



The Mediator Roles of Mothers in Father-Child Communications and Family Relationships*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received: 03 Jul. 2019 Received in revised form: 28 Oct. 2019 Accepted: 13 Nov. 2019 DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2019.84.7</p>	<p>Purpose: In many middle-class families in Turkey, mothers typically occupy a mediator role in father-child communications, meaning that messages between fathers and children (particularly regarding an important subject) are sent through mothers. This phenomenological study investigates Turkish father-child communication dynamics, the roles of mothers in this relationship, and the effects of mothers acting as mediators in communications between father and child.</p>
<p>Keywords father-child relationship, mother-child relationship, communication, family-interactions, Turkish families.</p>	<p>Research Methods: This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analyses to reveal the essence of the relationship of participants with their fathers and their shared experiences regarding the reflection of the mother's role in the father-child relationship and common meanings that have been established. Employing a homogeneous sampling method, we</p>
<p>conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 middle-class undergraduate students (nine female and six male students) aged 19-24 ($x=21.33$) in Istanbul, Turkey. Findings: Our analyses revealed the following three overarching themes that define the experiences of the participants: (i) an unsatisfactory father-child relationship, (ii) the mother: relational fulcrum of the father-child communications, and (iii) problematic emotional reactions to family-interactions. Implications for Research and Practice: This study represents a critical step towards understanding the experiences of youths raised in families wherein mothers occupy a mediator role in father-child communications. It revealed that the father-child relationship does not represent a satisfactory relationship and that this relationship is associated with a sense of deprivation by the children. A comparative evaluation of the experiences of the fathers, mothers, and children would enrich the interpretations and help to obtain a more complicated view of these family relationships.</p>	

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Introduction

As a crucial aspect of family relationships, communication (Noller & Callan, 1990) plays a key role in increasing the quality of relationships among the members, in maintaining the healthy functioning of the family as a whole, and in providing insights into the main underlying dynamics of family relationships (Olson, 2000). Affectionate communication patterns within the family help the members to feel a sense of belonging, love and being loved, appreciated, and accepted. Research studies report that members of families with strong communications can develop a positive sense of self, and be emotionally closer and affectionate towards each other (Barnes & Olson, 1985; Noller & Callan, 1990). They also can deal with familial conflicts more effectively.

Family members may communicate with each other in different ways. In general, the communication skills of female members are more advanced than those of male members, and fathers are perceived as more judgmental, authoritarian, and less willing to be involved in important discussions of feelings and problems (Morman & Floyd, 2002; Noller & Callan 1990). This type of inter-family communication pattern exists in several cultures and often can be found in Turkish families as well. A growing body of literature reports that in Turkey mother-child communications are stronger than father-child communications; adolescents communicate more with their mothers (Hortacsu, 1989); fathers are perceived as less affectionate and more authoritarian compared to mothers (Ataca, 2009; Boratav, Fisek & Ziya, 2017; Sunar & Fisek 2005); and mothers hold a primary position in areas concerning the child, while fathers hold an inferior or subordinate position (Anne Cocuk Egitim Vakfı [ACEV], 2017, Bozok, 2018).

In Turkey, it is common in middle-class families that mothers occupy a mediator role, meaning that children send their messages to their fathers through mothers. It is frequently observed in Turkish families that adolescents explain their situation to their mother first and ask the mother to convey these messages to the father instead of directly talking to him about ordinary or important issues, such as spending the night at a friend's house, asking for permission to go out, explaining a desire to change one's school/department, or announcing the existence of a boyfriend/girlfriend. This study investigates Turkish father-child relationship dynamics, the roles of mothers in this relationship, and perceptions regarding family relationships wherein mothers play a mediator role in communications between the father and child/ren.

Father-Child Relationships

In the 21st century, social transformations have led to a reconstruction of the identity of fatherhood. This development, in turn, has triggered new, in-depth scholarly investigations into family relationships. Numerous factors, such as the participation of women in the labor force, increased awareness of fathers regarding the well-being of their children, changes in the traditional family structure, and a trend to rearrange gender roles in a more egalitarian manner have altered fatherhood roles, and consequently, the perceived identity of fathers. Also, during the last five decades, academics interested in father-child relationships have helped to redefine fatherhood

by discussing themes, such as “nurturing” (Lamb, 2000, 2010) and “co-parenting” (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

This new fatherhood identity has created the expectation that today’s fathers should be more nurturing, affectionate, and involved in raising children compared to fathers in previous generations. Today, fatherhood is characterized by the parenting attributes, such as assuming an active role in child care, expressing love to the wife and child, providing emotional and social support, availability, responsibility, being a role model, offering affectionate communication, providing financial support, and showing authoritarianism. Whether a father is “good” or not is determined by assessing to what extent he presents these characteristics (Lamb, 2010; Morman & Floyd, 2006).

