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RESEARCH

Self-Efficacy and Parental Monitoring as Mediators in the Relationship Between Poverty, Emotional and Behavioral Problems

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Abstract

Child poverty is a global issue that affects all of humanity, especially children. The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating roles of self-efficacy and parental monitoring in the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems. This study was conducted using a relational model with368 students enrolled in state middle schools and their parents, residing in socioeconomically disadvantaged regions of Türkiye. The data was analyzed using the parallel mediation model. The findings revealed that self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems, while parental monitoring partially mediated the relationship between child poverty and behavioral problems. Given the correlational nature of the study, these findings reflect indirect associations rather than causal effects. Nevertheless, the results highlight the potential importance of individual and familial protective factors in understanding how child poverty relates to students' emotional and behavioral outcomes. Based on these findings, future research is encouraged to further investigate the roles of self-efficacy and parental monitoring in similar contexts, preferably using longitudinal or multi-method designs. Practitioners should consider the relevance of these factors when designing supportive programs, and policymakers should take into account family and child psychosocial variables when developing strategies to address child poverty.

Keywords Poverty · Emotional problems · Behavioral problems · Self-efficacy · Parental monitoring

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1 Introduction

Despite rapid global advancements across technology, economy, and education, inequality in access to basic resources remains a persistent issue. One of the most vulnerable population affected by these structural inequalities are children. Poverty, both a cause and consequence of inequality, continues to threaten the developmental outcomes and long-term well-being of children across the globe. According to the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2022), children—along with older people—represent the most at-risk people experiencing poverty more acutely than other age groups. Indeed, UNICEF states that children are twice as likely to experience poverty as adults. Deprivation of basic necessities such as nutrition, healthcare, education, and sanitation during 2021 early childhood, a critical period of development, not only undermines physical and psychological health but also increases the likelihood of intergenerational transmission of poverty (Devenish et al., 2017; Ho et al., 2023).

While income-based measures of child poverty remain prevalent, there is a growing consensus among scholars and international organizations that this unidimensional approach has limitations. Multidimensional child poverty, as defined by UNICEF, encompasses deprivation across key life domains, including education, health, and living conditions, and presents a more comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of poverty on children (Save the Children & UNICEF, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2021). Since this approach is based on whether people are deprived of the goods and services necessary for life, it can be said to encourage a more humane view of poverty. Global estimates suggest that nearly 45% of children—approximately one billion—are affected by multidimensional poverty (UNICEF, 2021). For example, the situation in Türkiye is also concerning, as official statistics indicate that the child poverty rate is 31.9%, meaning that one in three children lives in income poverty (Turkish Statistical Institute [TURKSTAT], 2024a). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, and the 2023 earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş have exacerbated children's socioeconomic vulnerabilities, raising serious concerns about their developmental trajectories (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023).

2 Child Poverty: Prevalence and Risk Factors

Child poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, and the presence of multiple risk factors rather than a single risk factor is more determinant of children's life outcomes. Economic risk factors include parental unemployment, low parental education, large family size, households with ethnic minority backgrounds, and families with members who have disabilities (Bychkov et al., 2024; Chiang & Chiang, 2018). Social risk factors include chronic unemployment, young maternal age, foreign-born mothers, single-parent families, and residence in rural areas (Chiang & Chiang, 2018). Experiences of natural disasters further deepen child poverty by directly affecting family livelihoods, housing, and access to health services (Sunarti et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2016). Such disasters increase not only physical but also social and economic vulnerabilities, making it harder for children to break out of the cycle of poverty (Van

Rossem & Pannecoucke, 2019; Wei et al., 2016). These multiple, interacting risks highlight the importance of considering both individual and contextual factors when examining child outcomes.

2.1 Effects of Child Poverty on Developmental Outcomes

Child poverty constitutes a critical public health and social issue with profound and lasting consequences for children's development and well-being (Wickham et al., 2016). Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that poverty during childhood is strongly associated with adverse outcomes across multiple domains, including compromised physical health, impaired cognitive and academic functioning, and disrupted social-emotional development (Bidmead et al., 2024; Wickham et al., 2016). Children living in economically disadvantaged contexts are more likely to experience chronic stress, poor nutrition, limited access to quality education, and unsafe living environments - factors that collectively diminish developmental potential and perpetuate intergenerational cycles of disadvantage (Wood, 2018). Neurocognitive domains, such as working memory, language processing, and executive functioning, are disproportionately affected by poverty-related risks, which, in turn, undermine school readiness and academic achievement (Lee, 2024; Odgers, 2015). Moreover, socio-emotional challenges, increased levels of aggression, withdrawal, anxiety, and depressive symptoms are prevalent among children from low-income households. They have been linked to long-term impairments in psychosocial adjustment and adult socioeconomic attainment (Dos Reis Vilela et al., 2019; Heberle & Carter, 2020). Notably, childhood poverty becomes a significant predictor of both emotional and behavioral problems in adolescence (Devenish et al., 2017; Lozano-Sánchez et al., 2024). The relationship between poverty and psychological problems is also seen in adulthood, with low self-esteem, feelings of shame, and lack of control playing a mediating role (Frankham et al., 2019). These findings underscore the importance of implementing comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to help buffer the developmental harm posed by child poverty and, in turn, promote equity in health and education outcomes.

