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Article

Socioeconomic Status and Behavioral Problems in Children: The Mediating Effect of Social Relations in Mainland China

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Abstract: In 2014, 13.33% of youths aged 5–19 years worldwide had at least one type of behavioral problem. In China, children may be more likely to have internal and external behavioral problems, given that China has a high number of "left-behind children" and "only child of the family". In this study, we explore the relationships between socioeconomic status (SES), social relations, and childhood behavioral problems in China. Data from 2151 children aged 10–15 years were collected from the 2018 wave of the China Family Panel Studies. We conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) using Amos (version 26) to test a theoretical model. The results showed that SES was significantly related to childhood behavioral problems, and that social relations mediated the relationship between SES and childhood behavioral problems. On the basis of these findings, we discuss relevant theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: socioeconomic status; mental health; childhood behavioral problems; mediating effect; social relations; China

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1. Introduction

Behavioral problems can adversely affect the development of adolescents. Children's behavioral problems are defined as children's behaviors that deviate from the norm during socialization [1]. Internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems are two common types of behavioral problems in children and adolescents [2]. Internalizing behavior problems include depression and anxiety, while externalizing behavior problems include disobedience, aggression, discipline violation, hyperactivity, inattention, and temper outbursts [3,4]. In 2014, 13.33% of youths aged 5–19 years worldwide had at least one type of behavioral problem [5]. In China, children are more likely to have internal and external behavior problems, given that China has a high number of "left-behind children" (LBC) and "only child of the family" [6,7].

LBC refers to children whose parents are rural migrant laborers who move to cities to find work. China began massive economic reforms in 1979, and coastal cities were designated as special economic zones. Consequently, workers migrated from inland rural areas to these coastal urban economic zones, which expanded their economic prospects. The total number of migrant workers in China reached nearly 300 million in 2021 [8]. Migrant workers may have less access to cities' social services such as education, and health care by reason of China's current household registration system. As a result, a large number of migrant workers leave their children behind when they migrate to urban areas, thereby creating a population of LBC. By the end of August 2018, there were 6.97 million LBC in rural China [9]. LBC are more likely than children whose parents continue to live with them to have behavioral problems because of the lack of parental involvement [10].

"Only child of the family" refers to the child having no siblings. Due to Chinese family planning policy and declining willingness to have children with the development of the social economy [11], the number of "only child" is increasing. Research shows that the number of "only child" was about 145 million in 2010, and the size of the population without siblings will reach about 300 million, accounting for about 1/4 of the total population, in 2050 [12]. Compared with children who have siblings, those without siblings are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors [13].

Socioeconomic status (SES) has a substantial influence on behavioral problems in children, which can predict children's behavioral problems [14]. SES is defined as a family's access to a variety of resources, often measured using separate indices [15]. A family's SES cannot be captured by a single index or by averaging separate indices, but must combine multiple sources of information synergistically, including economic, human, and social resources [16,17]. SES is usually assessed by three indicators: family income, parents' professional reputation, and parents' education level [18]. The influence of household income and parental education on mental well-being in children is stronger than that of occupational status, therefore, some research uses household income and parental education to define SES [19]. SES is strongly associated with children's internalized and externalized behavioral problems [20–23]. Children with low SES have a higher incidence of problematic behaviors [14], and are more likely to have internalizing problems (i.e., anxiety, and depression) [24] and externalization behaviors (hyperactivity, inattention, social withdrawal, and aggression) [25]. Improving SES can help to reduce childhood behavioral problems [14,26].

Social relations are important for the development of children and adolescents [27]. Children's behavioral problems are influenced by social relations [28]. According to the ecosystem theory, social relations can be embodied in a child's multidimensional ecosystem at family, peer group, and school levels through parent-child relations, peer relations, and teacher-student relations [29]. A significant positive correlation has been found between SES and the dimensions of social relations of children and adolescents [27]. SES can influence children's behavioral problems through social relations (i.e., parent-child relations, peer relations, and teacher-student relations).