Acknowledged as one of the indicators of good fatherhood by both fathers and children, communication determines the quality of the father-child relationship today (Floyd & Morman, 2003, 2005; Morman & Floyd, 2006). Studies report that the father-child relationship and communications have changed compared to earlier generations; today’s fathers have become more affectionate and open to communication (Borotav et al., 2017; Floyd & Morman, 2005; Sunar, 2009). However, studies also report that sometimes the new methods do not exactly meet the expectations of the children (Floyd & Morman, 2005; Morman & Floyd 2002). This can be explained by the concepts of a culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fathering. A culture of fatherhood is built upon shared norms, values, and beliefs concerning fatherhood. Conduct of fathering means what a father actually does as a parent. Studies note that fathers often experience difficulty displaying the characteristics of idealized fatherhood in real life; i.e., there is a gap between the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fathering (Barutcu & Hidir, 2016; Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsleys, & Dominelli, 2008; Sunar, 2002).

Consequently, recent studies continue to report that mother-child communications are still stronger, closer, and more affectionate compared to father-child communications. Also, both sons and daughters feel closer to their mothers (Nielson, 2001; Noller & Callan, 1990), spend more time with their mothers, and feel that they know each other better than the child knows the father (Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Mathew, Derlaga & Morrow, 2006). Vogel, Bradley, Raikes and Boller (2011) underscored that this pattern reflects the loss of relationship balance and that mothers are perceived as essential actors within the family, while fathers hold an inferior position.

This pattern can be clearly observed in middle-class Turkish families. It is also common in middle-class Turkish families to see that mothers assume an active role in father-child communications, and even hold a central position in it. Despite recent changes in family relations, fathers still are perceived as being less affectionate, more authoritarian, and more controlling compared to mothers in Turkey (Ataca, 2009; Borotav et al., 2017; Sunar, 2009). This study explored how youths, who raised in families wherein mothers occupy a mediator role in father-child communications, perceive:

- (1) the father-child relationship,

- (2) which roles are assumed by mothers in father-child communications, and
- (3) the effects of the mother's mediator role within the family.

Method

Research Design

This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analyses (IPA) to explore the relationships of youths with their fathers, their perceptions of the mother's role in their father-child relationship, and the effects of the mother's mediating communication role (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA was selected due to its emphasis on the double hermeneutic process, which refers to the two-ordered meaning-making process between the data, the participants, and the researcher.

Setting and Recruitment

The data were collected in accordance with the approval and permission received from the Atatürk Education Faculty at Marmara University in Turkey. The researcher made an announcement concerning the study during her lectures and offered general information about its purpose. Fifteen volunteer participants met the inclusion criteria as follows: (i) having biological parents, (ii) having lived with these parents during childhood or still living with them, (iii) having married parents, (iv) having a mother that plays a mediator role in father-child communications, and (v) having a family with medium SES. These participants were interviewed. The in-depth interviews were carried out by three doctoral students, who were supervised by the researcher during the entire process. This was done to ensure maintenance of the ethical boundaries between the lecturer and the students and also to ensure that the participants expressed themselves sincerely. All of the interviewers were well-trained in qualitative research methods at the postgraduate level and had conducted prior phenomenology studies.

Participants

A homogeneous sample was employed to focus on a particular context and specific time period. Similarities and differences in the participants' experiences were thoroughly examined with this sampling method. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 middle-class undergraduate students (nine females, six males) aged 19-24 ($M=21.33$) in Istanbul, Turkey. The demographic variables of the sample are illustrated in Table 1.

Interviews

After receiving each participant's informed consent, a demographic questionnaire was administered to each participant. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which lasted approximately 1.5 hours. In these, grand tour questions were utilized (to ask about the phenomenon or cultural scene), as were follow-up questions (to ask for further details about an act, event, or category). The guiding research

questions were: “How is your communication and relationship with your father?” and “What kind of role does your mother assume in your communications with your father?” Examples of follow-up questions included: “What can you say about your father’s parenting?” and “What can you tell us about your family life, regarding your relationship with both your parents?” All of the interviews were audio recorded then were transcribed verbatim.

