showed an equally differentiated profile. The child demonstrated empathy, care, and helping most reliably toward people in the immediate family circle. The child understood that waste should be placed appropriately and could show concern for close others, although independent initiative in maintaining environmental cleanliness was limited. Friendliness also fluctuated with mood: when emotionally comfortable, the child could interact warmly, but when upset the child might withdraw into an activity or fail to respond. This pattern indicates that the motivational basis for prosocial behavior was present, yet the behavior was not equally accessible across emotional states and relationship contexts.

Helping was a particularly informative strength. The child helped the grandmother with daily work, including gathering firewood and assisting with family chores, and was reported to prepare rice when the grandmother was ill. The neighboring informant also described occasions when the child helped outside the household after an initially hesitant response. This suggests that prosocial responsiveness was not confined completely to the grandmother, but proximity and familiarity lowered the threshold for helping.

Cooperation was less stable than helping. The child participated actively in shared family activities but did not consistently follow agreements during joint tasks and could shift toward preferred activities.

The clearest difficulties appeared during peer play and sharing. The child was energetic and could play positively with peers who understood the child's intentions and preferences. However, the child sometimes teased others to gain attention, created conflict, or became angry when a peer acted unexpectedly. The child's difficulty was therefore not a lack of social interest; the child was active and sought interaction. Rather, the vulnerability involved maintaining regulation and reciprocity when peer behavior frustrated the child's expectations.

Sharing was even more relationship-selective. During direct observation, the child did not willingly lend preferred toys or share food or favored possessions with peers. Informants nevertheless reported that the child sometimes set aside food for the grandmother.

Table 3. Summary of prosocial behavior findings

Subdomain	Evidence pattern	Analytic interpretation
Care/empathy	The child disposed of waste appropriately with reminders, showed empathy toward close people, and was friendly when emotionally settled.	Caring was present but stronger toward familiar people and depended partly on mood and prompting.
Cooperation	The child actively joined family chores but did not consistently follow shared agreements and was less spontaneous outside the family.	Cooperation was strongest in close-family routines with clear roles.
Joint play	The child was active and cheerful but sometimes teased peers, triggered conflict, or became emotionally reactive when misunderstood.	Peer play exposed weaker conflict regulation despite capacity for positive interaction.

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Subdomain	Evidence pattern	Analytic interpretation
Helping	The child readily helped the grandmother and family; helping neighbors could occur after hesitation.	Helping generalized partly beyond family but remained relationship-sensitive.
Sharing	The child did not share preferred toys or food during observation, although selective sharing with the grandmother was reported.	Sharing was the clearest prosocial vulnerability and was strongly shaped by relational closeness.

Cross-Context Pattern

Across the case, self-regulatory and prosocial competencies were generally stronger in familiar, emotionally close, and predictable routines than in peer or less familiar interactions requiring delay, reciprocity, sharing, or conflict management. Table 4 summarizes this cross-context pattern.

Table 4. Cross-context pattern of self-regulation and prosocial behavior

Context	Relatively stronger behaviors	More fragile behaviors	Implication
Close-family routines	Helping, responsibility, familiar-rule compliance, selective empathy	Independent initiation sometimes required prompting	Emotional closeness and predictable routines can scaffold competence.
Peer/less familiar interaction	Social interest, positive play under favorable conditions, occasional helping	Waiting, sharing, conflict-free play, sustained cooperation	Skills do not automatically generalize across relational contexts.
Post-divorce caregiving ecology	Security and continuity with grandmother	Inconsistent limits and reduced breadth of caregiver/parent input	Outcome reflects interacting protective and constraining processes, not divorce alone.