3 Theoretical Framework

Child poverty is a multi-layered phenomenon that directly and indirectly affects child development, and the theoretical basis for this study is Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. This model considers child development in terms of both individual characteristics and environmental contexts, spanning from the microsystem to the chronosystem, which interact dynamically (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Tudge & Rosa, 2020). Within this framework, parental monitoring, a key proximal process within the microsystem, reflects the degree to which parents are aware of and involved in their children's daily activities. While child deprivation does not automatically lead to increased parental monitoring, socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts can influence both the frequency and quality of monitoring behaviors (Bae & Wickrama, 2015; Booth & Shaw, 2020). For example, parents in low-income or

resource-limited households may face structural and psychosocial barriers, such as long working hours, limited social support, or stress from economic strain, which can hinder consistent monitoring (Bae & Wickrama, 2015; Booth & Shaw, 2020). Conversely, some parents may respond to perceived risks associated with deprivation by increasing vigilance and control over their children's activities (Pereira et al., 2015). Therefore, child deprivation shapes the context in which parental monitoring occurs, but the direction and effectiveness of this monitoring are contingent on multiple interacting factors, including parental resources, stress levels, and the child's behavior (Acri et al., 2017; Patton & Thomas, 2025; Pereira et al., 2015).

4 Self-Efficacy and Parental Monitoring as Protective Factors

Two psychosocial constructs have emerged as particularly salient in buffering the adverse effects of poverty during adolescence: self-efficacy and parental monitoring. Self-efficacy, an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute actions required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 2006), plays a vital role in shaping adaptive behavior, emotional regulation, and academic engagement during adolescence. Evidence suggests that socioeconomic adversity can hinder the development of self-efficacy by limiting access to enriching experiences and role models, thereby constraining opportunities for personal growth (Callander & Schofield, 2016; Meilstrup et al., 2020). Similarly, parental monitoring, which refers to the extent to which parents are informed about their children's activities and whereabouts, has been identified as a critical protective factor in adolescence (Dittus et al., 2023). Effective parental monitoring—often underpinned by open communication and mutual trust between parent and child—is critical in reducing the likelihood of risk behaviors and mitigating behavioral problems. However, the effectiveness of such monitoring appears to be moderated by socioeconomic status (SES). Parents in low-income households frequently encounter structural and psychosocial barriers that hinder consistent supervision and engagement (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2010). Notably, a longitudinal study conducted among Dutch adolescents revealed a counterintuitive association: higher levels of parental control were linked to increased delinquency, particularly among adolescents from low-SES backgrounds (Rekker et al., 2017). This finding suggests that in contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage, parental monitoring may be implemented in a more coercive or overcontrolling manner, especially when adolescents begin to exhibit problematic behavior—potentially exacerbating rather than curbing delinquency.

Previous research and theoretical frameworks, including Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model, have consistently demonstrated that poverty is associated with increased emotional and behavioral problems in children. Economic hardship exposes children to instability, crowding, noise, and chronic stress—conditions known to disrupt the development of self-regulation and increase vulnerability to emotional and behavioral difficulties (Evans & Kim, 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2014). Moreover, accumulating evidence indicates that economic hardship not only heightens children's exposure to environmental stressors but also undermines key developmental processes that foster resilience, including perceived competence and

self-regulation (Evans & Kim, 2013). Additionally, parental monitoring is often compromised in low-SES households due to structural and psychosocial barriers, such as long working hours, economic strain, and limited social support, which diminishes its effectiveness in buffering against risk behaviors (Bae & Wickrama, 2015; Booth & Shaw, 2020; Pereira et al., 2015). The Family Stress Model likewise suggests that financial strain contributes to parental distress, which can weaken the quality of parent–child interactions and reduce the consistency of supportive parenting (Conger et al., 2010). These circumstances also limit children's opportunities to build a sense of personal competence, resulting in lower self-efficacy when navigating academic or social challenges (Bandura, 2006; Callander & Schofield, 2016; Meilstrup et al., 2020). Taken together, these mechanisms provide a coherent theoretical and empirical rationale for examining the interconnected effects of poverty, self-efficacy, and parental monitoring on children's psychosocial outcomes. Professionals working in educational settings have a critical responsibility to recognize and address these multifaceted effects of poverty, including developing awareness of socioeconomic disadvantage, understanding its impact on children's development, and implementing evidence-based strategies to support affected students (Juntunen et al., 2022). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2022) emphasizes the crucial role of school counselors in overcoming barriers that hinder the academic and personal success of children living in poverty. Nevertheless, gaps remain in understanding the psychological consequences of poverty and the most effective intervention strategies, which perpetuate inequities in access to high-quality mental health services and the implementation of protective family and individual processes among socioeconomically disadvantaged populations (Generali & Foss-Kelly, 2022; Post et al., 2020).

5 The Present Study

Addressing child poverty from a mental health perspective can enhance school counselors' capacity to recognize its implications for children's psychological development and to implement targeted interventions. Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the mediating roles of self-efficacy and parental monitoring in the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems among early adolescents. Specifically, it tests a partial mediation model wherein (1) self-efficacy mediates the relationship between poverty and both emotional and behavioral problems, and (2) parental monitoring mediates the relationship between poverty and emotional and behavioral problems. By focusing on these mediating mechanisms, this study aims to contribute to an understanding on how poverty is associated with psychosocial outcomes in adolescents. Specifically, it aims to explore the roles of self-efficacy and parental monitoring in mediating the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems during early adolescence (see Fig. 1). Within this framework, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Do self-efficacy and parental monitoring mediate the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems in middle school students?

