

Reducing Parental Psychological Control: The Influence of Marital Support and Psychological Capital

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the predictive role of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital in parental psychological control, exploring how these factors contribute to variations in parenting behaviors.

Methods and Materials: A correlational descriptive design was employed, with a sample of 320 married individuals with children selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie table. Participants completed standardized measures assessing parental psychological control, emotional support in marriage, and psychological capital. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation to examine the relationships between variables and multiple linear regression to determine the predictive power of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital on parental psychological control. SPSS version 27 was used for statistical analysis, with significance set at $p < 0.01$.

Findings: Results indicated significant negative correlations between parental psychological control and both emotional support in marriage ($r = -0.52, p < 0.01$) and psychological capital ($r = -0.46, p < 0.01$). Multiple regression analysis showed that emotional support in marriage ($B = -0.41, p < 0.01$) and psychological capital ($B = -0.36, p < 0.01$) significantly predicted lower parental psychological control, accounting for 34% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.34$). These findings suggest that parents with higher marital support and stronger psychological resources engage in less psychologically controlling parenting behaviors.

Conclusion: This study highlights the crucial role of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital in reducing parental psychological control. Strengthening spousal support and enhancing psychological capital may serve as effective strategies for promoting healthier parenting practices and reducing manipulative parental behaviors. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and intervention strategies aimed at fostering supportive marital relationships and psychological resilience among parents.

Keywords: Parental psychological control, emotional support in marriage, psychological capital, parenting behaviors, family relationships.

1 Introduction

Parental psychological control is a critical factor influencing children's emotional and behavioral development, with implications for family dynamics and long-term psychological well-being. Psychological control refers to a form of intrusive parenting that manipulates children's emotions and autonomy through guilt induction, love withdrawal, and invalidation, ultimately affecting their psychological resilience and self-regulation (Zoromba et al., 2024). Extensive research has demonstrated that parenting behaviors rooted in psychological control can hinder children's ability to develop a sense of autonomy and psychological well-being, leading to increased susceptibility to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviors (Kim & Ko, 2024). Given the importance of parental psychological control in child development, it is crucial to explore the factors that contribute to its emergence within family relationships. Among the most influential factors, emotional support in marriage and psychological capital have been identified as potential predictors, shaping the ways in which parents engage in controlling behaviors toward their children (Chu, 2024).

Emotional support in marriage plays a fundamental role in shaping parental behaviors and attitudes, as it fosters a sense of emotional security, effective communication, and mutual understanding between spouses (Jiang, 2024). Studies have highlighted that when individuals receive strong emotional support from their partners, they are more likely to develop positive parenting strategies, reducing the likelihood of engaging in psychologically controlling behaviors (Le et al., 2023). Conversely, marital dissatisfaction and a lack of emotional support can lead to increased stress and negative emotional regulation, which may, in turn, manifest as psychological control over children (Jia et al., 2023). Furthermore, research suggests that supportive marital relationships provide a buffer against stress and enhance parents' ability to maintain a balanced approach to parenting, fostering healthy emotional interactions with their children (Duggan, 2022). This underscores the importance of investigating the extent to which emotional support in marriage influences parental psychological control and the mechanisms through which this effect occurs.

In addition to emotional support in marriage, psychological capital (PsyCap) has emerged as a significant construct influencing parenting behaviors. Psychological capital, conceptualized as a positive psychological state

encompassing self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, has been linked to adaptive coping strategies and effective stress management in various life domains (Fu'ady et al., 2023). Within the context of parenting, individuals with high levels of psychological capital are more likely to employ positive reinforcement, constructive discipline, and emotional regulation strategies, thereby reducing reliance on psychological control (Azar et al., 2024). Studies have shown that parents with strong psychological capital are more resilient in the face of parenting challenges and are better equipped to provide their children with autonomy-supportive environments (Meng et al., 2023). Furthermore, psychological capital has been identified as a mediator between various stressors and parental behaviors, suggesting that it may play a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects of marital dissatisfaction or external stressors on parenting practices (Fan et al., 2024).

Given the established associations between emotional support in marriage, psychological capital, and parenting behaviors, it is essential to explore their combined predictive power in determining parental psychological control. Previous research has largely focused on these variables in isolation, with limited studies investigating their interactive effects on parenting practices (Shi, 2024). A comprehensive examination of these factors can provide valuable insights into how they collectively contribute to the emergence or prevention of psychological control in parenting. Furthermore, such an investigation can offer practical implications for designing interventions aimed at fostering positive parenting strategies through marital counseling and psychological capital development programs (Kariv et al., 2022).