In conclusion, SES directly affects children's behavioral problems and indirectly affects children's behavioral problems through social relations. Social relations play an intermediary role in the underlying influencing mechanism. However, few studies have explored the relationship between SES and children's behavioral problems through social relations. Even fewer researchers explore the relationships between SES and children's behavioral problems by using parent-child relationships, peer relationships, and teacher-student relationships in an integrated framework to reflect children's social relations. The majority of empirical studies on this topic have been conducted in the social context of Western countries; relevant research has not yet been conducted in China. Therefore, to address these gaps in the literature, we explored the correlation between SES and childhood behavioral problems, and investigated the mediating effect of social relations (parent-child relationships, peer relationships, and teacher-student relationships have been adequately considered in an integrated framework) in the Chinese context. Our goal was to uncover information that could be used to inform policy decisions aimed at reducing behavioral problems in children.

2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on social causation theory, social resource theory, social convoy model, and ecosystems theory.

Social causation theory affirms that SES affects an individual's mental health [27]. In brief, social causation theory suggests children with low SES, (including financial stress, increased exposure to violence, increased adverse life events such as negative income shocks, lower education, food insecurity, income insecurity, and reduced resources to protect individuals from the consequences of adverse life events), will suffer from a greater

risk for mental health problems [30–33]. Indeed, the offspring of low-SES parents are more likely to develop psychiatric disorders during childhood and adolescence than those of higher SES parents, independent of single-parent status, parental psychopathology, and the offspring's age, gender, and IQ [15]. Behavioral problems are one of the most common and persistent forms of maladjustment in children, and they are also an important indicator to measure their mental health and social function development [34,35]. Given the relationship between behavioral problems and mental health disorders, children from families with a low SES are more likely to experience internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

Social resource theory can explain the relationships between SES and social relations. Social resource theory suggests that social capital can be interpreted as information, obligations, and norms embedded in an individual's social relations and social resources [36]. Social capital is difficult to be measured at the quantitative level; therefore, most of the previous literature used social relations as proxy variables for relevant research [37]. Individuals' SES affects their social relations (i.e., parent-child relations, peer relations, and teacher-student relations), and children with high SES will have better social relations.

The social convoy model can elucidate how a child can accept social support through social relations. In the Lewinian tradition, the individual's social convoy is defined in terms of relations that are perceived by the individual to be close and important in his or her life, and the convoy is conceptualized empirically as a hierarchy of three concentric circles surrounding the individual [38]. In social interaction, individuals exchange social support with social relations in different convoy tracks, so as to encourage individuals to cope with stress and achieve their pursuit of physical and mental health and happiness [39]. Therefore, this model also provides theoretical support for the relationship between social relations and children's behavioral problems in this study.

Children's microsystems are divided into families, peer groups, and schools by the ecosystems theory [29]. Therefore, social relations in children's microsystems can be reflected through parent-child relationships, peer relationships, and teacher-student relationships.

In sum, SES directly affects the behavioral problems of children according to social causation theory, and indirectly affects the behavioral problems of children through socials relations. In the present study, we sought to establish an integrated conceptual framework (Figure 1) and explain the direct influence of SES on behavioral problems in children while considering the mediating role of social relations, in the context of mainland China.

This study proposed the following hypotheses according to the proposed framework:

H1. *A higher SES predicts a lower level of behavioral problems in children.*

H2. *High SES predicts better social relations in all dimensions, which prevents children's behavioral problems from arising.*

H2.1. *A higher SES indicates better parent-child relations, which is related to a lower incidence of behavioral problems in children.*

H2.2. *A higher SES indicates better peer relations, which is related to a lower incidence of behavioral problems in children.*

H2.3. *A higher SES indicates better teacher-student relations, which is related to a lower incidence of behavioral problems in children.*

