

# **Predictors of Socioemotional Functioning among Typically Developing Siblings of Autistic Children in Central Selangor, Malaysia**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The marked increase in the prevalence of autistic children in Malaysia (Shair et al., 2024) highlights that there is a growing number of typically developing siblings whose social-emotional development might be affected due to living with an autistic sibling. Therefore, there is a critical need to examine the socioemotional functioning of the typically developing siblings with an autistic sibling. This study aimed to examine predictors of socioemotional functioning among typically developing siblings of children with autism. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted using questionnaires that incorporated three research instruments: the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA). This study took place in schools offering the Special Education Integration Programme in Central Selangor, Malaysia. A total of 163 respondents, aged 10 to 17, were selected through the fishbowl sampling method. Findings revealed that paternal permissive parenting style and emotion regulation were significant predictors of the socioemotional functioning of typically developing siblings, with  $\beta = -.205$  and  $\beta = .241$ , respectively. These results provide valuable insight into the specific roles of paternal permissive parenting and emotion regulation in influencing the socioemotional development of typically developing siblings. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential value of culturally sensitive school- and family-based interventions that strengthen paternal engagement and emotion regulation skills among siblings of autistic children.

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## INTRODUCTION

Siblings often have a strong influence on a child's social, emotional, and cognitive skills. They often shape one another's growth more than parents do due to extensive shared time and daily interactions (Buist et al., 2013; Dirks et al., 2015). Typically developing siblings of autistic children grow up in distinctive family environments shaped by the challenges and dynamics of autism. These unique environments influence how they feel, how they build relationships, and how they develop emotionally and socially.

Research consistently shows that typically developing siblings of autistic children face various emotional, social, and psychological challenges. They often experience higher stress levels (Gorjy et al., 2017; Mokoena & Kern, 2022; Quatrosi et al., 2023; Shivers et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2020), show weaker social and emotional skills (Gorjy et al., 2017; Habelrih et al., 2018; Schmeer et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2020; Tsai et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2021), experience anxiety and depression (Inam et al., 2017; Shivers & McGregor, 2019; Shivers et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2020) and report lower mental well-being and poorer quality of life (Quatrosi et al., 2023; Shivers et al., 2019). In Malaysia, typically developing siblings of autistic children similarly report ambivalent emotions, communication barriers, and reliance on emotion regulation coping (Chu et al., 2021). Across Southeast Asia, siblings of children with special needs describe heightened responsibilities, emotional conflict, and the importance of extended-family support

(Ventic et al., 2025). Social stigma often contributes to shame, depression, and reluctance to seek help among both mothers and typically developing siblings (Tsai et al., 2018; Vidojevic et al., 2014). Within Malaysia, limited public awareness and enduring stigma regarding autism spectrum disorder (ASD) further intensify these burdens (Low et al., 2021).

In addition, typically developing siblings of autistic children often have fewer opportunities for leisure activities, struggle with poor sleep, and get limited respite time (Pavlopoulou & Dimitriou, 2019). Their relationships with autistic siblings tend to be strained, showing less warmth and closeness (Shivers et al., 2019), while some feel distant from their parents due to feeling ignored, lacking emotional connection, or finding it hard to communicate (Dansby et al., 2017). Besides, typically developing siblings of children also tend to blame themselves and be overly self-critical (Gorjy et al., 2017), show lower self-worth (Inam et al., 2017; Shivers et al., 2019), and struggle to adapt to challenges (Caner et al., 2024; Habelrih et al., 2018).

Bronfenbrenner's socioecological framework (1979) emphasises the pivotal role of parents as the most influential figures in shaping children's socioemotional developmental trajectories. Within the microsystem, parents act as critical determinants of children's socioemotional development (Istianti et al., 2023; Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018). The specific parenting style and practices adopted by parents lead to distinct socialisation

processes that ultimately shape children's behaviours, self-perceptions, and social-emotional competencies. These early and ongoing interactions within the family environment have a profound and lasting impact on children's socioemotional growth, underscoring the importance of parental engagement and parenting approaches in determining their children's developmental trajectories. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this study.

