

SELF-REGULATION AND PROSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN GRANDPARENT CARE AFTER PARENTAL DIVORCE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood social-emotional development may become especially vulnerable when parental divorce is followed by a transfer of daily caregiving to grandparents. This study examined self-regulation and prosocial development in a five-year-old child raised primarily by a grandmother after parental divorce. A qualitative single-case study was conducted in June 2026 using naturalistic observation, semi-structured interviews with the grandmother and a neighboring informant, and supporting documentation. Data were organized through reduction, display, and conclusion verification, with source and technique triangulation and member checking. Findings indicated an uneven, context-dependent profile: responsibility and discipline were comparatively stronger in familiar household routines, whereas waiting for turns became unstable when gratification was delayed. Empathy and helping were more visible toward close family members, while sharing, sustained cooperation, and conflict-free peer interaction were less stable beyond the immediate family circle. The case contributes a competency-level, cross-context account showing that strengths rehearsed in predictable family routines may not automatically generalize to peer situations. The pattern should not be attributed to divorce alone; it was interpreted in relation to family reorganization, caregiving consistency, caregiver capacity, parent contact, and opportunities for peer socialization. Evidence from the case supports cautious, evidence-informed consideration of coordinated home-school routines to scaffold waiting, sharing, cooperative play, and emotion regulation; these applications require further testing because systematic teacher observations were not included. Future multi-case and longitudinal studies should examine variation across grandparent-care arrangements.

Keywords: Grandparent care, Parental divorce, Prosocial behavior, Self-regulation, Social-emotional development

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, much research has focused on self-regulation and prosocial behavior as foundational dimensions of early childhood development because these capacities organize how children manage impulses, participate in social routines, respond to other people's needs, and adapt to formal learning environments. Self-regulation is not a single behavior; it includes the coordinated regulation of attention, emotion, and behavior in goal-directed situations. Its developmental significance is substantial. Reviews link childhood self-regulation to school readiness, interpersonal functioning, mental health, and later achievement, while longitudinal and meta-analytic evidence indicates that early regulatory capacity predicts a broad range of subsequent outcomes (Blair & Raver, 2015; Eisenberg et al., 2010; Robson et al., 2020). During the preschool years, everyday demands such as following rules, completing simple responsibilities, delaying gratification, and waiting for a turn provide recurring contexts in which regulatory skills are practiced and made visible. Prosocial behavior develops alongside regulation and includes voluntary actions intended to benefit others, such as helping, sharing, cooperating, caring, and responding empathically. These behaviors are shaped both by children's emerging social-cognitive capacities and by repeated socialization experiences. Parent-child discussion about emotions is associated with early helping and sharing, and parental warmth and emotion regulation are related to preschoolers' prosocial behavior (Brownell et al., 2013; Xiao et al., 2018). Peer experience is also consequential because the preschool years expose children to recurring situations of resource competition, reciprocity, social negotiation, and conflict repair. Direct observational research

shows that the quality of peer socialization can influence the form and context of prosocial responses rather than simply their frequency (Salerni & Caprin, 2022). Accordingly, self-regulation and prosociality are best understood as interdependent competencies that develop through transactions between the child and the caregiving and peer environments. Recent international evidence further indicates that young children's prosocial development is shaped by caregiving behavior, relational processes, and emotionally meaningful contexts (Padilla-Walker et al., 2024; Partington & Hastings, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024).