Table 1

Sample Demographics (N=15)

	Psychological counseling	Special education
Major	9	6
Parents’ Employment status	Mother	Father
Unemployed/Housewife	9	-
Employee	3	15
Working at spouses’ workplace for free	3	-
Parents’ Education	Mother	Father
Undergraduate	1	5
High school	6	9
Middle school	7	1
Elementary school	1	-
The place where family members live	City	Town /Rural area
	10	5

Data Analysis

Considering the importance of the double hermeneutic process, the researcher initiated the data analysis by focusing on how the explicit and implicit experiences and perceptions of the participants were shaped and interpreted. MaxQDA-11 software was used to facilitate the data management. The data were analyzed following the steps outlined in IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003). First, the researcher read and re-read interview transcripts together with the field-notes, and took memos regarding the manner and content of the interviews, the use of language, and the contexts. Second, the researcher took discovery notes, focusing on the memos. These included descriptive (basic meanings of what was discussed), linguistic (pauses, intonations, stresses, etc.), and conceptual notes (comments and reflections). The researcher thereby defined themes which emerged from the statements of the participants. In the

third step, the researcher established connections between these themes and then grouped them according to conceptual similarities. In the fourth step, each theme was supported with samples from the participants' statements and the researcher's own analytic comments.

Trustworthiness

Various steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. First, significant attention was paid to the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes. Also, the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, with a sincere effort to accurately reflect the audio recordings. To enhance credibility and conformability, the researcher employed reflexive memoing to document her personal reflections on the research process. This process included the incorporation of direct quotations that reflect the feelings and opinions of the participants (thick description), as well as purposive sampling to support transferability. Finally, the researcher interviewed three participants face-to-face and received their confirmation that the themes reflected their real experiences (member checking) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The Researcher's Role

Phenomenology researchers are always aware of the critical importance of the emic/etic position of the researcher in obtaining in-depth information concerning the studied phenomenon. Therefore, using a double hermeneutic process, the researcher presented an emphatic position to reflect the perceptions of people experiencing the phenomenon with the viewpoint of an insider, while taking a questioning stance as an outsider/stranger to examine the phenomenon from different angles. Being also a member of a couple and family therapist, the researcher possesses a comprehensive agenda, including attention to themes relating to family relationships, the father-child relationship, and ambiguous loss. In addition to the researcher's clinical and academic background, she also is the child of a middle-class family, and was born and raised in Turkey. This circumstance allowed her to be both an insider and an outsider while evaluating the experiences of the participants.

Results

This study obtained three overarching themes as follows: (i) an unsatisfactory father-child relationship, (ii) the mother: relational fulcrum of the father-child communication, and (iii) problematic emotional reactions to family-interactions. While each youth expressed a unique experience regarding his/her father-child relationship/communication pattern and role/s that the mother assumed in this communication, the findings showed that all of the participants had similar experiences.

Unsatisfactory father-child relationship

All participants stated that their relationship experiences with their fathers did not satisfy their emotional needs or expectations. Their narratives reflect that their father-

child relationships were relatively problematic, and far from a desired father-child relationship. The participants' answers to the question "how is your relationship with your father?" centered on the following terms: problematic, undefinable, distant/cold, and detached. One male participant living in a city presented a clear example of his unsatisfactory relationship with his father:

When I want to talk about something with my family, or when I have a problem, or I want something, I go to my sister or my mother. I never go to my father because we do not have such a relationship with him. I do not know how to describe our relationship, detached maybe. We barely talk or share something. We talk sometimes but only about daily stuff. We do not have a father-son relationship, as shown in the TV series.

The participants' narratives demonstrate that this unsatisfactory father-child relationship is characterized by three main parenting attributes of the fathers: (i) distance, (ii) an uninvolved parenting style, and (iii) authoritativeness.

Distance

The participants' narratives demonstrate that the father-child relationship is defined by hierarchy, and that hierarchy is symbolized with distance. The participants emphasized that their relationship with their father was more formal and superficial. Eleven of the participants stated that they had a closer relationship with their fathers when they were a child; but after a certain age (especially after adolescence), their relationship changed and became distant. One participant said: "My father used to pay a lot of attention to us when we were kids. We used to play together. As we grew up, he started to put distance between us." The participants' narratives show that their distant father-child relationships were characterized by two basic features: (i) lack of communication, and (ii) lack of emotional and physical engagement.