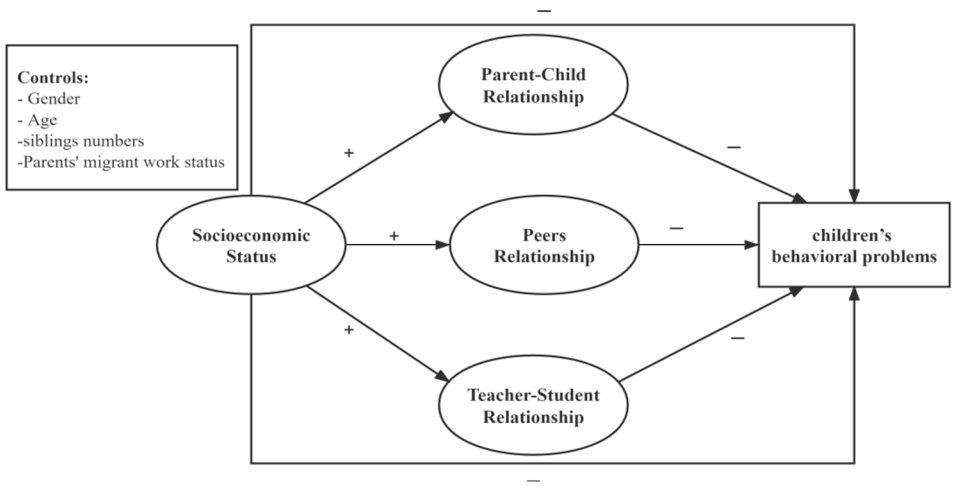

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Methods

3.1.1. Data

The data used in this study were collected as part of the 2018 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), which is a comprehensive national survey conducted by the Institute of Social Science Surveys (ISSS). The CFPS is a national, longitudinal program initiated in 2010. The data are collected from 25 provinces in China, and thus represent 95% of the Chinese population. The sampling method used in the CFPS is based on the multi-stage approach [40]. Data on socioeconomic status were provided by one adult member of the family, and data on social relations and behavioral problems in children came from adolescents. According to the definition set by the CFPS, adolescents were those aged 10–15 years who had adequate cognitive ability to complete the self-reported questionnaires. After removing cases with missing values, we included data from 2151 adolescents in this study.

3.1.2. Measurement

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study was behavioral problems in children. Behavioral problems in the participant group were measured using the simplified version of Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist [41]. This survey contains 14 questions, including 8 internalizing behavioral questions ("I am angry when I encounter difficulties studying"; "I'm afraid of exams"; "I often feel lonely"; "I often feel sad"; "I'm afraid I'm not doing well enough in school"; "I'm afraid I won't be able to finish my homework"; "I'm afraid I will have no playmates at school"; "I feel ashamed when I make mistakes at school") and 6 externalizing behavioral questions ("I often quarrel with my peers"; "It's hard for me to concentrate"; "I'm easily distracted"; "It's hard for me to finish my school homework"; "I get in trouble for interrupting others"; "I get into trouble after fighting with my peers"). The scale that the participants used to answer the fourteen questions ranged from 1 (completely inconsistent) to 5 (completely consistent), where higher scores represented higher levels of behavioral problems.

Mediating Variable

Social relations were measured in terms of parent-child relations, peer relations, and teacher-student relations in children's various social ecosystems. Parent-child relationships were determined by asking "giving up watching TV so that children can focus on homework"; "often talking to children about school"; "checking children's homework"; "asking children to finish their homework"; "restricting children's TV viewing"; and "restricting

certain TV programs". These items were scored from 1 (never: 0) to 5 (very often: 5 to 7 times a week). A high score corresponded to good parent-child relationship.

Peer relationship was quantified in terms of a child's relationship with his or her classmates. Two items were included in the CFPS questionnaire: (a) Whether to be in a student cadre, which was divided into 0 (no) and 1 (yes); and (b) How popular are you, which was scored with ten options ranging from 1 (minimum) to 10 (highest). A high score suggested good peer relations.

Teacher-student relationship was reflected in children's relations with their school teachers. In this study, teacher-student relations were evaluated by asking the respondents, "Satisfaction with Chinese teachers"; "Satisfaction with Math teachers"; "Satisfaction with English teachers". Items were scored with five options ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). A high score indicated an enhanced quality of teacher–student relations.

Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study was SES, measured according to household economic condition and parental education status. Familial economic status was determined by the respondents' answer to the family-reported question in the CFPS: "Total revenue in the past 12 months (Yuan)?" Per-capita household income was divided into five levels. A high score represents a greater household economic status. In the CFPS, parental educational status was divided into eight levels, ranging from 1 (illiterate) to 8 (PhD). High scores indicate high levels of parental education. In general, a higher family economic status and high parental education level correspond to greater SES.

Control Variable

We considered four control variables: gender (female = 0 and male = 1), age, number of siblings (non-only child = 0, only child = 1), and parents' migrant work status (parents both go out to work = 0; mother goes out to work, but father stays at home = 1; father goes out to work, but mother stays at home = 2; parents both stay at home = 3).

3.2. Statistical Analysis

We conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) using Amos (version 26) to test the hypothetical model. SEM has a number of strengths: (1) provide separate estimates of relations among latent constructs and their manifest indicators (the measurement model) and of the relations among constructs (the structural model), which are corrected for biases attributable to random error and construct-irrelevant variance; (2) provide a summary evaluation of even complex models that involve a large number of linear equations; (3) via nested chi-square tests and other means, users can comparatively evaluate the fit of alternative models that differ in complexity, and (4) allow researchers to directly test the model of interest rather than a straw-man alternative [42].

4. Results

4.1. Subsection

4.1.1. Characteristics of the Participants

In our sample, 1139 (53%) were male and 1012 (47%) were female. The average age of the participants was 12.37 years. 467 (21.70%) of the participants were one-child and 1684 (78.30%) were non-only child. Participants whose parents both go out to work were 556 (25.80), while those whose parents both stay at home were 1180 (54.90%). Participants whose mother goes to work, but father stays at home were 78 (3.60%), while those whose father goes to work, but mother stays at home were 337 (15.70%). The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants (N = 2151).

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	1139	53
Female	1012	47
Age	Mean = 12.37	SD = 1.67
Number of siblings		
Only child	467	21.70
Non-only child	1684	78.30
Parents' migrant work status		
Parents both go out to work	556	25.80
Mother goes out to work, but father stays at home	78	3.60
Father goes out to work, but mother stays at home	337	15.70
Parents both stay at home	1180	54.90

Note. SD = standard deviation.

4.1.2. Internal Consistency Test, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test and Bartlett's Test of the Dependent Variable

One of the most popular estimates of internal consistency is Cronbach's α. The Cronbach's α of the 14 behavioral problem items was 0.785. Generally, if $\alpha \geq 0.9$, the internal consistency is considered to be excellent, and if $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.9$, it is considered to be good. According to the analysis results, all items had internal consistency. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted to evaluate the factor ability. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.848 (>0.6), and the significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity was less than 0.001 (<0.05), which indicates that the selected content has some validity.

4.1.3. Test of Measurement Model

The measurement model provided a good fit for the observed correlation: $\chi^2 = 362.364$ (df = 71, $p < 0.001$), CFI = 0.932, and RMSEA = 0.044. All of the standardized factor loadings were statistically significant. The standard factor loading of all observed variables constituting the latent variable ranged between 0.341and 0.870 (Table 2).

Table 2. Standardized factor loadings of the observed variables on the latent construct.

Latent Construct	Observed Variable	Factor Loading
PC	Give up watching TV so that the children could focus on homework	0.348
	Often talk to children about school	0.444
	Ask the children to finish their homework	0.533
	Check child's homework	0.594
	Prevent children from watching TV	0.575
	Restricting TV programs	0.510
PR	Whether to be in a student cadre	0.365
	How popular are you	0.341
TSR	Satisfaction with Chinese teachers	0.606
	Satisfaction with math teacher	0.649
	Satisfaction with English teachers	0.648
SES	Household economic situation	0.495
	Father's education status	0.705
	Mother's education status	0.870

Note. PCR = parent–child relations; PR = peer relations; TSR = teacher–student relations; SES = socioeconomic status.