DISCUSSION

The cross-context pattern can be interpreted as an interaction between emerging self-regulation, prosocial behavior, and the relational demands of each setting. Within the home, the child showed initiative through helping, completing tasks, and participating in familiar routines. More fragile performance appeared when the child had to delay a preferred response, coordinate goals with peers, share desired objects, or manage frustration. This contrast does not imply a fixed developmental deficit. Rather, it indicates that the same child could display different levels of regulation and prosocial reciprocity depending on predictability, emotional closeness, and the complexity of the social demand. From a developmental-ecological perspective, the grandmother's home was the most stable caregiving environment represented in the data: expectations were familiar, the relationship was close, and roles were predictable. Self-regulatory strengths and family-based prosocial behavior clustered around activities repeatedly practiced in that setting. Peer interactions created a less predictable context requiring turn-taking, possession negotiation, perspective taking, and conflict repair. The broader post-divorce ecology also included reduced contact with the father and prolonged absence of the mother, but the study did not measure pre-divorce conflict, parental mental health, earlier temperament, or systematic school behavior. Consistent with divorce research, these contextual changes should therefore be treated as part of a reorganized relational environment rather than as direct causes of the observed behaviors (Amato, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rhoades, 2008; Harold & Sellers, 2018). The most defensible interpretation is therefore transactional and hypothesis-generating. Grandparent care following parental divorce provided continuity, emotional security, and repeated opportunities for responsibility and helping, while inconsistent limit-setting and constrained caregiver capacity may have coincided with fewer structured opportunities to practice waiting, sharing, and conflict management in frustration-heavy peer situations. The child's own emotional reactivity may also have interacted with these conditions, although temperament was not formally measured. This interpretation is consistent with evidence on the interplay among child reactivity, regulatory control, and caregiving, as well as research linking grandparenting practices with child emotional and behavioral outcomes (Dennis, 2006; Li et al., 2019). The case therefore supports a context-sensitive account of self-regulation and prosocial behavior, not a validated causal model of divorce or grandparent care.

This pattern fits developmental research showing that self-regulation is scaffolded through repeated adult-child routines. Dennis (2006) found that preschool self-regulation is shaped by interactions among child reactivity, control capacities, and parenting, while Morawska et al. (2019) identify caregiver practices as central to the development of young children's regulatory capacity. In this case, responsibility was most evident where the grandmother provided a stable script: put items away, complete a simple chore, or help with a known family task. The finding also aligns

with broader evidence that regulatory capacity supports school readiness and social adjustment but develops through repeated practice rather than appearing as a unitary trait (Blair & Raver, 2015; Eisenberg et al., 2010). Educationally, this suggests that the child already possessed a usable foundation for regulation that could be extended from household responsibility to classroom and peer routines.

The finding is consistent with research indicating that warm, structured, and inductive caregiving is associated with better socialization outcomes. Xiao et al. (2018) showed links among parental regulation, warmth, discipline, and children's prosocial behavior, and Li et al. (2019) demonstrated that grandparenting styles can have distinctive associations with children's emotional and behavioral problems. The grandmother in this case provided warmth and practical direction, but the enforcement of limits was not always predictable. Such a pattern can simultaneously support security and weaken the child's opportunity to practice self-imposed behavioral control. The result should not be interpreted as a deficit in affection; rather, it reflects a tension between protection and consistent limit setting.

Both informants described this variability, suggesting that the problem was not an absolute inability to wait but an unstable capacity that depended on mood, the desirability of the object, and the social partner. This finding is strongly compatible with the broader literature on effortful control. Fabes et al. (1999) showed that regulatory differences become especially consequential during emotionally intense peer interaction, and Spinrad et al. (2006) linked emotion-related regulation to later social competence.

International grandfamily research provides a useful framework for interpreting this context dependence. Custodial-grandchild samples show substantial heterogeneity, and relational closeness with grandparents can function as an important protective process (Hayslip et al., 2019; Xu & Harrison, 2023). At the same time, systematic review evidence indicates that custodial grandchildren can face elevated behavioral and educational risks, often in the context of layered prior adversity and caregiver strain (Xu et al., 2022). Smith et al. (2019) similarly found higher psychological difficulties among custodial grandchildren than several comparison groups. The present case should not be generalized to those samples, but it illustrates a plausible micro-level mechanism: a highly central and emotionally secure grandparent relationship may support competence inside the family while the child receives fewer or less consistently scaffolded opportunities to transfer that competence to peer negotiation.

The grandmother's age and reported physical limitations are relevant contextual considerations without implying inadequate care. Grandfamilies often involve simultaneous strengths and demands. Hayslip et al. (2019) emphasize resilience, diversity, family relationships, and caregiver distress as recurring themes in the grandparent-care literature. In this case, the grandmother provided continuity, practical care, and emotional security, while the available account suggested that physically demanding supervision could be challenging; this was not independently measured as a causal mechanism. A permissive-protective response—yielding to reduce distress or conflict—may be understandable in this context, but the case cannot establish that such responses caused the child's difficulties with delay, negotiation, or sharing. The appropriate implication is support for the caregiver, not blame.