Lack of communication was indicated in all of the participants' narratives. They noted that this was mainly caused by the behaviors of their fathers (e.g., not talking, not listening, criticizing, judging, etc.), and that this led to their reluctance to communicate with their fathers. One participant raised in a city by dual-earner parents said:

Even if I argue with my mother, I know that my mother takes me seriously and cares about me. But my father fails to do that. Sometimes, his voice, attitude, or behaviors tell me 'I can't deal with you anymore.' It feels as if he is actually trying not to listen to what I am trying to say. Probably he regrets in the end. But his attitude brings me to the point of thinking 'my father never listens to me.'

Seven participants stated that communication with their fathers was limited due to respect, and that mostly this arose from the behaviors of their father. One participant noted that respecting elders was a norm in their culture and added:

I cannot talk to my father. We should not get too close. That is the reason why I go to my mom first. My father does not listen a lot, relying on the experience he gained

due to his age. This has nothing to do with me. There is an unwritten rule in our society saying that one should not tell everything to the father.

In addition, the participants revealed that their father-child relationships were superficial and that communication was generally focused upon household chores, academic achievement, giving and receiving pocket money, and controlling the child (especially the girls). Eleven of the participants, all of whom had moved out of their home to attend high school or university, stated that given that they lived far from their family did not lead to any change in their communication with their fathers. They did not call each other except in obligatory circumstances (to ask for pocket money, or for the father, to check on how the child is doing). Further, eight of the participants reported that their fathers did not call them very often though they lived apart from family, and that a call generally came only in a crisis (disease, death, etc.). The account of a female participant who lived with her family but could not go home due to her busy schedule stood out in this respect:

I could not go home due to my busy schedule. My father called. I was very surprised. Because if he is calling, this means that something happened: Either someone died or something else happened... I would feel uneasy if my father always called me because I am not used to this... For example, when I call my mother, my father picks up the phone if my mother is not there: He says, 'your mother is not here' and hangs up, so this is my relationship with my father.

Many of the participants stated that their communications with their father did not make them feel special or valuable. Their narratives also show that verbal messages with emotional content, such as missing each other, love, and valuing the child, were conveyed between the child and the father implicitly. One participant said:

Ten years ago, my father and I used to communicate and talk to each other... We can also talk now, but this is never happening. Maybe due to pride or arrogance. But I wish I could have a heart-to-heart talk with my father and tell him that I love him. But this is just a dream. We usually keep silent.

The emotional distance of fathers and the lack of a satisfactory emotional bond in the father-child relationship was the second common theme. Thirteen participants stated that they had not experienced emotional sharing, including physical contact, such as kissing and hugging, sufficiently enough since their childhood in their relationships with their fathers. Similarly, 12 participants said that they believed their fathers loved them, but they did not hear this very often verbally from them. The emotional distance between these fathers and children is an issue that arouses a feeling of deprivation among the participants. Ten of the participants expressed this deprivation with a feeling of longing:

My father does not display his love. He never kissed me or hugged me when I was a kid. I do not remember. I would remember if he did, I guess. I think I always miss this.

We also observed that lack of emotional and physical engagement with the father was excused by some of the participants due to various reasons (busy working

schedule or bad childhood experiences of the father himself): *"My father loves his children. We know this. But he can't express his love. Of course, it would be better if he could. Maybe I would not feel so distanced from him then... Probably that was his experience with his father. There was a lot of respect between them, but love was invisible. Our relationship looks like theirs."*

Eight of the participants stated that they could establish a temporary, closer emotional relationship with their father during a crisis (sickness, accident, loss of a family member, etc.) or successful achievement (getting into a university, ranking well in a competition, etc.), but that they would revert to their former relationship when the impact of the crisis or success faded:

I would normally see my father as a robot. I would never think he would get upset because he never showed his feelings. When my grandfather died, I saw my father crying. At that moment, I realized that my father had emotions. He always hides them. Of course, he loves us. We know it. But when it comes to feeling it, I cannot say I feel it."