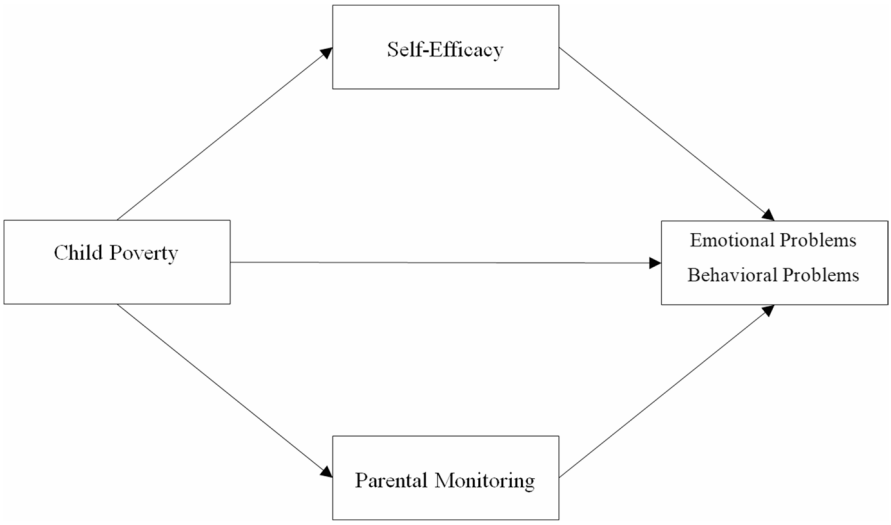

Fig. 1 Proposed model

RQ1a. To what extent does child poverty significantly predict emotional and behavioral problems in middle school students?
RQ1b. To what extent does child poverty significantly predict levels of self-efficacy in middle school students?
RQ1c. To what extent does child poverty significantly predict levels of parental monitoring in middle school students?

RQ2. To what extent do self-efficacy and parental monitoring levels significantly predict emotional and behavioral problems in middle school students?

RQ2a. Do self-efficacy and parental monitoring significantly mediate the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems in middle school students?

6 Method

6.1 Study Design

In this study, a correlational research model and a quantitative research method were employed (Sullivan, 2024). In this study, because the prediction of child poverty (independent variable) and emotional and behavioral problems (dependent variables) was tested through self-efficacy and parental monitoring (mediating variables), a parallel mediation model was used, examining two mediating variables. Participants were selected using purposive sampling (Robinson, 2023). In this context, the students and their parents resided in the Southeastern Anatolia Region (TURKSTAT, 2024b), which has the lowest average annual household income in Türkiye,

and the students were enrolled in public secondary schools. Accordingly, the data were collected from public schools serving low-income families in the provinces of Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, and Gaziantep—areas among the most severely affected by the earthquakes and characterized by high levels of socioeconomic deprivation. All participating children had experienced the earthquakes and were living in these provinces at the time of data collection.

7 Participants

The participants comprise 368 middle school students (female = 229, 62.2%; male = 139, 37.8%) who are continuing their education in the Southeastern Anatolia Region and who experienced the February 2023 earthquake, as well as one parent of each student. The perception of poverty reflects the family's subjective evaluation of its socioeconomic hardship and can only be accurately reported by the parents. Since the variable "child poverty" in our mediation model was directly derived from the parent-reported Poverty Perception Scale, collecting data from a single parent was sufficient and appropriate.

Drawing on the empirical sample size recommendations of Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) for detecting medium-sized mediated effects, the minimum required sample size for adequate statistical power was calculated at 196 participants. The final sample of 368 student–parent dyads, therefore, exceeded this threshold. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants were female students (62.2%), 12-year-olds (47.6%), and those with 3–4 siblings (45.1%). When examining the sociodemographic characteristics of the mothers, it is seen that the majority of the children had mothers who were alive (98.9%), unemployed (85.3%), and literate (76.1%). When examining the sociodemographic characteristics of the fathers, it is seen that the majority of children had fathers who were alive (96.5%), employed full-time (64.1%), and literate (91.8%).

8 Data Collection Process

After obtaining ethical committee approval, the Turkish Ministry of National Education granted the researcher permission to collect data from state middle schools for use in the study. Once consent was obtained, the data collection process began by providing information about the study's purpose and importance to administrators and school counselors working in middle schools in the Southeastern Anatolia Region. The first researcher and a professional psychological counselor, collected the data. The first researcher provided training to the psychological counselor on the data collection tools and key points to consider before the data collection process. Subsequently, information about the research was provided to the children, and the applications were carried out on the days and times determined by the school administrators.

Before data collection, informed consent forms were provided to the middle school children and their parents regarding the study. After the consent forms were signed and returned, the Personal Information Form, Poverty Perception Scale (Sezgin et al.,

Table 1 Participants' sociodemographic characteristics

Variables		*n*	%
Age of participating children	10	18	4.9
	11	117	31.8
	12	175	47.6
	13	51	13.9
	14	7	1.9
Number of siblings	0–2	93	25.3
	3–4	166	45.1
	5–6	81	22
	7 and above	28	7.6
Mother's status of being alive	Being alive	364	98.9
	Passing away	4	1.1
Mother's employment status	Not working	314	85.3
	Part-time worker	18	4.9
	Full-time worker	32	8.7
	Passing away	4	1.1
Mother's literacy status	Literate	280	76.1
	Not literate	84	22.8
	Passing away	4	1.1
Father's status of being alive	Being alive	355	96.5
	Passing away	13	3.5
Father's employment status	Not working	32	8.7
	Part-time worker	87	23.6
	Full-time worker	236	64.1
	Passing away	13	3.5
Father's literacy status	Literate	338	91.8
	Not literate	17	4.6
	Passing away	13	3.5

$N = 368$

2022), Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Güvenir et al., 2008), Self-Efficacy Scale for Children (Telef & Karaca, 2012), and Parental Monitoring Scale (Sayıl et al., 2012) were administered to the children to collect face-to-face data while parents completed the Poverty Perception Scale. The reason for obtaining information about poverty from parents is to better represent the child's socioeconomic environment in the study. Therefore, household economic conditions can be reported more accurately by adults than by children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). This design choice also served as a procedural remedy for common method bias, as the predictor variable (child poverty) and the outcome and mediator variables were collected from different informants (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

8.1 Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form The Personal Information Form was prepared by the researcher(s) and contains questions about the children's sociodemographic characteristics. This form includes questions on the child's age, gender, grade level, number of siblings, and the sociodemographic characteristics of the parents (whether they are alive, their employment status, and their level of education).