Parenting style is a key predictor of children's socioemotional outcomes (Gross & Ford, 2024; Luo et al., 2021). Different parenting styles have distinct implications for typically developing siblings of autistic children. Authoritative parenting, which is characterised by warmth, clear expectations, emotional bonding, and open communication, is consistently identified as the most effective approach for promoting children's socioemotional development

and psychological well-being (Agoha et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2021; Reyes-Wapano, 2021; Vasiou et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020). In Malaysia, Rahman and Jermadi (2021) found that parents of autistic children commonly adopt this style, which supports positive emotional outcomes for both typically developing siblings and autistic children. Similarly, Poirier et al. (2024) revealed that authoritative parenting fosters resilience and socioemotional skills, while Benseny Delgado (2024) associated it with lower family stress, stronger socioemotional functioning, and improved overall quality of life.

In response to caregiving stress, some parents adopt authoritarian parenting, which is characterised by strict control and high demands (Benseny Delgado, 2024; Inam et al., 2017). Although this approach aims to maintain order, it is often associated with greater anxiety and behavioural difficulties

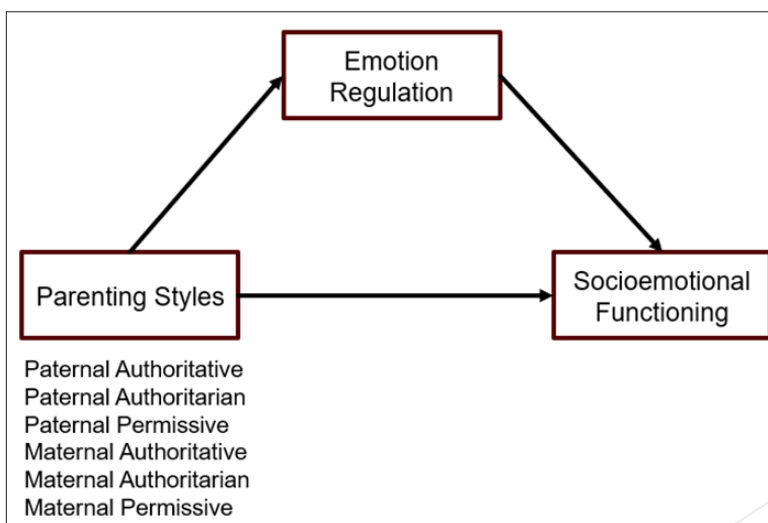


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

among typically developing siblings of autistic children (Benseny Delgado, 2024; Crowell et al., 2019; Rahman & Jermadi, 2021). Nonetheless, in certain contexts, authoritarian parenting encourages social behaviour and reduces behavioural issues (Mohammadi & Zarafshan, 2014), which suggests that its effects depend on context and implementation. Typically developing siblings of autistic children raised in permissive environments marked by low structure, unclear boundaries, and inconsistent expectations face greater socioemotional difficulties, especially in the context of having an autistic sibling (Benseny Delgado, 2024; Mohammadi & Zarafshan, 2014; Poirier et al., 2024).

Culturally, Malaysian collectivist values emphasise family harmony and interdependence. Parenting approaches such as “guan” care buffer emotional risks for typically developing siblings of autistic children by framing structured or controlling behaviours as expressions of affection and moral guidance rather than restriction (Masiran, 2022; Nainee et al., 2021). At the same time, these cultural expectations can intensify sibling responsibilities and role obligations, potentially amplifying stress. Consequently, it is essential to consider how parenting styles influence the socioemotional functioning of typically developing siblings of autistic children within this cultural context.

Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals manage and adjust their emotional responses to meet situational demands. It involves reducing or controlling the intensity and frequency of

emotional arousal when necessary (Gross & Ford, 2024). Emotion regulation is a key component of children’s socioemotional competence, shaping how they respond to emotions, interact with others, and navigate complex social situations. For typically developing siblings of autistic children, emotion regulation is particularly important, as these siblings often experience heightened stress and emotional strain arising from the unique demands of living with an autistic sibling (Chu et al., 2023; Mokoena & Kern, 2022; Singh et al., 2020). Adaptive emotion regulation skills serve as a protective factor, safeguarding socioemotional well-being and supporting positive adjustment (Dalimunthe & Nasution, 2023; Hamaidi et al., 2021; McQuade & Breau, 2017; Stover et al., 2024). It acts as a protective buffer against stress (Gross & John, 2003; Polizzi & Lynn, 2021) and mitigates depressive symptoms in at-risk adolescents (Aune et al., 2023). Conversely, maladaptive emotion regulation is associated with internalising problems, self-harm, and broader psychopathology (Cheung et al., 2020; Kennedy & Brausch, 2024; Lim et al., 2023; Yadlosky et al., 2023; Zafar et al., 2021).