Uninvolved parenting

That the father did not assume an active role in child-care and the mother was the primary caring figure was also determined to be a common theme. Many of the participants stated that they found it normal that their fathers held a secondary position and their mothers assumed the main caregiver role, since they were women. The uninvolved parenting of the fathers was characterized by (i) providing only for material needs, (ii) being passive in housework and child care in the presence of the mother, and (iii) lack of interest. However, the participants also indicated that these behaviors inhibited father-child interaction and made it more problematic:

He never asks about my wellbeing. The common conversation we have is money. He takes care of me when he has to, I mean when my mother is sick or absent. I was surprised when I saw he took my sister to the hospital when she got sick because this is not something I would expect from my father. My father generally tells my mother, 'your daughter is sick, let's take her to the hospital'... He says, 'your daughter' instead of 'my daughter.' He always talks to my mom like 'your daughter is arguing with me, say something to her'. I cannot help but feel some kind of coldness between us when this is the case.

The uninvolved parenting described using the term disinterest, in particular, was indicated as one of the obstacles that prevents the participants from getting emotionally closer to their fathers. They stated that their mothers were responsible for everything that mattered to them, and therefore, they developed a closer relationship with their mothers:

I do not want to call him disinterested, but he has never shown any interest in anything so far... My father only brings money and gives it to my mother. She takes care of very complicated stuff. He does not take on responsibilities sufficiently. Because he is disinterested, I cannot help but get closer to my mother and share everything with her. But I still feel I lack something.

Authoritativeness

Developing in parallel with the hierarchy between parent and child in the family, the authoritarian father attitude was found to be another common attribute of the father in an unsatisfactory father-child relationship. The behaviors that the father (i) is stricter and more nervous, (ii) recognizes the family members in a limited manner, (iii) assigns particular importance to his own opinions when making decisions, and (iv) restricts communication compared to the mother were described as parenting characteristics that characterize authoritativeness:

You have to adapt to his idea of a child. This idea includes a do's and don't's list. And he wants us to follow this list. He does not give strong reactions, or yell or beat us. But he is very clear when he says no. My mother also says 'no' sometimes, but she changes her idea. If my father says 'no,' there is no way to convince him.

Mothers: The relational fulcrum of the father-child communications

The participants' narratives demonstrate that motherhood and the mother-child relationship were defined by these youths using the themes of love and emotional closeness. All of the participants stated that their relationship with their mother was never broken off, although they occasionally had conflicts, and the first person they went to when they had a problem or something to tell was their mother, followed by their siblings, friends, and cousins. Their narratives show that the parenting characteristics of the mothers, such as (i) close emotional and physical engagement, (ii) a tendency to engage in open communication, (iii) understanding, and (iv) unconditional love/acceptance, were among the reasons that the mothers were preferred as the first person to communicate with in the family: *"We are more close with my mother; we can speak more comfortably.... She is usually calm. I feel she loves me... She clearly expresses her feelings and calls me 'my son.'"*

The participants revealed that their mothers served as a relational fulcrum of the father-child communications in three ways: (i) functioning as a bridge, (ii) ensuring the sustainability of communication, and (iii) making the father more open to communication.

Functioning as a Bridge

Common phenomenon experienced by all of the participants were that their open and comfortable communication with the mother could not be established with the father, and they felt a need for the mother to act as a bridge for them to convey messages easily to the father. Thirteen participants stated that when they needed to communicate with their father about something (asking for permission to go somewhere, discussing academic issues, talking about the presence of a girlfriend/boyfriend, etc.), they tended to talk to their mothers first, so that she could convey the message to the father instead of them directly talking to him. The participants' accounts show that (i) cultural issues, such as an intimate relationship with the mother and a formal relationship with the father, (ii) the emotional distance of the father, (iii) not being listened to by the father, and the youths' concern about

being criticized were the reasons for lack of direct communication between father and child:

I think it is because it is a preconception in the society: They say, 'one shouldn't talk to his father; you should go to your mother first.' I have a boyfriend now. They both know about him. I told my mother, and she told my father. When I want to talk to my father, I usually ask my mother to mediate. We are not on bad terms, but I tend to ask my mother to mediate."

Seven participants also stated that their fathers tended to communicate with them by asking their mothers to help, instead of directly communicating with them: *"I tell to my mother what I want to say to my father. As far as I have observed, this is the case in most families. Because it feels so difficult to go and talk directly to my father and ask something from him... I have tried a few times to consult him. He generally told me, 'ask your mother'.... My mother is the bridge between us..."*

Ensuring the sustainability of communication

Eleven of the participants stated that their mother assumed the roles of maintaining communications and improving their relationship with their fathers. The mothers thus contributed to the sustainability of father-child communications, especially in times of tension and emotional distance with the father:

My mother always says: 'You love your father, and he loves you back.' But sometimes our relationship can get really tense... because I sometimes happen to say something to him or give him hard feelings. My mother makes me sit and talks to me. When there is a problem, my mother prevents it from growing. We experienced this several times. She acts in a remedial manner.