Poverty Perception Scale (PPS) Developed by Sezgin et al. (2022) to measure individuals' perceptions of poverty and determine the interaction between factors related to poverty. This scale, consisting of 33 items across three subscales—absolute poverty, relative poverty, and human poverty—uses a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The absolute poverty sub-dimension of the scale consists of 17 items (lowest score 17 – highest score 85), the relative poverty sub-dimension consists of 6 items (lowest score 6 – highest score 30), and the human poverty sub-dimension consists of 10 items (lowest score 10 – highest score 50). As the total score from the scale increases, the individual's perceived poverty level decreases. In the present study, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate whether the original three-factor structure of the PPS (absolute poverty, relative poverty, human poverty; Sezgin et al., 2022) was supported in the current sample. The hypothesized three-factor model yielded the following fit indices: $\chi^2(492) = 2326.00$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.812, TLI = 0.799, RMSEA = 0.101, 90% CI [0.097, 0.105], SRMR = 0.061. Although CFI and TLI values fell below the conventional threshold of 0.90 and RMSEA exceeded 0.08, the SRMR value was adequate, and all items loaded significantly on their intended factors. Given that this scale was originally validated in a Turkish adult sample (Sezgin et al., 2022) and the present study applied it in a specific regional context (Southeastern Anatolia), some reduction in model fit was anticipated. All items loaded significantly on their intended factors (all $ps < 0.001$); standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.25 to 0.97, with 26 out of 33 items loading above 0.50. The three latent factors were highly correlated (Absolute–Relative: $r = .907$; Absolute–Human: $r = .971$; Relative–Human: $r = .899$), suggesting that they reflect a strongly overlapping underlying construct of perceived poverty. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the scale as a whole is 0.92, 0.91 for the absolute poverty and relative poverty subscales, and 0.90 for the human poverty subscale. In this study, parents' total scores on the Poverty Perception Scale were used to determine the level of child poverty. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the scale as a whole in this study is 0.86. "*The home our family lives in is suitable for human habitation; it has decent conditions*," and "*We can easily access and benefit from social services*" are sample items from the scale.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) This instrument was developed by Goodman (1997) to measure emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents. The original form of the instrument consists of five subscales: emotional problems, social behavior, behavioral problems, attention deficit and hyperactivity, and peer problems. This instrument, which uses a three-point Likert scale (0 = not true, 1 = somewhat true, and 2 = definitely true), consists of five items per subscale, totaling 25 items. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Güvenir et al. (2008), and it was found that the scale consists of five subscales and a total of 25 items, as in the original form. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the SDQ's Total Difficulty Score is 0.73 (Güvenir et al., 2008). In this study, the Emotional Problems subscale was used to assess emotional problems in children, and the Behavioral Problems subscale was used to assess behavioral problems. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the Emotional Problems subscale in the study

was 0.60, while it was 0.62 for the Behavioral Problems subscale. Examples of items from the scale include "*I am often unhappy*, *sad*, *or tearful*" and "*I am very anxious*."

Self-Efficacy Scale for Children (SESC) This instrument was developed by Muris (2001) to measure adolescents' social, emotional, and academic self-efficacy. The instrument consists of three subscales, each with seven items, totaling 21 items, and employs a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very much"). One of the three subscales, social self-efficacy, measures adolescents' perceptions of their ability to establish and develop interpersonal relationships; emotional self-efficacy measures adolescents' perceptions of their ability to cope with negative emotions; and academic self-efficacy measures adolescents' perceptions of their ability to achieve educational goals and succeed in academic subjects (Muris, 2001). The total self-efficacy score is calculated by summing the scores of all subscales. The lowest possible score on the scale is 21, and the highest is 105. A high score on the scale indicates a high level of self-efficacy, while a low score indicates a low level of self-efficacy. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version of the scale was calculated to be 0.86 (Telef & Karaca, 2012). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the overall Children's Self-Efficacy Scale is 0.83. Examples of items from the scale include "*How well can you cheer yourself up when faced with a negative event*?" and "*How well can you explain to other children around you that they are doing something you don't like*?"

Parental Monitoring Scale (PMS) This instrument was developed to measure parents' knowledge of their adolescents' daily activities outside the home (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). The instrument has a five-point Likert scale (1 = *never knows*, 5 = *always knows*). The Turkish adaptation of the Parental Knowledge: Monitoring Scale was developed by Sayıl et al. (2012), and it was found to consist of 8 items on a single dimension. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for this instrument, which is interpreted as an increase in the score indicating an increase in parental knowledge on the adolescent's activities outside the home, was 0.86. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the instrumentwas 0.78. Examples of items in the questionnaire include "*My mother knows who I hang out with in my free time…*" and "*My mother knows where I go and what I do after school…*".