While the links between parenting, emotion regulation, and socioemotional outcomes are well documented internationally, their specific roles among Malaysian typically developing siblings remain underexplored. Existing studies have primarily focussed on parental or family functioning and have been conducted largely in Western contexts (Watson et al., 2021), leaving a limited understanding of local dynamics.

With the prevalence of ASD in Malaysia rising sharply from 9,105 diagnosed students in 2018 to 14,073 in 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020), more typically developing siblings are likely to encounter distinct socioemotional challenges. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how parenting styles and emotion regulation predict socioemotional functioning among Malaysian typically developing siblings of autistic children, while providing culturally grounded insights to guide family and school-based interventions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Procedures and Participants

The present study aims to explore the interplay between parenting styles, emotion regulation, and socioemotional functioning among typically developing siblings of autistic children within a sample residing in Central Selangor, Malaysia. This research employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey and correlational design. The study was conducted in the central zone of Selangor, Malaysia, as this zone has the highest concentration of Special Education Integration Programme (Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi) schools and a dense population.

The targeted population for this study consisted of 10 to 17-year-old typically developing siblings of autistic students. The sample size for this study was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, which recommended a minimum of

132 respondents. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- i. must be a typically developing sibling of autistic children and,
- ii. aged between 10 to 17 years and,
- iii. NOT be sitting for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education) examination during the academic year of the study.

Ultimately, a total of 163 respondents were recruited through the fishbowl sampling method.

Alongside data collection on the primary variables, background information about the respondents was also obtained. This comprehensive approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants and enriched the context for subsequent analysis.

### Measures

Three well-established instruments were used in this study: the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) by Buri (1991), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) by Goodman (1997), and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA) by Gullone and Taffe (2012). All instruments were originally in English. To make them culturally relevant and accessible, the PAQ and ERQ-CA were translated into both Malay and Chinese. The SDQ was translated only into Malay, as a validated Chinese version was already available. The translation process followed Brislin's (1970) back-translation method to ensure both linguistic and cultural accuracy.

***Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ; Buri, 1991)***

The PAQ measures parenting styles and behaviours. It is a reliable and valid instrument developed by Buri in 1991 based on Baumrind's (1967) three main styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Buri (1991) reported Cronbach's alpha values between 0.74 and 0.87 for paternal styles, and between 0.78 and 0.86 for maternal styles, showing strong internal consistency.

***The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997)***

The SDQ is widely used to assess children's emotional and behavioural functioning. In this study, participants completed the self-report version to describe their own socioemotional functioning. This version has shown good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.70 and 0.75 (Koskelainen et al., 2000; Theunissen et al., 2019). Although the self-report version is designed for children aged 11 and above, Hobbs and Laurens (2020) found that its psychometric properties are also reliable for children aged 9 to 10.

***The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (ERQ-CA; Gullone & Taffe, 2012)***

The ERQ-CA measures emotion regulation strategies in children and adolescents. It focusses on how young people use specific strategies to manage their emotions and offers insight into their coping skills

and emotional well-being. The tool has demonstrated high internal consistency and stability, confirming its suitability for use with children and adolescents.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire survey. Approval was first obtained from the Education Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, and then ethical clearance was obtained from the Jawatankuasa Etika Universiti Putra Malaysia (Ethics Committee of Universiti Putra Malaysia). Following this, a pilot study was conducted. The internal consistency result of the pilot study is illustrated in Table 1, where all instruments exhibited satisfactory or high reliability ( $\alpha > .70$ ).