The family is a particularly powerful part of a child's developmental ecology. Warmth, behavioral guidance, consistency, and opportunities for autonomy help children learn how to regulate emotion and behavior. In preschool samples, observed parenting is associated with persistence, frustration management, and compliance, while parenting-focused reviews identify caregiver practices as important mechanisms through which young children's regulatory abilities may be strengthened (Dennis, 2006; Morawska et al., 2019). This relationship is also evident cross-culturally. Research with Indonesian children has linked regulation and negative emotionality to social functioning, supporting the relevance of regulation-social competence processes beyond Western samples (Eisenberg et al., 2001). The implication is that caregiving practices should not be treated as background variables; they are part of the developmental process through which social-emotional competence is constructed. This developmental territory becomes more complex when parents separate and daily care shifts to grandparents. Parental divorce does not produce a uniform developmental outcome. Meta-analytic and review evidence instead shows average elevations in risk across psychological, social, behavioral, and academic domains, with considerable variation depending on conflict, parenting quality, economic strain, continuing parent-child relationships, and protective resources (Amato, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Rhoades, 2008). More recent process-oriented work emphasizes that children are affected not merely by legal marital status but by the relational and ecological consequences surrounding separation, including interparental conflict, changes in parenting, and altered access to attachment figures (Harold & Sellers, 2018). Therefore, post-divorce development should be analyzed as a reorganization of the child's social ecology rather than as a simple cause-effect relationship between divorce and maladjustment. Grandparent care is one important form of such reorganization. International literature recognizes grandfamilies as heterogeneous systems in which grandparents may provide continuity, affection, cultural transmission, and practical security while also facing health, energy, economic, and role-strain challenges (Hayslip et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022). Studies of custodial grandchildren show elevated average psychological and behavioral difficulties relative to some parent-led comparison groups, although outcomes vary widely and are influenced by relational quality, family history, and contextual resources (Smith et al., 2019; Xu & Harrison, 2023). Grandparenting style itself matters: warm and authoritative practices can support adjustment, whereas permissive or psychologically controlling practices may be associated with greater emotional or behavioral difficulty (Li et al., 2019). Thus, grandparent care cannot be classified as inherently protective or risky; its developmental meaning depends on the quality and consistency of the caregiving relationship and on the wider circumstances that produced the caregiving arrangement. Recent grandfamily research also shows that caregiver stress and accumulated adversity are relevant contextual risks for children's behavioral and

psychological adjustment, reinforcing the need for multi-level rather than deterministic interpretations (Kaylor-Tapscott & Sullivan, 2024; Smith et al., 2024).

Despite these advances, it remains unclear how social-emotional competencies are patterned within the everyday life of a young child whose parental divorce is followed by long-term grandparent care. Much of the international literature uses broad mental-health or behavior-problem outcomes, school-age samples, national datasets, or caregiver-report measures. Such designs are necessary for estimating population-level risk, but they can obscure within-child variation across specific competencies and situations. A child may, for example, show responsibility in household routines while still struggling to delay gratification during peer play; similarly, the same child may help a familiar caregiver but resist sharing with peers. Treating social-emotional development as a unitary score can hide these context-sensitive differences. The general solution is to examine development at the level of observable competencies and social contexts. For early childhood education, this means distinguishing self-regulation indicators such as responsibility, discipline, and waiting for turns from prosocial indicators such as caring, cooperation, joint play, helping, and sharing. This competency-level perspective is supported by research showing that regulation becomes especially important during intense peer interactions and that self-regulatory capacities are associated with children's social competence and peer functioning (Fabes et al., 1999; Spinrad et al., 2006). It also aligns with evidence that explicit educational experiences can strengthen self-regulation and prosociality; for example, structured preschool interventions have improved social competence, delay of gratification, and prosocial outcomes (Flook et al., 2015). The educational question, therefore, is not only whether the child is "well adjusted," but which competencies are stable, which are fragile, and under what relational conditions each is expressed.

Scientific literature suggests several mechanisms that can guide such an analysis. First, self-regulation develops through repeated co-regulation: adults set limits, model emotion management, provide predictable routines, and gradually transfer responsibility to the child. Parenting warmth is associated with compliance, while structured guidance and parenting interventions can support regulatory development (Dennis, 2006; Morawska et al., 2019). Second, 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). Third, peer interaction provides a distinct arena in which children must negotiate turns, possessions, rules, and conflicting intentions; strong regulation supports more socially competent responding during demanding interactions (Fabes et al., 1999). Taken together, these mechanisms provide an integrative developmental-ecological framework for the present case: caregiving consistency and relational closeness can scaffold regulation and prosocial behavior in predictable family routines, whereas caregiver capacity and the intensity of peer demands may shape whether those competencies are expressed in less familiar or frustration-heavy situations. Family reorganization after divorce changes the configuration of relationships and opportunities around the child, but it is not treated here as a direct causal mechanism. International grandfamily research similarly favors multi-level explanations because custodial grandchildren's outcomes are associated with caregiver health, family relationships, socioeconomic conditions, and prior adversity rather than a single caregiving variable (Hayslip et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022). This perspective also cautions against deficit

assumptions. A grandparent may simultaneously provide stability and affection while finding it difficult to maintain consistent boundaries or sustain physically demanding supervision. The same caregiving arrangement can therefore contain both protective and constraining processes. Recent co-regulation scholarship likewise emphasizes that caregiver self-regulation and dyadic coregulation are central to discipline-related developmental processes (Lunkenheimer et al., 2023).