8.2 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 29) was used to analyze the collected data. The analysis began with checking the dataset. Z scores were calculated, and the Mahalanobis distance was used to identify outliers in the dataset, both univariate and multivariate. Following the analysis, it was observed that the z-standard scores in the dataset ranged from −3 to +3. The distribution of z-scores between −3 and +3 indicates no outliers; therefore, no data need to be excluded. A normality test was performed on the scale responses to examine skewness and kurtosis; since these values fell within the range of −1.5 to +1.5, the data set was considered

Table 2 Coefficient of correlation between scales and subdimensions

Scales and Subdimensions	PPS	SESC	PMS	SDQ-B	SDQ-E
PPS	1		.		
SESC	0.730**	1			
PMS	0.743**	0.770**	1		
SDQ-B	−0.671**	−0.717**	−0.665**	1	
SDQ-E	−0.627**	−0.779**	−0.619**	0.611**	1

PPS Poverty Perception Scale, *SESC* Self-Efficacy Scale for Children, *PMS* Parental Monitoring Scale, *SDQ* Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, *SDQ-B* SDQ- Behavioral problems, *SDQ-E* SDQ- Emotional problems, **p <.001

normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2021). Tolerance and VIF values were examined to test the assumption of multicollinearity. If tolerance values are less than 0.10 and VIF values are greater than 10, the multicollinearity assumption is not met (Pallant, 2020). In this study, in which the dependent variables were emotional and behavioral problems and the independent variables were child poverty, self-efficacy, and parental monitoring, there was no multicollinearity among the variables (Tolerance = 0.414, VIF = 2.416). Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships among the study's variables. To test the hypothesized mediation models, Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4; Hayes, 2022) was used, and separate parallel mediation models were estimated for emotional problems and behavioral problems. In each model, child poverty was entered as the independent variable, self-efficacy and parental monitoring were entered as parallel mediators, and the relevant SDQ subscale (emotional problems or behavioral problems) was used as the outcome. Indirect effects were estimated using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples, and an indirect effect was considered statistically significant when the 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include zero. Table 2 presents the correlation values between the scales and subscales. When examining the correlation values between the scales and subscales in Table 2, it was found that all scales and subscales in the study exhibited statistically significant relationships with one another.

8.3 Findings

8.3.1 Preliminary Analyses

Before testing the mediation models, bivariate correlations among all study variables were examined (see Table 2). Higher scores on the Poverty Perception Scale (indicating lower perceived poverty) were significantly associated with lower emotional problems (r = −.63, p <.001), lower behavioral problems (r = −.67, p <.001), higher self-efficacy (r =.73, p <.001), and higher parental monitoring (r =.74, p <.001). Given these significant associations, parallel mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) to examine the hypothesized indirect effects.

8.4 Parallel Mediation Model for Emotional Problems

The first parallel mediation model examined whether self-efficacy and parental monitoring mediated the relationship between child poverty and emotional problems. The total effect of child poverty on emotional problems was significant (c = −0.1243, p <.001; see Table 3 for full model results). When mediators were included, the direct effect remained significant but decreased (c′ = −0.0255, p =.018), indicating partial mediation. The total indirect effect was significant (effect = −0.0988, 95% CI [−0.1167, −0.0817]). Specifically, the indirect effect through self-efficacy was significant (effect = −0.1001, 95% CI [−0.1180, −0.0833]), whereas the indirect effect through parental monitoring was not significant (effect = 0.0013, 95% CI [−0.0147, 0.0179]). The model explained 61.4% of the variance in emotional problems (R^2 = 0.614).

8.5 Parallel Mediation Model for Behavioral Problems

The second parallel mediation model examined the mediating roles of self-efficacy and parental monitoring in the relationship between child poverty and behavioral problems. The total effect of child poverty on behavioral problems was significant (c = −0.1097, p <.001; see Table 3 for full model results). The direct effect remained significant when mediators were included (c′ = −0.0412, p <.001), indi-

Table 3 Parallel mediation of the association between child poverty and emotional/behavioral problems (PROCESS model 4)

Emotional Problems			
Effect	*B*	*SE*	95% *CI*
Total effect (c)	−0.1243	0.0081	[−0.1402, −0.1085]
Direct effect (c′)	−0.0255	0.0104	[−0.0459, −0.0051]
Total indirect effect	−0.0988	0.0089	[−0.1167, −0.0817]
Indirect effect via self-efficacy	−0.1001	0.0088	[−0.1180, −0.0833]
Indirect effect via parental monitoring	0.0013	0.0084	[−0.0147, 0.0179]
R^2 (parallel mediation model) = 0.614			
Behavioural Problems			
Effect	*B*	*SE*	95% *CI*
Total effect (c)	−0.1097	0.0063	[−0.1222, −0.0972]
Direct effect (c′)	−0.0412	0.0090	[−0.0590, −0.0235]
Total indirect effect	−0.0685	0.0075	[−0.0836, −0.0535]
Indirect effect via self-efficacy	−0.0484	0.0072	[−0.0627, −0.0345]
Indirect effect via parental monitoring	−0.0200	0.0079	[−0.0352, −0.0048]

Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Indirect effects were estimated using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples. *SE* values for indirect effects are bootstrap standard errors. *CI* confidence interval. An indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the 95% *CI* does not include zero

cating partial mediation. The total indirect effect was significant (effect = −0.0685, 95% CI [−0.0836, −0.0535]). Both specific indirect effects were significant: self-efficacy (effect = −0.0484, 95% CI [−0.0627, −0.0345]) and parental monitoring (effect = −0.0200, 95% CI [−0.0352, −0.0048]). The model explained 57.0% of the variance in behavioral problems ($R^2 = 0.570$).

8.6 Supplementary Analyses

To address potential confounding and examine the robustness of the findings, supplementary analyses included child age and gender as covariates in parallel mediation models. These covariates were selected based on prior literature indicating that emotional and behavioral problems in adolescence vary as a function of developmental stage and gender (Rescorla et al., 2007). Rather than incorporating these covariates into the primary models, a supplementary approach was adopted to preserve the parsimony of the theoretically driven mediation model while still testing whether the observed effects held after accounting for demographic differences. The results were virtually identical to those reported in the main analyses. Specifically, for emotional problems, the indirect effect through self-efficacy remained significant (effect = −0.0996, 95% CI [−0.1172, −0.0836]), while the indirect effect through parental monitoring remained nonsignificant (effect = 0.0009, 95% CI [−0.0158, 0.0168]). For behavioral problems, both indirect effects remained significant: self-efficacy (effect = −0.0481, 95% CI [−0.0618, −0.0338]) and parental monitoring (effect = −0.0201, 95% CI [−0.0358, −0.0047]). These supplementary findings confirm that the mediation effects are robust and not attributable to differences in child age or gender.