4.1.4. Test of Structural Model

The overall fit indices for the structural model were: χ^2 = 1157.814, df = 146, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.947, AGFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.804, and RMSEA = 0.057. The model accounted for a total of 16% of the variance in the rate of behavioral problems in children. The standardized solution of the structural model is presented in Figure 2. For brevity, only the significant paths of the main predictors are shown in the figure.

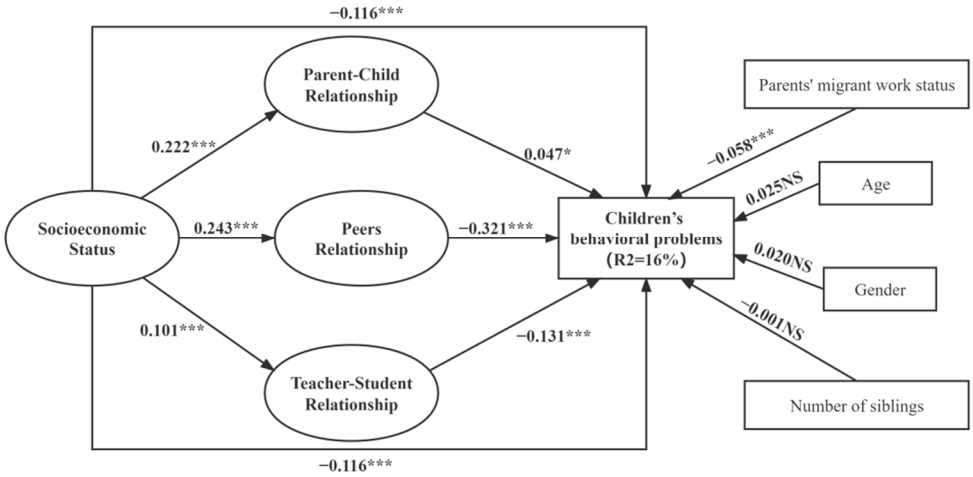

Figure 2. Standardized solutions for the structural model of socioeconomic status, social relations, and behavioral problems in children (*** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.1$).

Overall, the direct path from SES to behavioral problems in children was significant, therefore H1 can be verified by the present study. Multidimensional social relations perform a mediating role in the relationship between SES and children's behavioral problems. Specifically, increases in SES were associated with significant enhancement of peer relationships (β = 0.243, $p < 0.001$), which was conducive to reducing children's behavioral problems (β = −0.321, $p < 0.001$), which supports the H2.2. hypothesis. A high SES would increase the quality of teacher-student relations (β = 0.101, $p < 0.001$), which would reduce children's behavioral problems. This result verified H2.3. However, SES enhanced parent-child relations (β = 0.222, $p < 0.001$), which did not ameliorate behavioral problems in children (β = 0.047, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, the H2.1. hypothesis was not entirely supported by this study.

Among all of the control variables, gender, age, and the number of siblings had not significantly impacted the rate of behavioral problems in children. However, parents' migrant work status had significantly impacted the rate of behavioral problems in children. Specifically, children whose parents both stay at home had a lower level of behavioral problems (β = −0.058, $p < 0.001$).

5. Discussion

Using data from the 2018 CFPS, we sought to understand the relationships between SES, social relations, and behavioral problems in children in China. Furthermore, we established a conceptual framework to describe the mechanism by which SES influences behavioral problems in children. Our results indicate that SES both directly and indirectly affected the rate of behavioral problems in children through social relations. Overall, our findings address gaps in the current literature. We established an integrated research framework (including all children's microsystem social relations: parent-child relations, peer relations, and teacher-student relations) in the social context of China, which may contribute to existing theoretical frameworks as well as the design of future research.

To discuss the model fit of the measurement model: The chi-square statistic had a statistically significant discrepancy (χ^2 = 362.364, df = 71, $p < 0.001$), an insignificant chi-square value ($p > 0.05$) indicated that the hypothetical model was well fitted to the

sample data [43]. A well-fit hypothetical model commonly produces a significant χ^2 if the sample size is large because of its sensitivity to the sample size [44]; our sample size is 2151, therefore, our result can be accepted. The other model-fit indices corresponded with a CFI value (0.939) higher than the critical value of 0.9 [45], and an RMSEA value (0.044) less than the critical value of 0.080 [46]. These findings demonstrate that the measurement model reasonably fit the current data. The accepted factor loading is greater than 0.3 [47]. Thus, the selected indicators effectively and significantly represent the intrinsic structure of the latent variable.