Indonesian studies provide useful contextual evidence but leave a more specific gap. Research has described social-emotional behavior in early childhood (Dewi et al., 2020), examined social interaction among children affected by parental divorce (Hasanah et al., 2023), documented social-emotional problems in children from broken-home contexts (Mahendra et al., 2022), and linked family environment to children's developmental outcomes (Rahmalia & Laeli, 2024). Other work has addressed emotion and social development through play (Mukhlis & Mbelo, 2019) and the psychosocial consequences of parental divorce (Titalessy & Kusumiati, 2021). However, these studies do not jointly provide a fine-grained account of how self-regulation and prosocial behavior vary within one preschool child whose daily caregiving has shifted to a grandparent after parental divorce. The resulting research gap is therefore both substantive and analytic. Substantively, grandparent caregiving, post-divorce family reorganization, and early social-emotional development are often examined separately. Analytically, prior work rarely contrasts competencies that are embedded in familiar household routines with competencies that require negotiation beyond the immediate family. A case study can contribute by showing how these domains coexist in one developmental ecology and by identifying whether strengths and vulnerabilities cluster differently across close-family and broader-peer contexts. This does not replace population research; rather, it provides process-level detail that can inform hypotheses for larger studies and intervention design.

The study makes three bounded contributions. First, it provides a contextual empirical account of a preschool child in grandparent care following parental divorce in Indonesia. Second, it offers an analytic contribution by comparing specific self-regulatory and prosocial competencies across close-family routines and peer or less familiar interactions rather than treating social-emotional development as a unitary outcome. Third, it offers a practical, hypothesis-generating contribution by identifying which competencies may require deliberate support when skills established in familiar routines do not readily transfer across social contexts. The novelty therefore lies not simply in combining post-divorce family restructuring, grandparent care, and early social-emotional development, but in examining their intersection through a competency-level, cross-context lens. The scope is deliberately bounded to one child, one primary grandparent caregiver, one supporting neighborhood informant, and observations conducted in June 2026; the study aims for contextual depth and analytic transferability rather than statistical generalization. The purpose of this study was to describe the social-emotional development of a five-year-old child in grandparent care after parental divorce, with specific attention to responsibility, discipline, and waiting for turns within self-regulation, and care/empathy, cooperation, joint play, helping, and sharing within prosocial behavior.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This research used a qualitative single-case study design. The design was selected because the phenomenon of interest was not simply the presence of a developmental difficulty but the way specific social-emotional behaviors were expressed within a distinctive post-divorce caregiving arrangement. A case-study approach enabled the researcher to combine direct observation, caregiver accounts, and contextual documentation while preserving the sequence and setting in which behaviors occurred. The unit of analysis was one five-year-old child whose daily care had been assumed by a grandparent after the parents separated. The study was conducted during June 2026 in the child's home environment in Jember, Indonesia. The study documentation available for this report 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.