After the pilot study, permission was acquired from the Selangor Education Department to conduct the study in special education integration programme schools located in central Selangor. Additionally, approval was obtained from the head of schools at the selected special education integration programme schools. Upon receiving approval from the head of school, a briefing session was held with the special education integration programme head teachers to explain the study's objectives and procedures. Following this, hard copy survey questionnaires, respondent information sheets, informed consent forms, and guardian/parent consent letters were distributed to the parents of autistic children to bring back to the participants. After the two weeks, the completed questionnaires

Table 1  
*Reliability coefficients for all the study instruments used in the pilot study*

Instruments	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Parenting styles</b>		
Paternal authoritative	10	0.80
Paternal authoritarian	10	0.75
Paternal permissive	10	0.72
Maternal authoritative	10	0.82
Maternal authoritarian	10	0.79
Maternal permissive	10	0.73
<b>Emotion regulation</b>	10	0.80
<b>Socioemotional functioning</b>	25	0.75

and consent forms were collected from the special education integration programme head teachers. This systematic approach ensured that the data collection process was thorough, ethical, and compliant with all necessary regulations.

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 29.0.0.0. The analytical process began with Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) to assess the normality of the data. Following EDA, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to summarise the background information of the respondents and to examine the patterns of the main variables. Then Pearson Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between parenting styles, emotion regulation and socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children. The next step is to conduct multiple regression analysis to identify the significant predictors of socioemotional

functioning among typically developing siblings.

## RESULTS

### Level of Socioemotional Functioning among Typically Developing Siblings of Autistic Children

Table 2 presents the distribution of socioemotional functioning levels among the typically developing siblings of autistic children, revealing a relatively even spread across low, moderate, and high socioemotional functioning categories. Specifically, 34.4% of respondents reported low levels of socioemotional functioning, indicating that over one-third of typically developing siblings are struggling with challenges in managing their emotions, maintaining positive social relationships, or adapting to the complex family environment associated with having an autistic sibling. Meanwhile, 31.9% of the participants fell into the moderate socioemotional functioning category, and 33.7% of typically developing siblings exhibited high levels of socioemotional functioning.

Table 2

*Level of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings (n=163)*

Variables	n	%	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Low (1.00 - 1.23)	56	34.4	17.09	5.96	6	32
Moderate (1.24 - 1.51)	52	31.9				
High (1.52 - 1.95)	55	33.7				

### Predictors of Socioemotional Functioning among Typically Developing Siblings of Autistic Children

Multiple linear regression was used to test the predictors of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings. The results are shown in Table 3, where the overall regression was statistically significant and fitted the regression model with  $F(4, 158) = 6.766, p < .001$ .

The correlations between parenting styles, emotion regulation and socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children are presented in Table 4. The findings delineated that paternal authoritative parenting style and maternal authoritative parenting style have significant positive relationship with socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings with  $r = .171, p < .05$  and  $r = .223, p < .01$  respectively, while paternal permissive parenting style

have significant negative relationship with socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings with  $r = -.209^{**}, p < .01$ . The results demonstrated that more paternal authoritative or more maternal authoritative would cause higher socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings. On the contrary, the higher level of paternal permissiveness would cause the lower level of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children. Meanwhile, paternal authoritarian parenting style, maternal authoritarian parenting style and maternal permissive parenting style were not significantly correlated to the socioemotional functioning of the typically developing siblings. Whereas emotion regulation is positively correlated to socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children ( $r = .285, p < .01$ ). This

Table 3

*ANOVA analysis for regression model*

	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	2.239	4	0.560	6.766	<0.001 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	13.072	158	0.083		
Total	15.311	162			

Table 4

*Relationship between parenting styles, emotion regulation and socioemotional functioning among typically developing siblings (n=163)*

Variable	SEF	
	r	p
Paternal authoritative PS	0.171*	<0.05
Paternal authoritarian PS	-0.133	>0.05
Paternal permissive PS	-0.209**	<0.01
Maternal authoritative PS	0.223**	<0.01
Maternal authoritarian PS	-0.004	>0.05
Maternal permissive PS	-0.124	>0.05
ER	0.285**	<0.01

Note. \*  $p < .05$  Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*  $p < .01$  Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

PS - parenting styles

demonstrated that typically developing siblings who reported to a higher level of emotion regulation would have a higher level of socioemotional functioning.