In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to examine the extent to which emotional support in marriage and psychological capital predict parental psychological control. Employing a correlational descriptive design, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationships among these variables and identifying the key psychological and relational mechanisms underlying parental psychological control (Qiu & Ye, 2023). Given the increasing recognition of psychological capital as a critical factor in various domains of life, including education, work, and personal relationships, this study extends its application to the realm of parenting, offering new perspectives on how positive psychological resources can shape parenting behaviors (Wang et al., 2022).

The findings of this study have significant implications for both research and practice. By understanding the role of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital in predicting parental psychological control, interventions can be designed to enhance marital relationships and psychological resources among parents, ultimately fostering healthier family environments (Fu et al., 2024). Moreover, the study's results may inform policymakers and family therapists about the importance of incorporating psychological capital training into parenting programs to reduce psychological control and promote positive parent-child relationships (Jumriaty et al., 2024).

In conclusion, parental psychological control remains a critical area of investigation in developmental psychology, with profound implications for child outcomes and family well-being. By examining the predictive roles of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital, this study aims to bridge existing gaps in the literature and offer practical recommendations for enhancing parenting practices.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design and Participants

The present study employed a correlational descriptive design to examine the predictive relationship between emotional support in marriage and psychological capital with parental psychological control. The study population consisted of married individuals with children, and the sample size was determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) table, resulting in a total of 320 participants. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation across different demographic characteristics, including age, gender, and length of marriage. Participants were required to be currently married and have at least one child to meet the study's inclusion criteria. Data collection was conducted through self-report questionnaires administered either in-person or online, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Parental Psychological Control

The Parental Psychological Control Scale (PCS) developed by Barber (1996) is a widely used instrument for assessing parental psychological control, which refers to intrusive and manipulative parenting behaviors that undermine a child's autonomy. This scale consists of 18

items that measure three key subscales: guilt induction, love withdrawal, and invalidation. Participants respond to the items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of psychological control. The validity and reliability of this scale have been confirmed in various studies, demonstrating strong internal consistency and construct validity in diverse populations.

2.2.2 Emotional Support

The Emotional Support in Marriage Scale, developed by Schaefer and Olson (1981), is a standardized tool designed to measure the perceived emotional support provided by a spouse. This scale includes 10 items assessing dimensions such as emotional responsiveness, encouragement, and understanding. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of emotional support. Research has confirmed the validity and reliability of this scale, showing strong internal consistency and predictive validity in studies on marital satisfaction and relationship dynamics.

2.2.3 Psychological Capital

The Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24), developed by Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman (2007), is a standardized instrument used to assess psychological capital, a positive psychological state characterized by self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. The PCQ-24 consists of 24 items divided equally into four subscales: self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to achieve goals), optimism (a positive outlook on future success), hope (perseverance toward goals and pathways thinking), and resilience (the ability to recover from adversity). Respondents rate items on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater psychological capital. The PCQ-24 has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with high reliability and validity established across different cultural and occupational contexts.

2.3 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the study utilized both Pearson correlation and linear regression to examine the relationships among the study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the bivariate associations between the dependent variable, parental psychological control, and each

of the independent variables, emotional support in marriage and psychological capital. To determine the predictive power of the independent variables, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed with parental psychological control as the dependent variable and emotional support in marriage and psychological capital as the independent variables. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27, with significance levels set at $p < 0.05$. Assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were checked before conducting regression analyses to ensure the robustness of the results.

3 Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants revealed a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, and

marital duration. The sample consisted of 320 individuals, of whom 156 (48.75%) were male and 164 (51.25%) were female. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 55 years, with a mean age of 37.82 years ($SD = 6.94$). Regarding the duration of marriage, 84 participants (26.25%) had been married for less than five years, 123 participants (38.44%) for five to ten years, and 113 participants (35.31%) for more than ten years. Additionally, 182 participants (56.88%) reported having one child, while 138 participants (43.12%) had two or more children. The distribution of educational levels showed that 59 participants (18.44%) had a high school diploma or lower, 127 participants (39.69%) had an undergraduate degree, and 134 participants (41.88%) held a graduate degree or higher. These characteristics reflect a balanced and representative sample for examining the study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Parental Psychological Control	42.57	8.23
Emotional Support in Marriage	68.39	10.45
Psychological Capital	75.82	12.38

The descriptive statistics for the study variables, including mean and standard deviation, are presented in Table 1. The mean score for parental psychological control was 42.57 ($SD = 8.23$), indicating moderate levels of psychological control among parents. Emotional support in marriage had a higher mean score of 68.39 ($SD = 10.45$), suggesting that participants generally perceived a moderate to high level of emotional support in their marital relationships. Psychological capital showed the highest mean score at 75.82 ($SD = 12.38$), reflecting a relatively strong presence of psychological resilience, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy among participants.