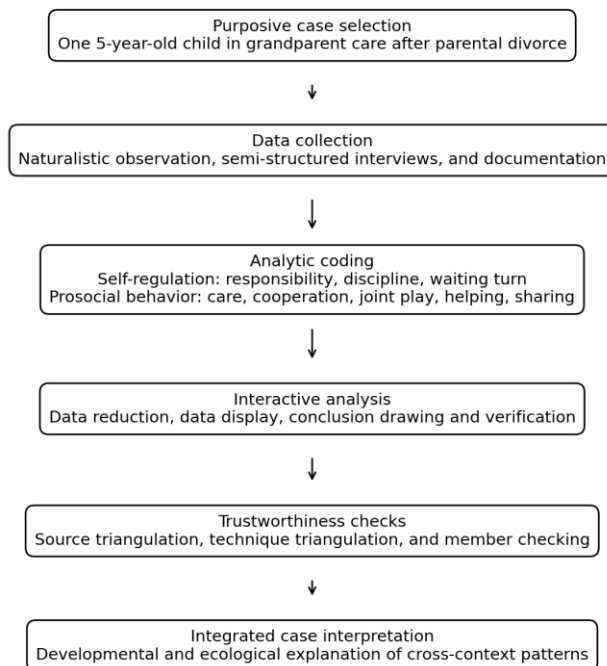


Figure 1. Research procedure and analytic flow

Participants and Context

The child was selected purposively because the case met the study criteria: early-childhood age, post-divorce parental context, ongoing grandparent care, and observable concerns in social-emotional functioning. 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 present study reported no direct contact with the biological mother since the separation. The grandmother, an older adult who had long-standing knowledge of the child's routines and development, served as the primary informant. A neighboring adult who regularly observed the child's interactions around the home served as a

supporting informant. Using an informant from outside the immediate household allowed the study to compare family-based descriptions with accounts of the child's 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; these contextual characteristics should therefore not be assumed when considering transferability.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

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 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

Domain	Main indicators	Evidence sources	Recording/analytic material
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

Data Analysis Procedures

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 patterns of consistency, variability, and developmental unevenness. 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.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

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 present study also reports member checking with the primary informant and re-examination of raw notes during verification. The available documentation does not specify the exact timing of member checking, whether it focused on factual accuracy or interpretive conclusions, or whether the neighboring informant participated; member checking is therefore reported conservatively as a supplementary credibility procedure. 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. This incomplete ethical documentation is acknowledged as a limitation. 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 AND DISCUSSION

Case Context and Pattern of Grandparent Care

The findings of this study indicate that the child's social-emotional development was neither uniformly delayed nor uniformly age-appropriate across all situations. Instead, the case displayed a patterned unevenness: behaviors tied to familiar household routines and emotional closeness were generally stronger than behaviors requiring frustration tolerance, reciprocal negotiation, or positive interaction with peers and less familiar people. This pattern shifts interpretation away from a global label of 'poor social-emotional development' toward a more differentiated view of what the child could do, with whom, and under what conditions.

The child had been cared for primarily by the grandmother since approximately one year of age. The father remained part of the child's life but communication was infrequent, while the mother was absent from day-to-day interaction according to the present study. The grandmother therefore functioned as the child's principal caregiving figure and the central organizer of everyday routines. The available account suggested that physically intensive supervision could be demanding for the older caregiver, although caregiver capacity was not independently measured. The caregiving pattern was interpreted as permissive-protective with pockets of structured guidance because the grandmother expected the child to complete household responsibilities and follow some rules, yet limits could become less consistent when the child cried, sulked, or strongly insisted on a preference. This label is therefore an analytic interpretation of the reported and observed pattern, not a standardized parenting-style classification.

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.

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. The child sometimes left toys scattered, took a peer's object without

permission, or attempted to take an item when another child would not lend it. The evidence therefore supports an interpretation of emerging responsibility rather than generalized independent self-management.

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.

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 return home from play or when corrected, the child sometimes became angry, sulked, or remained silent rather than responding constructively. This distinction between behavioral compliance and internalized regulation is analytically important. A child may "follow a rule" while still relying heavily on external control. Self-regulation becomes more robust when the child can anticipate the rule, tolerate disappointment, and regulate behavior even when immediate adult enforcement is reduced.

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.

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. 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. When the situation was calm and predictable, the child could regulate; when desire and peer competition intensified, regulatory performance deteriorated.

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.

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.
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.

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. Brownell et al. (2013) demonstrated that early prosocial behavior is related to socialization processes involving attention to others' emotions and needs. In

the present case, the child's everyday responsibilities may have repeatedly linked helping with a concrete understanding of the grandmother's needs, thereby making family-based helping relatively well established.

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. This distinction is theoretically meaningful. Helping can involve a one-directional response to a clear need, whereas cooperation requires sustained coordination of goals, roles, and rules. The latter places heavier demands on inhibitory control, attention, and social negotiation. Salerni and Caprin (2022) emphasize that prosocial behavior is qualitatively shaped by socialization experiences and relationship contexts. The present case extends that observation by showing that a child can be helpful in a dyadic, familiar caregiving relationship while still finding cooperative reciprocity more demanding.