Table 5 shows that out of the four predictors of socioemotional functioning among typically developing siblings, only paternal permissive parenting style and emotion regulation were statistically significant in predicting the socioemotional functioning of the typically developing siblings with  $\beta = -0.205$  and  $\beta = 0.241$ , respectively. The unstandardised coefficients for paternal permissive parenting style and emotion regulation are -0.119 and 0.208, respectively. This indicated that for every unit increase in paternal permissive parenting style score, a 0.119 unit decrease in socioemotional functioning score and for every unit increase in emotion regulation score, there is a 0.208 unit increase in socioemotional functioning score. Paternal

permissive parenting style and emotion regulation explained 14.6% ( $R^2 = 0.146$ ) of variance in socioemotional functioning of the typically developing siblings.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the roles of parenting styles and emotion regulation on socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children. The current findings show that most typically developing siblings reported low levels of socioemotional functioning. This existing result is supported by substantial existing studies in which the SEF among the typically developing siblings of autistic children is low (Caner et al., 2024; Quatrosi et al., 2023; Shivers et al., 2019). However, the finding also indicated that the difference between the low level of socioemotional functioning and the high

Table 5

*Multiple linear regression analysis results on socioemotional functioning (n=163)*

Model	Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient		Collinearity statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.648	0.270		2.398	0.018		
Paternal authoritative	0.072	0.071	0.121	1.015	0.312	0.380	2.631
Paternal permissive	-0.119	0.043	-0.205	-2.739	0.007	0.963	1.038
Maternal authoritative	0.035	0.069	0.062	0.504	0.615	0.361	2.772
Emotion regulation	0.208	0.067	0.241	3.111	0.002	0.897	1.115

Note.  $R^2 = .146$ ; adjusted  $R^2 = .125$ ;  $[F(4, 158) = 6.766, p < .001]$

level of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings is only 0.7%. This narrow variance might be due to some typically developing siblings gaining a positive effect from living with an autistic sibling, as demonstrated in the studies of Gorjy et al. (2017), Mokoena and Kern (2022), and Schmeer et al. (2021).

The results also showed that both paternal and maternal authoritative parenting styles were positively correlated with the socioemotional functioning of typically developing siblings. This means that higher use of authoritative parenting by either parent is associated with better socioemotional functioning in typically developing siblings. These findings are consistent with many previous studies, which have found that authoritative parenting is one of the most effective approaches for promoting children's social, emotional, and psychological well-being (Agoha et al., 2021; Benseny Delgado, 2024; Luo et

al., 2021; Rahman & Jermadi, 2021; Reyes-Wapano, 2021; Vasiou et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020).

Similarly, in families with a child diagnosed with ASD, authoritative parenting remains the most effective style (Benseny Delgado, 2024). Findings of Vasiou et al. (2023) and Zhang et al. (2020) delineated that authoritative parenting styles were positively correlated to children's socioemotional development. Furthermore, Luo et al. (2021) also revealed that when parents adopted an authoritative style, children achieved better psychological adjustment, displayed stronger social skills, and exhibited fewer behavioural and emotional difficulties. Furthermore, a review by Reyes-Wapano (2021) proclaimed that authoritative parenting styles were positively correlated to social-emotional competence. All these existing research findings supported the current result, which highlighted that either paternal or maternal authoritative parenting

styles would positively support the healthy development of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings.

Authoritative parents who are always responsive and warm, provide clear expectations and consistent support, and create a secure environment for typically developing siblings to openly express their feelings and challenges. Through open communication, active listening, and guidance, authoritative parents help typically developing siblings develop essential skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution and empathy, where these skills are crucial for building healthy socioemotional functioning. Besides, the balance of structure and support provided by authoritative parents equips typically developing siblings with adaptive coping skills, enabling them to handle challenges and stress more effectively. By fostering a nurturing yet structured environment, authoritative parents promote healthy socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings (Benseny Delgado; 2024; Rahman & Jermadi; 2021).