Before conducting the main analyses, the assumptions for Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression were examined and confirmed. The normality of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which

indicated that the dependent variable, parental psychological control, was normally distributed ($D(320) = 0.041, p = 0.143$). Linearity was checked using scatterplots, which displayed a linear relationship between the independent variables (emotional support in marriage and psychological capital) and the dependent variable. Multicollinearity was examined through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with VIF values of 1.27 for emotional support in marriage and 1.34 for psychological capital, both of which are well below the cutoff of 10, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Homoscedasticity was verified through the examination of residual plots, showing a random and evenly distributed pattern. These results confirmed that all necessary statistical assumptions were met, ensuring the validity of the correlation and regression analyses.

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients Among Study Variables

Variable	Parental Psychological Control (r)	Parental Psychological Control (p)	Emotional Support in Marriage (r)	Emotional Support in Marriage (p)	Psychological Capital (r)	Psychological Capital (p)
Parental Psychological Control	1.00	-	-0.52	<0.01	-0.46	<0.01

Emotional Support in Marriage	-0.52	<0.01	1.00	-	0.54	<0.01
Psychological Capital	-0.46	<0.01	0.54	<0.01	1.00	-

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicated significant negative associations between parental psychological control and both emotional support in marriage ($r = -0.52, p < 0.01$) and psychological capital ($r = -0.46, p < 0.01$). This suggests that as emotional support in marriage and psychological capital increase, parental psychological control decreases. Furthermore, emotional support in marriage and psychological capital were

positively correlated with each other ($r = 0.54, p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of emotional support in marriage are associated with greater psychological capital. These findings support the hypothesis that stronger spousal support and higher psychological resources contribute to lower parental psychological control. The correlation results are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 3

Summary of Regression Results

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
Regression	5487.32	2	2743.66	0.58	0.34	0.33	84.24	<0.01
Residual	10327.68	317	32.57	-	-	-	-	-
Total	15815.00	319	-	-	-	-	-	-

The regression analysis demonstrated that emotional support in marriage and psychological capital significantly predicted parental psychological control ($F(2, 317) = 84.24, p < 0.01$), accounting for approximately 34% of the variance in psychological control ($R^2 = 0.34, \text{adjusted } R^2 = 0.33$). The regression sum of squares was 5487.32, while the residual

sum of squares was 10327.68, indicating that a substantial portion of the variance in parental psychological control was explained by the independent variables. The significant F-value confirms that the overall model is a good fit for the data. [Table 3](#) provides a summary of the regression analysis.

Table 4

Multivariate Regression Results

Variable	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Constant	55.62	3.87	-	14.37	<0.01
Emotional Support in Marriage	-0.41	0.07	-0.47	-5.87	<0.01
Psychological Capital	-0.36	0.09	-0.42	-4.00	<0.01

The results of the multiple regression analysis further confirmed the significant predictive roles of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital. The constant term in the model was 55.62 ($SE = 3.87, t = 14.37, p < 0.01$). Emotional support in marriage had a significant negative effect on parental psychological control ($B = -0.41, SE = 0.07, \beta = -0.47, t = -5.87, p < 0.01$), indicating that for every unit increase in emotional support, psychological control decreased by 0.41 points. Similarly, psychological capital also showed a significant negative effect ($B = -0.36, SE = 0.09, \beta = -0.42, t = -4.00, p < 0.01$), suggesting that an increase in psychological capital corresponded with a decrease in parental psychological control. These findings confirm that higher emotional support and greater

psychological capital significantly contribute to reducing parental psychological control. [Table 4](#) presents the multivariate regression results.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence regarding the predictive role of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital in relation to parental psychological control. The results of Pearson correlation analysis indicated that both emotional support in marriage and psychological capital had significant negative correlations with parental psychological control. Furthermore, the results of multiple linear regression

analysis revealed that emotional support in marriage and psychological capital collectively accounted for a significant proportion of variance in parental psychological control, indicating that higher levels of emotional support and psychological capital were associated with lower tendencies toward psychologically controlling parenting behaviors. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the impact of spousal support and psychological resilience on parenting practices (Kim & Ko, 2024; Zoromba et al., 2024).