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. This is consistent with the link between emotion regulation and socially competent peer interaction reported by Fabes et al. (1999) and Spinrad et al. (2006). Peer play is inherently less predictable than a household chore: another child can refuse, change rules, keep a desired object, or misunderstand intent. These moments require rapid regulation and perspective taking. 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. This contrast is one of the most theoretically informative findings in the case. It demonstrates that the child understood and could enact sharing, but the behavior was conditional on closeness and emotional security. Prosocial development cannot therefore be reduced to a binary "can/cannot share" judgment. The relevant developmental task is expanding a behavior already present within a secure relationship into broader reciprocal relationships.

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.

Interpretation Through Developmental and Ecological Perspectives

The cross-context pattern can be interpreted by combining psychosocial and developmental-ecological perspectives. The child showed substantial initiative within the home through helping, completing tasks, and participating in routines. More fragile performance appeared when the child's own initiative had to be coordinated with another child's rights, intentions, or access to desired objects. This contrast provides a cautious developmental interpretation of why responsibility could appear comparatively strong while sharing and turn-taking remained unstable, without treating one case as evidence of a universal age-based developmental sequence.

From an ecological perspective, the grandmother's home was the most stable caregiving setting represented in the available data: expectations were familiar, the relationship was close, and roles were predictable. The child's strengths therefore clustered around activities embedded in that setting. A broader relational ecology included peer interactions and contact with biological parents; systematic school observations were not part of the analyzed dataset. The father's reduced contact after remarriage and the prolonged absence of the mother changed the composition of the child's relational environment, but the results do not establish that either event directly caused the observed behaviors. Divorce research cautions against such deterministic attribution. Amato (2001) found average disadvantages across multiple domains, but Kelly and Emery (2003) stressed variation in risk and resilience. Rhoades (2008) and Harold and Sellers (2018) further show that child adjustment is shaped by conflict processes, relational quality, emotional security, and parenting mechanisms. Because the present study did not measure pre-divorce conflict, parental mental health, or the child's earlier temperament, causal claims about divorce would exceed the evidence.

The more defensible interpretation is transactional and hypothesis-generating. Post-divorce family restructuring created a caregiving ecology in which the grandmother became the child's primary secure figure. Her caregiving was associated in this case with daily competence and family-based prosocial behavior, while protective accommodation, inconsistent limits, and constrained caregiver capacity may have coincided with fewer opportunities for guided practice in frustration-heavy peer situations. The child's active behavior and emotional reactivity may also have interacted with these conditions, but temperament was not formally measured. This interpretation is consistent with Dennis's (2006) emphasis on the interplay among child reactivity, control, and parenting, and with Li et al.'s (2019) evidence that grandparenting style is associated

with child emotional and behavioral outcomes. The case therefore supports a context-sensitive explanatory pattern rather than a validated causal model.

Table 4. Cross-context pattern and contribution of the case

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.

Comparison With Prior Research and Scientific Contribution

Several findings converge with prior Indonesian research while adding a more differentiated interpretation. Studies of children affected by parental divorce have reported difficulties in social interaction, emotion regulation, confidence, and peer adaptation (Hasanah et al., 2023; Mahendra et al., 2022; Titalessy & Kusumiati, 2021). The present case contained some comparable behaviors—anger when frustrated, inconsistent peer cooperation, and reluctance to share—but it also showed meaningful strengths in household responsibility, empathy toward close others, and helping. These strengths complicate any generalized assumption that post-divorce children display globally poor social-emotional functioning.

The case also supports work emphasizing the family environment as a determinant of social-emotional development. Rahmalia and Laeli (2024) identify family interaction and caregiving as important developmental influences, while Dewi et al. (2020) frame social-emotional behavior as multidimensional. The present findings make that multidimensionality visible at the within-child level. Responsibility, discipline, waiting, helping, sharing, and cooperation did not move together. Such unevenness is scientifically useful because it suggests that intervention targets should be selected by domain rather than by broad diagnostic impressions.

International evidence makes the contribution clearer. Xu et al. (2022) conclude that custodial grandchildren are vulnerable on average but emphasize multi-level predictors and major heterogeneity. Hayslip et al. (2019) similarly argue that contemporary grandfamily research must attend to strengths, diversity, relational processes, and context. The present study supplies a naturalistic early-childhood example of these principles. Its contribution is not a new estimate of risk or a validated process model; rather, it offers a case-based, hypothesis-generating pattern of contextual generalization. Competencies repeatedly rehearsed in secure, predictable family

routines were more available than competencies demanding negotiation with peers. This pattern suggests a testable proposition for future studies: in post-divorce grandparent-care households, the breadth of social contexts in which regulatory and prosocial skills are scaffolded may be associated with whether home-based competence generalizes to peer settings.