9 Discussion

The present study investigated the mediating roles of self-efficacy and parental monitoring in the relationships between child poverty and two key psychosocial outcomes: emotional problems and behavioral problems. Rather than implying causal pathways, the findings contribute to the literature by elucidating how these variables are interrelated in the context of socioeconomic adversity among children. Firstly, this study confirms that child poverty significantly predicts both emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents, corroborating a substantial body of prior research. Consistent with Ziebold et al. (2023) and Zimmerman et al. (2022), these findings demonstrate that higher poverty levels are associated with increased internalizing and externalizing symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and behavioral difficulties. Additionally, multidimensional poverty measures have been linked to a decline in adolescent mental health and well-being (Díaz et al., 2022; Jiang, 2020). In the present sample, children had also experienced the 2023 earthquakes in Southeastern Anatolia, an exposure that may have intensified these psychosocial risks. However, because disaster exposure was not directly measured, its role should be interpreted cautiously. This contextual factor nevertheless illustrates how disaster-related stressors can compound the challenges associated with poverty. The role of family dynam-

ics, particularly parental mental health and monitoring, has been shown to shape the association between poverty and youth outcomes (Lee, 2022). Lee (2022) revealed that poverty adversely affects parental mental health and attitudes towards children, which, in turn, are positively and significantly related to children's emotional and behavioral difficulties. Traumatic events such as earthquakes can increase stress and conflict within the family and school environments, which are the primary microsystems for middle school children, thereby exacerbating emotional and behavioral problems (Medina-Mora et al., 2024). Given that the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is the most influential developmental context for children, heightened strain within these environments can significantly affect their psychological well-being. However, some inconsistencies exist; for example, Lee and Kim (2012) reported no significant association between poverty and adolescent psychological symptoms, possibly due to sample or contextual factors such as social support and resilience. Taken together, the present findings suggest, rather than confirm, that children exposed to both socioeconomic disadvantage and disaster-related stress may be at heightened risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties.

This study further found that child poverty was significantly associated with lower levels of self-efficacy, indicating a robust negative relationship between economic disadvantage and children's beliefs in their own capabilities. This result is consistent with the existing literature, which suggests that poverty undermines key psychological resources essential for adaptive functioning (Callander & Schofield, 2016; Meilstrup et al., 2020; Mistry et al., 2002; Odenbring, 2019). For example, children and adolescents participating in a qualitative study conducted in Sweden reported that poverty had a negative impact on their self-efficacy (Odenbring, 2019). Economic hardship often restricts access to supportive environments and opportunities that foster mastery experiences, which are fundamental to the development of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997a, b). Nevertheless, given the cross-sectional and correlational nature of the data, it is not possible to determine whether poverty leads to reduced self-efficacy or whether children with lower self-efficacy are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of poverty. Within the present sample, the children had also experienced the 2023 earthquakes in Southeastern Anatolia, a circumstance that likely intensified the challenges associated with economic hardship. Exposure to a large-scale disaster can heighten stress, disrupt daily routines, and reduce access to stable social and educational supports, thereby further undermining the development of self-efficacy (Koçak et al., 2024; Özarslan et al., 2025). The diminished self-efficacy observed in children facing poverty has important implications, as self-efficacy is a well-established predictor of academic achievement (Jung et al., 2017; Cattelino et al., 2019), emotional regulation (Usán Supervía & Quílez Robres, 2021), and social adjustment (Caprara et al., 2004).

Regarding parental monitoring, the results indicated that child poverty was significantly related to variations in parental monitoring behaviors. This finding is consistent with studies showing that economic hardship imposes psychological and material constraints on parents, which can hinder their ability to consistently and effectively monitor their children (Hayes et al., 2004; West et al., 2020). Economic stress often compromises parents' emotional resources, leading to less attentive supervision and reduced involvement in children's daily lives (Prime et al., 2020).

Adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds report lower perceived emotional support and poorer family relationships, particularly when exposed to persistent poverty and parental mental health issues (Adjei et al., 2024). Importantly, the study did not directly assess parental mental health or parenting stress, which limits conclusions about the mechanisms by which poverty may influence monitoring practices. In the context of the present sample, earthquake-related stress may have further strained parental capacity to provide consistent monitoring (Bozkurt Karalı & Özkan, 2025; Proctor et al., 2007). Moreover, these results support the ecological perspective that contextual factors, such as poverty, influence family processes that are critical to children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