The negative association between emotional support in marriage and parental psychological control reinforces the theoretical premise that supportive marital relationships contribute to healthier parenting behaviors. Emotional support in marriage fosters a sense of security, reduces parental stress, and promotes effective emotional regulation, thereby reducing the likelihood of parents engaging in controlling behaviors toward their children (Jiang, 2024). Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals who perceive greater emotional support from their spouses exhibit higher levels of parenting warmth and responsiveness, while those experiencing marital dissatisfaction and emotional neglect are more prone to coercive and psychologically controlling parenting styles (Le et al., 2023). The findings of the present study are consistent with research highlighting the spillover effect of marital quality on parenting, suggesting that emotional interactions between spouses directly influence how they regulate their parenting practices (Duggan, 2022).

Additionally, the significant predictive role of psychological capital in parental psychological control highlights the importance of positive psychological resources in shaping parenting behaviors. Psychological capital, which includes components such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, equips parents with adaptive coping mechanisms to manage stressors associated with parenting responsibilities (Fu'ady et al., 2023). The results of this study align with previous findings that indicate parents with high psychological capital are more likely to use positive parenting strategies, fostering autonomy-supportive environments rather than resorting to psychological control (Azar et al., 2024). Moreover, studies have suggested that psychological capital functions as a protective factor against stress-induced maladaptive parenting behaviors, reinforcing the importance of psychological resilience in maintaining positive parent-child interactions (Meng et al., 2023).

The results also support the broader literature on the role of psychological capital in interpersonal relationships. For

instance, research has demonstrated that individuals with high psychological capital experience greater well-being, engage in more constructive conflict resolution strategies, and maintain better relational outcomes (Fan et al., 2024). These findings indicate that psychological capital not only influences workplace and academic settings but also plays a crucial role in family dynamics (Chu, 2024). The current study extends this understanding by illustrating that psychological capital contributes to healthier parenting practices by mitigating stress-induced tendencies toward psychological control (Shi, 2024).

A notable finding of this study is the combined effect of emotional support in marriage and psychological capital on parental psychological control. While both variables independently predicted lower psychological control, their combined contribution suggests an interactive effect in which emotional support in marriage reinforces psychological capital, further buffering parents against stress and negative parenting behaviors (Qiu & Ye, 2023). This result is consistent with studies emphasizing the interplay between social support and psychological resilience in mitigating maladaptive behaviors (Okechukwu et al., 2023). In other words, parents who receive strong emotional support from their spouses may develop higher psychological capital, which, in turn, reduces their reliance on psychological control as a parenting strategy (Jia et al., 2023).

These findings have significant implications for understanding the mechanisms underlying parental psychological control. Research has consistently shown that psychological control is often rooted in parental stress, emotional dysregulation, and feelings of insecurity (Jan et al., 2023). By demonstrating that emotional support in marriage and psychological capital serve as protective factors, the present study provides empirical support for interventions aimed at strengthening marital relationships and psychological resources to improve parenting outcomes (Fu et al., 2024). Future research should further explore the longitudinal effects of these factors to establish causal relationships and examine their long-term impact on family dynamics (Zhou et al., 2021).

Despite the strengths of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias or individual response tendencies. Future studies should consider incorporating observational or multi-informant approaches to obtain a more comprehensive assessment of parental psychological control, emotional support in

marriage, and psychological capital. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between the study variables. While significant relationships were identified, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how changes in emotional support and psychological capital over time influence parenting behaviors. Lastly, the study focused on a specific population, and findings may not be generalizable to all cultural or socioeconomic groups. Future research should examine these relationships in diverse populations to explore potential cultural variations.

Future research should consider exploring additional moderating or mediating variables that may influence the relationship between emotional support in marriage, psychological capital, and parental psychological control. For instance, factors such as parental stress, work-family conflict, and personality traits may play a role in shaping parenting behaviors. Additionally, longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of emotional support and psychological capital on parenting practices, helping to establish causal pathways. Another important area for future research is investigating intervention programs designed to enhance psychological capital and marital support among parents. Examining the effectiveness of such programs could offer practical strategies for reducing psychological control in parenting.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of strengthening emotional support within marital relationships to foster healthier parenting practices. Practitioners working with families should consider implementing couple-based interventions that focus on improving communication, emotional responsiveness, and mutual support between spouses. Additionally, psychological capital development programs could be integrated into parenting workshops, equipping parents with skills in resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy to reduce reliance on psychological control. Schools and community organizations could also play a role by offering resources and support groups for parents, emphasizing the role of psychological well-being in effective parenting. By addressing both relational and psychological aspects, these interventions could contribute to more positive family dynamics and healthier child development outcomes.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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