Theoretical and Methodological Contribution

Several findings converge with prior Indonesian research on children affected by parental divorce while adding a more differentiated early childhood account. Earlier studies have reported difficulties in social interaction, emotion regulation, confidence, and peer adaptation (Hasanah et al., 2023; Mahendra et al., 2022; Titalessy & Kusumati, 2021). The present case showed some comparable behaviors—anger when frustrated, inconsistent peer cooperation, and reluctance to share—but also clear strengths in household responsibility, empathy toward close others, and helping. By separating self-regulation from prosocial behavior and examining both across contexts, the case avoids treating children following parental divorce as uniformly impaired.

Prior Indonesian work also emphasizes the importance of family interaction and the multidimensional nature of social-emotional functioning (Dewi et al., 2020; Rahmalia & Laeli, 2024). The present study sharpens that insight by showing that specific self-regulatory and prosocial competencies did not move together. Responsibility and familiar-rule compliance could be relatively stable while turn-taking remained fragile; helping and empathy could be evident within the family while sharing and sustained cooperation were less consistent with peers. This within-child differentiation is important for early childhood education because it points toward competency-specific support rather than broad labels of adjustment or maladjustment.

International grandfamily research further clarifies the contribution. Systematic and empirical studies emphasize heterogeneity in outcomes among grandchildren raised by grandparents and the importance of relational closeness, caregiver stress, prior adversity, and contextual resources (Hayslip et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022; Xu & Harrison, 2023). The present case contributes process-level detail by showing one way such heterogeneity may be expressed in early childhood: competencies repeatedly rehearsed within a secure and predictable grandparent relationship were more readily available than behaviors requiring reciprocity in peer settings. The contribution is not a new estimate of

risk, but a testable proposition that the breadth of contexts in which self-regulation and prosocial behavior are scaffolded may influence whether home-based competence generalizes to broader social interaction.

Implications for Education, Policy, and Practice

The educational implications are concrete. Waiting should be treated as a teachable social-emotional routine rather than a moral label. Visual turn cues, short predictable delays, explicit language for disappointment, and immediate positive reinforcement for successful waiting can convert a high-frustration situation into repeated regulatory practice. Evidence from preschool intervention research indicates that self-regulation and prosocial behavior can be strengthened through structured experiences rather than assumed to develop automatically (Flook et al., 2015; Ursache et al., 2012). The child's existing strengths in household responsibility suggest that similarly consistent routines could be built around waiting and conflict management.

The educational relevance of this pattern is supported by intervention literature showing that preschool self-regulation and prosocial behavior can be strengthened through structured experiences (Flook et al., 2015; Ursache et al., 2012). Because the child already demonstrated component skills, evidence-informed applications may focus on extending rather than replacing existing competencies: turn-taking games, cooperative tasks with clear roles, emotion labeling during conflict, brief predictable waiting routines, and reinforcement of successful sharing. Coordination between the grandparent caregiver and early childhood educators may also help make expectations more consistent across home and learning settings. These are applications inferred from the case and prior literature, not interventions tested in the present study, because systematic teacher observations and school-based implementation data were not collected.

The case nevertheless has practical implications for early childhood education and family support. The most fragile behaviors were delay of gratification, turn-taking, sharing, cooperative problem solving, and emotion regulation during frustration, whereas responsibility and helping provided existing strengths on which to build. Caregivers and educators may therefore consider a small set of consistently enforced rules, predictable consequences, choices within limits, praise for successful waiting and sharing, and supervised peer interaction. Communication between early childhood educators and the grandparent caregiver may help align language, routines, and expectations across settings. These strategies should be treated as evidence-informed possibilities for further evaluation rather than as effects demonstrated by this single case. Systematic-review evidence on grandparent-focused prevention programs likewise supports tailoring assistance to caregiving skills, coping, and intergenerational family relationships while recognizing the heterogeneity of grandparent-care arrangements (Chan & Piehler, 2024).