An essential finding of this study is that both self-efficacy and parental monitoring significantly predict children's emotional and behavioral problems. However, these associations should not be interpreted as evidence of direct causal effects. The findings suggest that supportive, appropriately structured monitoring, along with higher self-efficacy, is associated with lower levels of psychosocial difficulties. This result aligns with a growing body of literature that emphasizes the critical role of individual and family-level protective factors in shaping a child's psychological adjustment (Bandura, 2006; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Parenting practices influence adolescents' self-efficacy in regulating emotions, such as anger and sadness (Di Giunta et al., 2023). Our findings further demonstrate that parental monitoring effectiveness depends on its quality, as harsh, controlling, or inconsistent monitoring may intensify emotional and behavioral difficulties by undermining children's autonomy and perceived competence, particularly in contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage or disaster exposure. Harsh parenting and existing emotional problems negatively impact the development of self-efficacy, which in turn affects later adjustment and mental health (Di Giunta et al., 2023). Conversely, low self-efficacy has been consistently linked to increased vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and externalizing behaviors (Bandura, 2006). Similarly, parental monitoring has been widely recognized as a key component of effective parenting that buffers against the development of emotional and behavioral problems (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Yang et al., 2024). However, supportive, consistent, and appropriately structured monitoring appears particularly protective, whereas overly controlling or punitive forms of monitoring may have adverse effects, especially for children already facing significant stressors such as poverty or traumatic events (Ceballo et al., 2003; Wang & McLeroy, 2023). Thus, both the presence and quality of monitoring appear relevant for children's psychosocial adjustment. Adequate rules and supervision are associated with lower levels of behavioural problems and sensation seeking (Hayes et al., 2004). Moreover, parental monitoring is particularly effective for adolescents with high levels of aggressive behavior, serving as a protective factor against the development of further behavioral issues (Yang et al., 2024). In summary, the findings that self-efficacy and parental monitoring predict children's emotional and behavioral problems are consistent with the literature, underscoring that both the presence and the qualitative nature of monitoring are central in determining whether it functions as a protective resource or a potential risk factor for child psychosocial adjustment.

Consistent with theoretical expectations, self-efficacy emerged as a significant partial mediator between child poverty and both emotional and behavioral problems.

Specifically, the analyses revealed that child poverty had a strong direct effect on both emotional and behavioral problems, while also significantly predicting lower levels of self-efficacy. In turn, self-efficacy was strongly associated with fewer emotional and behavioral difficulties. In this sample, exposure to the 2023 earthquakes in Southeastern Anatolia likely intensified these psychosocial challenges, as disaster-related stress may disrupt routines, reduce access to supportive environments, and heighten vulnerability (Bozkurt Karalı & Özkan, 2025), thereby further influencing children's self-efficacy and mental health outcomes. Mediation analysis conducted using a regression-based approach, operationalized with Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS, confirmed that self-efficacy significantly mediated both relationships, highlighting the role of children's self-perceptions of competence in shaping their mental health outcomes under conditions of economic hardship. These findings are aligned with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997), which posits that self-efficacy plays a central role in how individuals interpret and respond to stressors. Children with higher self-efficacy are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies and demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, including poverty (Bandura 1997a, b). Empirical evidence supports the notion that self-efficacy serves as a psychological buffer in disadvantaged youth, reducing the likelihood of internalizing (e.g., depression) and externalizing (e.g., aggression) symptoms (Mileviciute et al., 2014). For instance, a study involving secondary school students found that higher self-efficacy was inversely related to internalizing problems and had a lower correlation with externalizing problems (Salavera & Usán, 2019). Additionally, self-efficacy was found to mediate the relationship between peer behaviours and internalizing symptoms in Ukrainian children, with higher self-efficacy associated with fewer behavioural symptoms (Burlaka et al., 2022). The partial mediation found in this study suggests that while poverty directly contributes to mental health risks, strengthening self-efficacy, especially in the context of disaster-related stress, could help mitigate some of the negative effects of socioeconomic deprivation and trauma exposure.

Another key finding of this study is that, while parental monitoring significantly mediated the relationship between child poverty and behavioral problems, it did not significantly mediate the relationship between poverty and emotional problems. This pattern suggests that parental monitoring may be more closely linked to observable behaviors (e.g., rule-breaking, aggression). The significant mediation path from child poverty to behavioral problems via parental monitoring supports prior research indicating that parental involvement, awareness, and oversight are protective against conduct problems, especially in economically disadvantaged contexts (Schonberg & Shaw, 2007; Sosu & Schmidt, 2017). Effective parental monitoring can help structure children's environment and reduce opportunities for deviant behavior, particularly in neighborhoods with elevated risk factors (Lansford et al., 2025; Lippold et al., 2016). However, the absence of a significant mediation effect for emotional problems may reflect the more complex and internalized nature of emotional difficulties. Emotional problems often arise from a combination of environmental stressors, cognitive vulnerabilities, and deficits in emotion regulation, which may not be directly addressed through parental monitoring alone (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Compas et al.,

2017). Instead, addressing emotional problems may require additional supports such as emotional coaching, trauma-informed care, or therapeutic interventions targeting emotion regulation and cognitive processing. Moreover, it is important to consider the specific characteristics of the study sample. All participating children were survivors of a recent large-scale earthquake, and the severity or nature of their trauma exposure was not measured in this study. In addition, all participating children had experienced a recent large-scale earthquake, and the severity or specific characteristics of their trauma exposure were not assessed in this study. It is plausible that the elevated and potentially unmeasured psychological distress associated with disaster-related trauma amplified emotional problems to a degree that exceeded the regulatory influence of parental monitoring. In such contexts, children's emotional needs may be more complex and require professional psychosocial interventions beyond the scope of everyday parental oversight. Therefore, the nonsignificant mediation effect of parental monitoring on emotional problems in this sample likely reflects the overwhelming impact of trauma, which may attenuate the protective role of parental monitoring under extreme conditions.