The findings also align with intervention literature. Flook et al. (2015) demonstrated that preschool social competence and regulatory skills can be improved through a structured kindness curriculum, and Ursache et al. (2012) review evidence that self-regulation can be deliberately supported as part of school readiness. These studies are relevant because the child in the present case already displayed component skills. Evidence-informed applications may therefore include turn-taking games, cooperative tasks with clear roles, emotion labeling during conflict, and reinforcement of small successful acts of sharing. Caregivers and teachers may also consider using consistent language and expectations across settings. These suggestions are applications derived from the case pattern and prior intervention literature, not interventions tested in the present study, because systematic teacher observations and school-based implementation data were not collected.

Importance, Practical Implications, Alternative Interpretations, and Limitations

The importance of the findings lies first in avoiding causal overstatement. Divorce, grandparent care, permissive behavior, and child social-emotional difficulties co-occur in this case, but a single-case design cannot identify independent causal effects. An alternative explanation is that the child's temperament or pre-existing regulatory profile contributed both to peer conflict and to the grandmother's tendency to protect or accommodate. Another possibility is that limited parent contact, rather than grandparenting style itself, reduced opportunities for varied adult modeling. A third possibility is that the child behaves differently at school than at home and in the neighborhood; the study did not include systematic teacher observations in the analyzed dataset. These alternatives reinforce, rather than weaken, the ecological conclusion that multiple processes should be considered simultaneously.

Second, the case has practical implications for early childhood education and family support, but the distinction between case evidence and evidence-informed application is important. The case directly identified relatively fragile performance in delay of gratification, turn-taking, sharing, cooperative problem solving, and emotion regulation during frustration. On that basis, and informed by the intervention literature cited above, caregivers and educators may consider simple, sustainable strategies such as a small number of consistently enforced rules, predictable consequences, choices within limits, praise for successful waiting and sharing, and supervised peer interaction. Communication between school personnel and the grandparent caregiver may also help reduce contradictory expectations across settings. These strategies should be treated as reasonable applications for further evaluation rather than as effects demonstrated by this single case. Systematic-review evidence on grandparent-focused prevention programs further supports tailoring assistance to caregiving skills, coping, and intergenerational family relationships while recognizing the heterogeneity of grandparent-care arrangements (Chan & Piehler, 2024).

Third, the findings suggest potential policy relevance for inclusive family engagement, although no policy intervention was evaluated in this study. Schools often organize parent involvement around biological mothers and fathers, yet some children are raised by grandparents

or other kin following divorce, migration, death, work demands, or other family transitions. Educational institutions may therefore benefit from identifying the actual daily caregiver and including that person in communication, social-emotional planning, and family education. Grandparent caregivers may also require flexible meeting arrangements and practical guidance that are sensitive to older adults' health and energy constraints. These are evidence-informed implications that warrant broader evaluation; they should not be interpreted as policy effects established by the present case.

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: stronger social-emotional behavior in familiar routines and weaker regulation and reciprocity 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 described self-regulation and prosocial development in a five-year-old child receiving grandparent care after parental divorce. The key finding was an uneven, context-dependent profile: responsibility and discipline were relatively stronger within familiar household routines, whereas waiting for turns remained unstable; care/empathy and helping were more visible toward close family members, while sharing, sustained cooperation, and conflict-free peer play were less developed. The case offers a bounded conceptual insight that post-divorce social-emotional development may be better interpreted through interacting relational and caregiving processes than through deterministic attribution to divorce or grandparent care. The cross-context contrast is best treated as a hypothesis-generating pattern rather than a validated theoretical model. In practice, caregivers and schools may consider coordinated, predictable routines that scaffold waiting, sharing, emotion regulation, and cooperative play while building on existing responsibility and helping behaviors; these applications require evaluation beyond this single case. Future studies should use multi-case, multi-informant, school-inclusive, and longitudinal designs

to examine whether the generalization of social-emotional competence from close-family settings to peer contexts varies across different grandparent-care arrangements.

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