The current finding of the negative and significant relationship between paternal permissive parenting style and socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings exhibited that the higher level of paternal permissive would cause the lower level of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children and is supported by the existing studies which shown that permissive parenting style was negatively and significantly associated with children's

various socioemotional development (Agoha et al., 2021; Liu & Merritt, 2018; Vasiou et al., 2023; Yang, 2024). Typically developing siblings navigate intricate emotional landscapes which require different coping strategies. The presence of a permissive father exacerbates feelings of insecurity or lack of guidance (Vasiou et al. 2023). Fathers who participate less frequently result in typically developing siblings perceiving paternal permissiveness as a lack of guidance in their challenging environment. Consequently, typically developing siblings might internalise the permissiveness from fathers more negatively, which ultimately affects their socioemotional functioning significantly.

Many previous studies support the current findings. Emotion regulation plays an important role in helping children adjust socially and emotionally, maintain psychological well-being, cope with stressful events, and build positive social relationships (Aune et al., 2023; Dalimunthe & Nasution, 2023; Hamaidi et al., 2021; McQuade & Breau, 2017; Qian et al., 2022; Stover et al., 2024). A meta-analysis by Stover et al. (2024) examined the association between cognitive reappraisal and resilience and found that greater use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies was associated with higher levels of personal resilience. This resilience enables typically developing siblings to adapt to difficulties, manage stress effectively, and recover more quickly from challenges, allowing them to learn and grow from setbacks. These findings reflected that adaptive emotion regulation

acts as a protective factor for typically developing siblings living in stressful environments. By strengthening emotion regulation skills, typically developing siblings are better able to regulate emotions, handle adversity, and reduce the negative impact of family and social stressors. Past studies by McQuade and Breau (2017), Dalimunthe and Nasution (2023), and Hamaidi et al. (2021) also showed that adaptive emotion regulation supports better socioemotional adjustment, encourages prosocial behaviour, and strengthens social competence, and these factors together improve socioemotional functioning in typically developing siblings.

Overall, these results highlight the protective role of strong emotion regulation skills in fostering typically developing siblings' healthy socioemotional development. Typically developing siblings who can regulate emotion effectively are more likely to adapt well in social situations, maintain positive relationships, and keep their emotions stable even during conflict or difficult circumstances.

The multiple linear regression analysis in the current study identified paternal permissive parenting style and emotion regulation as significant predictors of socioemotional functioning among the typically developing siblings of autistic children. This existing result resonates with prior research indicating that permissive parenting contributes to the deterioration of children's socioemotional outcomes (Agoha et al., 2021; Salavera et al., 2022; Vasiou et al., 2023; Yang, 2024; Yao, 2023)

and stronger emotion regulation skills are linked to better socioemotional outcomes (Mokoena & Kern, 2022; Petalas et al., 2012).

Although the explained variance ( $R^2 = 0.146$ ) was modest, this magnitude aligns with findings in the broader psychological literature, where small but reliable effects are common for complex psychosocial outcomes. Findings from Funder and Ozer (2019) and Götz et al. (2022) also indicated that even modest effects can hold substantive significance when they represent cumulative or multilevel influences. Given its multifaceted nature, socioemotional functioning among Malaysian typically developing siblings is also likely further shaped by contextual factors such as parenting stress, sibling relationship quality, social stigma, collectivist family expectations, and teacher or peer support within school environments.

According to a review study on parenting experiences in Malaysia by Masiran (2022), parenting styles that align with cultural norms are considered more effective. The result that paternal permissive parenting predicted weaker socioemotional functioning among typically developing siblings reflects the centrality of family hierarchy and responsibility within Malaysia's collectivist culture. In this context, children are socialised to value obedience, interdependence, and harmony over personal autonomy. Fathers are traditionally viewed as moral guides and disciplinarians. In this context, permissive paternal behaviour is perceived as a lack of

leadership or direction, which contributes to emotional insecurity among siblings and thereby undermines emotional well-being and hinders the acquisition of essential social skills (Yang, 2024; Yao, 2023). Consequently, typically developing siblings developed lower social competence because they struggled to navigate social situations effectively (Salavera et al., 2022; Vasiou et al., 2023). A permissive approach from fathers can heighten feelings of neglect or create confusion about family roles, particularly when typically developing siblings feel that parental attention or support is unevenly distributed between them and their autistic sibling (Gorjy et al., 2017; Mandleco & Webb, 2015; Mokoena & Kern, 2022; Tsai et al., 2018).