The supplementary analyses controlling for child age and gender indicate that the mediation patterns observed in the main analyses are largely stable. After accounting for these demographic variables, the indirect effects through self-efficacy and parental monitoring showed minimal change, suggesting that the associations identified are not simply driven by age- or gender-related differences. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that emotional and behavioral problems vary across adolescence by age and gender, while broader patterns of psychosocial adjustment remain comparable across these groups (Rescorla et al., 2007). With respect to emotional problems, the continued significance of the indirect effect through self-efficacy after controlling for age and gender highlights the importance of children's perceived competence in emotional adjustment under conditions of poverty. This finding suggests that self-efficacy may function as a relatively stable psychological resource across developmental stages and for both boys and girls. In contrast, the lack of a significant indirect effect through parental monitoring suggests that monitoring alone may not adequately explain variations in internalized emotional difficulties, even after accounting for individual psychological factors. Emotional problems are likely shaped by multiple influences, including emotion regulation abilities, cognitive appraisals of stress, and trauma-related experiences, which parental monitoring behaviors may not fully capture (Jacoby et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2015). For behavioral problems, the persistence of both indirect effects underscores the importance of both individual- and family-level processes in shaping externalizing behaviors. The finding that parental monitoring remained a significant mediator after adjusting for age and gender is consistent with evidence that such monitoring plays a particularly critical role in regulating observable behaviors, including aggression and rule-breaking, throughout adolescence. Likewise, the stability of the self-efficacy pathway emphasizes that adolescents' beliefs in their ability to manage challenges and regulate their behavior exert meaningful influence on behavioral adjustment, independently of demographic characteristics. Overall, these findings highlight the robustness of

self-efficacy and parental monitoring as key correlates of emotional and behavioral adjustment among socioeconomically disadvantaged adolescents, reinforcing their relevance as potential targets for intervention.

9.1 Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study offer several theoretical, practical, and methodological implications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers concerned with child development and mental health in the context of poverty. Self-efficacy emerged as a key psychological mechanism mediating the relationship between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems, highlighting the potential of interventions that strengthen children's beliefs in their own competence. School-based programs and community initiatives should therefore incorporate strategies that promote mastery experiences, goal setting, and positive reinforcement, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Parental monitoring was identified as a protective factor specifically for behavioral problems, indicating that enhancing consistent, supportive, and developmentally appropriate supervision may reduce externalizing behaviors, while internalizing difficulties may require additional supports such as emotional literacy training or trauma-informed care. The persistent direct effect of child poverty on both emotional and behavioral outcomes underscores its structural nature and the need for multi-level policy responses, including income support, housing stability programs, and accessible mental health services. Future research should adopt longitudinal and experimental designs to examine causal pathways more rigorously and integrate trauma assessments, especially in contexts where children have experienced major adverse events. Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of collaborative efforts among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to support socioeconomically disadvantaged children, enhance their resilience, and reduce disparities in access to mental health and developmental services.

9.2 Limitations

Despite the important contributions of this study, several limitations should be acknowledged to inform the interpretation of the findings and guide future research. First, the study employed a cross-sectional, correlational design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships among child poverty, self-efficacy, parental monitoring, and emotional and behavioral problems. Longitudinal or experimental designs would offer stronger evidence of directionality and causality among these variables. Second, the concept of child poverty is inherently dynamic and multidimensional, influenced by temporal, social, economic, and contextual factors. However, this study assessed poverty using a single time-point, cross-sectional design. As a result, the findings represent a snapshot rather than a developmental trajectory of how poverty may affect children's psychological functioning over time.

Third, the emotional and behavioral problems reported by children were not assessed using clinical diagnostic interviews; instead, all psychological data were collected through self-report measures. Although these tools offer practicality and efficiency in large samples, they may be limited by reporting bias, social desirability effects, or developmental limitations in children's self-awareness. Triangulation with additional data sources—such as parent or teacher reports, behavioral observations, or clinical assessments—would provide a more comprehensive and objective understanding of children's emotional and behavioral functioning. Fourth, the participants in this study were survivors of the February 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye. Although all participants experienced this shared traumatic event, the severity and psychological impact of the trauma were not assessed. It is possible that the trauma intensity among some children may have elevated their emotional vulnerability, reducing the buffering effects of parental monitoring on emotional problems. Therefore, future studies should incorporate trauma-related variables to better contextualize the emotional outcomes of children exposed to both poverty and disaster-related adversity. Fifth, although the use of different informants for the predictor variable (parent-reported poverty) and the outcome and mediator variables (child-reported) reduces common method bias, the mediators and outcomes were still assessed through the same source (i.e., child self-report). This may have inflated the associations among self-efficacy, parental monitoring, and emotional and behavioral problems. Future studies could incorporate multi-informant designs (e.g., teacher reports, behavioral observations) to further mitigate this concern. Sixth, the confirmatory factor analysis of the Poverty Perception Scale yielded fit indices below conventional thresholds (CFI = 0.812, TLI = 0.799, RMSEA = 0.101), which may raise concerns about construct validity. Although all items loaded significantly on their intended factors and the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.86$), the suboptimal model fit suggests that the factor structure may not fully replicate in this specific sample of families affected by the 2023 earthquakes. Future research should consider validating or adapting poverty measures for use with disaster-affected populations. Finally, the internal consistency coefficients for the SDQ subscales used in this study were relatively low (emotional problems $\alpha = 0.60$; behavioral problems $\alpha = 0.62$), falling below the commonly recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, these values are consistent with previous psychometric studies of the SDQ, which have reported similarly modest reliability estimates for the brief five-item subscales, particularly in self-report versions (e.g., peer problems $\alpha = 0.41$; Goodman, 2001). Nevertheless, the low reliability may have attenuated the observed relationships, suggesting that the true associations between child poverty and emotional and behavioral problems may be stronger than those reported in this study.

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Data Availability Data sets created and/or analyzed during the current study canbe obtained from the authors for scientific purposes.

Declarations

Ethical Standards and Informed Consent All procedures followed were in accordance with ethical standards of responsible communities on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Kırşehir Ahi Evran University (Approval No. 2022/09/15). Subsequently, permission to conduct the research in public middle schools was granted by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (Approval No. 66171722).

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process During the preparation of this work the author(s) used SCOPUS AI for literature review. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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