To discuss the model fit of the structural model: The chi-squared statistic was found to be significant (χ^2 = 1157.814, df = 146, $p < 0.001$) because of its sensitivity to the large sample size [44]. The other goodness-of-fit indices demonstrated acceptable results: the GFI value (0.947) was above 0.90 [48], the AGFI value (0.931) was above 0.90 [49], the CFI value (0.804) was close to 0.90 [45], and the RMSEA value (0.057) was lower than 0.08 [46]. Therefore, the test of the structural model was deemed applicable to the data.

Our analysis indicated that there was a positive direct relationship between SES and behavioral problems in children. Most previous empirical studies worldwide have indicated that a higher SES decreases the incidence of behavioral problems in children, suggesting that higher SES may predict better behaviors [50]. Compared with the children with high SES, children with low SES may have limited access to resources, which may cause more behavioral problems [51]. Thus, the present study validates this hypothesis in the Chinese context.

Our results are consistent with previous studies, where SES indirectly influenced behavioral problems in children via the mediating effect of social relations (including all children's microsystem social relations: parent-child relations, peer relations, and teacher-student relations).

High SES improves the relationship between parents and children, but fails to reduce children's behavioral problems. Therefore, H2.1 cannot be fully supported. SES and parent-child relationship have positive relations, which means that a higher SES stands for quality parent-child relations [52,53]. Parents with low SES have greater economic pressure, which may lead to their children with low SES to suffer from negative experiences, such as neglect and abuse, from the parents [53–55]. For children with low SES, their parents' work is mostly in an unstable state, which makes their parents unable to deal with the parent-child relationship well, leading to increased conflicts between the children and their parents [56]. Therefore, our research has the same result as previous studies, where high SES may indicate better parent-child relations.

The parent-child relationship has an essential impact on children's healthy development. Poor parent-child relationships can decrease the quality of family member interactions and inhibit personality development, ultimately affecting healthy development [57,58]. The quality of the parent-child relationship is related to children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors [56]. Children who have a relationship with their mothers which are negative will often show more aggressive and destructive behaviors [59]. Children with high-quality parent-child relationship support have a weaker correlation between stress and depression and anxiety [60,61], and less aggressive behavior [62]. As a protective factor in the development of children's behavioral problems, high-quality parent-child relationships may last for a long time [59]. However, our study does not support the idea that good parent-child relations can reduce children's behavioral problems. A possible explanation may be that the selected variables cannot completely measure parent-child relations. We use parent's involvement to indicate parent-child relations because positive parental involvement promotes good parent-child relationships [63,64]. Indeed, high parental involvement will decrease incidence of depressive symptoms in children and suicidal thoughts among teenagers [59], and a lower level of behavioral problems in adolescents [65]. Unfortunately, our study also fails to support this idea, given the factor loading of the indicates of the parent-child variables. The factor loading of warm investment is lower (i.e., Give up watching TV so that the children could focus on homework, and Often talk to children about

school), but the factor loading of regulate investment is higher (i.e., Prevent children from watching TV, and Restricting TV programs). We theorize that the high parental investment in this study may indicate an autocratic parenting style. An autocratic parenting style is prone to cause children's behavioral problems, therefore high parental investment leads to a higher rate of children's behavioral problems in this research [2]. Compared with low-SES children, high-SES children's parents may engage in work with higher competitive pressure and less company with children [66]. Therefore, it is possible that parent-child relationships may be interfered with by their parents' careers, thereby increasing children's behavior problems. A survey in China shows that the higher the social and economic status of a family, the greater the probability of behavioral problems among adolescents [67]. This research result provides some support for our conjecture.