The study also has relevance for inclusive family engagement in early childhood settings. Schools and early childhood programs often organize communication around biological parents, yet children may be raised by grandparents or other kin following divorce and other family transitions. Identifying the actual daily caregiver and including that person in communication, social-emotional planning, and family education may improve continuity between home and educational settings. For grandparent caregivers, flexible meeting arrangements and practical guidance may be particularly useful when age, health, or energy constraints affect participation. These implications were not directly evaluated in the present study and therefore should be understood as practice considerations arising from the case rather than demonstrated policy effects.

Limitations and Future Research

Because the study situates the case following parental divorce, temporal sequence should not be mistaken for causality. Parental divorce, grandparent care, inconsistent limit-setting, and behavioral difficulties co-occurred in this case, but a single-case design cannot isolate their independent effects. The child's temperament or pre-existing regulatory profile may have contributed to both peer conflict and the grandmother's protective accommodation. Limited contact with parents may have reduced exposure to varied adult models, and behavior at school may differ from behavior observed at home and in the neighborhood. The absence of systematic teacher observations, pre-divorce data, and standardized measures means that these alternatives remain open. The findings therefore support an ecological description of self-regulation and prosocial behavior in a post-divorce grandparent-care context rather than a causal account of divorce.

The limitations are substantial and define the boundaries of interpretation. The study involved one child and cannot support statistical generalization. Observation occurred within a limited time window in June 2026, and the available documentation does not specify the number or duration of observation sessions, total observation time, interview duration or mode, or whether interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data relied on one primary caregiver and one neighboring informant, and the biological parents' perspectives were not collected. School attendance, detailed household composition, and socioeconomic conditions were not systematically documented. The study did not use a standardized developmental assessment, did not employ multiple independent

coders or quantify inter-rater agreement, and did not measure temperament, prior family conflict, socioeconomic stress, or the duration and quality of school-based peer exposure. The available documentation also lacks a formal ethics approval identifier and does not specify guardian permission, adult-informant consent, child assent, or data-storage procedures. Some indicators were more richly documented than others, which can influence qualitative emphasis. Nevertheless, convergence across direct observation and two informant perspectives supports the credibility of the central case pattern: self-regulation and prosocial behavior were generally stronger in familiar routines and more fragile in frustration-heavy or less familiar interactions. Future research should test this pattern with multiple cases, repeated observations across home and school, grandparent-care typologies, standardized self-regulation measures, more complete ethical and procedural reporting, and longitudinal follow-up.

CONCLUSION

This study examined self-regulation and prosocial behavior in a five-year-old child receiving grandparent care following parental divorce. The central finding was a context-dependent profile rather than a uniform pattern of strength or difficulty. Within familiar household routines, responsibility and rule-following were comparatively stronger; when gratification was delayed or peer demands increased, turn-taking and frustration tolerance became less stable. Prosocial behavior showed a similar relational pattern: empathy and helping were more evident toward close family members, whereas sharing, sustained cooperation, and conflict-free peer play were less consistent. These findings suggest that competencies practiced within predictable grandparent-led routines may not automatically generalize to broader peer contexts. The case does not establish that parental divorce or grandparent care caused the observed behaviors; instead, it supports an ecological interpretation involving family reorganization, caregiving consistency, caregiver capacity, parent contact, and opportunities for peer socialization. For early childhood education, the practical priority is to build on existing responsibility and helping while creating coordinated opportunities to practice waiting, sharing, emotion regulation, and cooperative play across home and educational settings. Multi-case, multi-informant, school-inclusive, and longitudinal studies are needed to test whether this cross-context pattern recurs across different grandparent-care arrangements following parental divorce.

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Informed Consent and Assent

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Data, instrument, protocol, and analytic-file availability was not reported in the source manuscript. The authors should specify access conditions consistent with participant confidentiality.

Preregistration and Protocol

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Conflict of Interest

Competing-interest information was not reported in the source manuscript. The authors should confirm and disclose any financial or non-financial conflicts before submission.

Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

ChatGPT (OpenAI; GPT-5.6 Sol) was used to assist with language editing, structural reorganization, and formatting of this manuscript to the EDUCATIONE template. It was not used to generate or analyze empirical data. All scientific content, citations, interpretations, and final wording remain subject to author verification and responsibility.

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