According to Lucas-Molina et al. (2020), children with well-developed emotion regulation tend to demonstrate stronger social competence and are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour. For typically developing siblings, effective emotion regulation can improve their ability to navigate social situations, build acceptance, and form positive peer relationships. This is an essential skill for typically developing siblings given the unique family and social challenges they are facing (Flenik et al., 2023; Gorjy et al., 2017; Schmeer et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2021).

Furthermore, healthy emotion regulation enables typically developing siblings to develop adaptive coping strategies for managing stress and emotional strain, including feelings of anger, sadness, or concern related to their autistic sibling's

needs. Typically developing siblings with stronger emotion regulation skills are more capable of handling these emotions in a constructive manner, which in turn lowers the likelihood of internalising difficulties such as anxiety and depression (Lucas-Molina et al., 2020; Wilms et al., 2020). In addition, effective emotion regulation promotes empathy, allowing typically developing siblings to better recognise and respond to the emotions of their autistic siblings and parents. This capacity for empathy is important for sustaining socioemotional stability and fostering supportive relationships within the family (Lucas-Molina et al., 2020; Salavera et al., 2022).

The current findings highlight the substantial influence of both paternal permissive parenting and emotion regulation on the socioemotional functioning of typically developing siblings. To strengthen the socioemotional well-being of typically developing siblings, context-specific programmes should be integrated into Malaysian school and community systems. Schools could implement peer-support or sibling-awareness groups led by counsellors to promote emotion regulation skills and social inclusion. At the community level, family-based workshops organised through NGOs, autism centres, or religious institutions could help parents and siblings learn effective coping and communication strategies. These initiatives would align with Malaysia's collectivist values of mutual care and family harmony while providing accessible mental health support.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how parenting styles and emotion regulation influence the socioemotional functioning of typically developing siblings of autistic children in Central Selangor, Malaysia. Results showed that paternal permissive parenting and emotion regulation significantly predicted socioemotional functioning. From the perspective of Malaysia's collectivist and guan-based culture, these findings suggest that structured parental involvement and emotional restraint are interpreted as care and responsibility, while excessive permissiveness may reduce children's sense of security. Although the explained variance was modest, the effects are meaningful given the complex, multifactorial nature of socioemotional development.

These results are also in line with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which explains how a child's development is shaped by the systems around them, particularly the direct interactions with parents in the family environment. The findings show that the quality of parenting, especially the balance of support and structure, can have a lasting effect on a child's socioemotional health.

To support the socioemotional needs of typically developing siblings, targeted strategies should encourage fathers to take an active and guiding role in family life while also teaching children practical emotion regulation skills. Within Malaysia's collectivist and family-oriented context, integrating culturally responsive parenting practices with school-based social-emotional

learning and community awareness initiatives may collectively enhance familial cohesion and equip typically developing siblings to better navigate the emotional and relational challenges of living with an autistic sibling.

## Research Limitation

The first limitation of this study is the cross-sectional design of the study, which captures data at a single point in time and thus limits the ability to understand how parenting styles, emotion regulation, and socioemotional functioning of typically developing siblings might change or develop over time as typically developing siblings grow older, family dynamics evolve, or the needs of their autistic sibling shift. This design does not allow for capturing developmental trajectories or long-term patterns. Another limitation is that the sample was restricted to schools in Central Selangor, one of Malaysia's most urbanised regions. This limits the generalisability to other states, especially rural or East Malaysian settings.

Future research should consider multi-informant, mixed methods or longitudinal research designs and incorporate broader ecological variables such as peer relationships, social support, school climate, and family socioeconomic conditions, which could further enrich the findings, offering deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted socioemotional development in the typically developing siblings' population. Besides, cross-state sampling across Peninsular and

East Malaysia would allow examination of cultural and regional variations. Future studies should also explore gender-based differences, as traditional gender norms in Malaysian families may shape how siblings express emotions, perceive parental control, and use emotion regulation strategies.

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