High SES improves peer relationships, and thus reduces children's behavioral problems. H2.2. can be proved in this study. SES is an important factor affecting peer relationships. Children with low SES are less respected and accepted by their peers and are highly susceptible to being neglected, and having difficulty in establishing good peer relationships. Peer relationships are critical social relationships for children, which are important for their development and adaptation [68]. With the development of teenagers' autonomy and independence [69], the influence of peers on individuals gradually increases, and friends become an important "institution" for individual socialization [70–72]. Close emotional connections with peers can not only significantly reduce the negative internalizing behavioral problems such as loneliness and anxiety, but also significantly reduce externalizing behavioral problems such as aggression [69]. At the same time, when faced with stressful events, teenagers with more supportive friendships have fewer problematic behaviors [73,74] and less loneliness [75].

High SES improve teacher-student relationships, and thus reduce children's behavioral problems. H2.3. can be proved in this study. Teachers also constitute one of the primary social relations of children due to the increased amount of time spent in schools. Children's high SES positively affects teacher-student relations among school children [27,76]. Good teacher-student relations can improve students' academic performance, reduce students' behavioral problems, and predict and reduce children's less aggressive behaviors [77,78]. Conflicting teacher-child relations exacerbated the effects of externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems in early childhood [79]. Children with higher conflictual teacher-child relations had higher levels of behavior problems in middle childhood relative to children with low conflicting teacher-child relations [79].

Unlike other countries, China has a large number of "only children" and "left-behind children". Some studies have shown that children without siblings are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms than those with siblings [13], although our research does not confirm this view based on China's tradition of loving children;s only children in family enjoy the best resources in the family and may be spoiled by their parents and grandparents, resulting in behavioral problems. This is consistent with previous research results; that is, an overprotective upbringing is significantly correlated with externalized problem behaviors [80]. Compared with children with siblings, children without siblings have some behavioral problems, such as being poor at communicating with others and being relatively lonely [81]. Further research found gender differences in the behavioral problems of only children: boys showed more externalizing behavioral problems (i.e., attention problems, aggressive behavior); while girls show more internalizing behavior problems (i.e., anxiety and depression) [82].

Furthermore, "left-behind children" are more likely to have behavioral problems because of the lack of parental involvement. Mothers are more important for children's company, therefore, we divide parents' migrant work status into four groups, namely, three kinds of LBC (parents both go out to work; mother goes to work, but father stays at home; and father goes to work, but mother stays at home) and one group of non- LBC children. Our research found that compared with LBC, non-LBC have fewer behavioral problems. The stronger the ability of behavior control in a family's function, the fewer behavioral

problems children have [10]. Compared with the non-LBC, the LBC's families whose parents go out to work generally have poor functions in all aspects [83]. The behavioral problems of LBC are relatively prominent, which may be related to their family function defects caused by their parents' going out. Therefore, our study examines a population that is internationally distinct.

Our findings validate the applicability of social causation theory, social resource theory, social convoy model, and ecosystems theory to understanding childhood behaviors and explain SES influences in children's behavioral problems mechanisms.

This study had several limitations. First, although the cross-sectional study design allows us to examine the relationship between relevant variables, the underlying causal relationships could not be determined. Therefore, our results should be further verified using longitudinal studies. Second, although many indicators of social relations have been described, we only selected eleven indicators as measures of social relations (including six indicators as measures of parent-child relations, two indicators as measures of peer relations, and three indicators as measures of teacher-student relations). As a result, additional studies are needed to examine additional mediating variables that may affect the association between SES and behavioral problems in children. Third, this study has only four control variables; its research results may not be rigorous enough, and needs further research.

6. Conclusions

Our study highlighted the relationships between SES, social relations, and behavioral problems in children in the context of mainland China. There are significant theoretical and practical implications for future research. Future research with a longitudinal study design is needed to test additional measures of social relations. Future policy should focus on childhood behavioral problems by providing more financial assistance and support to low-SES families, thereby reducing socioeconomic disparities in behavioral problems and improving the lives of vulnerable children. Changes in policy that ensure all families have access to a basic living wage and the resources they need to support their children are one of the most effective strategies for reducing the occurrence of behavioral problems, especially among the low-SES.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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