Making the father more open to communication

Eleven of the participants stated that they preferred to communicate with their fathers through their mothers in order to minimize the possibility of not being listened to and rejected by them when they wanted to ask for permission or demand something. The participants said that their fathers became softer and more open to communication in this way:

My mother tells this to my father in an appropriate way. My father reacts to my mother, and that reaction rebounds from my mother to us... when I need to ask for permission to go somewhere, I do not talk about it with my father. I would rather go to my mother and say: 'I will go out.' If she wants me to go out, she says, 'OK, go out; I will talk to your father,' and she says it in a roundabout way... That is, my mother does not have a certain role. She adapts to each situation. She calms down my father if it is necessary. She softens him up.

Four participants emphasized that the mediator role of mothers in father-child communications might be a dynamic that limits the father-child relationship in some cases. They also stated that an obligatory communication might start between father and child when the mother did not act as a mediator. The same participants said that they were confused about this issue, and they were concerned that their father-child

communications might not be deep enough, and so could remain superficial without the mother acting as a mediator: *"Well, I communicate with my father in this atmosphere of arguing, and our communication improves in this way. We open our hearts towards each other during our arguments, even if indirectly. He expresses his anger, and so do I. But on the other side, I could have a more superficial relationship with my father if it wasn't for my mother. I don't know."*

Problematic emotional reactions to family-interactions

Many of the participants emphasized that their fathers were unable to be totally involved in the family system in an emotional sense, and therefore, they could not define their family as a real family:

We eat dinner all together. I do not remember a time when we ate it separately, but our conversation is limited. If you happen to ask, 'Do you have a solid family structure?' I would say no. It feels as if there is a separate family, including my mother, my sibling, and me. I feel attached to them in a different way. As I have said before, I do not count my father in the concept of our family as he is not really involved. But of course, he is my father.

The participants' accounts indicate that this perception is common: *"It is actually very inconsistent. Sometimes I feel like I am not a real member of the family. And at other times, I feel like I am really 'inside this family.' There are times when I feel like they do not see or hear me at all. But in general, I feel like yes, I am from within this family. I know I am making contradictory statements, but I don't know the reason."*

Moreover, the participants' narratives indicate there is a common perception that a change in the emotional closeness and communications between father and child might lead to a positive change in their sense of family belonging:

If I had a different relationship with my father, I think my relationship with my family would also be different. I would feel more committed. I would most likely look forward to spending time with them.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Several important points were shared by the study participants, which have clinical and research implications for professionals working with families. Firstly, the participants' narratives demonstrate that these father-child relationships were not satisfactory from the viewpoint of the children when they communicated with their father through their mother. They perceived their fathers as distant, authoritarian, and less responsible in terms of household chores and childcare compared to their mothers, and these characteristics of the fathers led to the current unsatisfactory father-child relationship.

Our analysis shows that the most significant factor in these unsatisfactory father-child relationships is the perceived distance from one another within the relationship. This is characterized by lack of communication, and lack of emotional and physical engagement. The statements of participants demonstrate that the father-child

communications became distant after the participants turned a certain age (adolescence). The participants reported a communication gap and a lack of affectionate communication between father and child. These accounts reveal that lack of emotional and physical engagement represents a significant aspect of the distant father-child relationship. These findings indicate that these kinds of experiences between father and child are perceived as emotional wounds associated with a sense of deprivation. This is a strong indicator of the dissatisfaction felt by these youths regarding their relationship with their fathers.

Several researchers and theoreticians report that father-child (especially son) communications change with the onset of adolescence for the child; the time spent together declines, and less communication is maintained (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997; Kagitcibasi, 2010). Floy and Morman (2003) claimed that this is the result of pressure that arose from the masculine gender roles on the father and his son. On the other hand, Kagitcibasi (2010) argued that having relatively less communication with the father compared to the mother is one of the typical characteristics of Turkish families. The father, who is affectionate towards small children and plays with them, changes as the child grows up. Eventually, the father-child relationship starts to be characterized by authority and respect. A more distant relationship is established, which inhibits the father from communicating with the child as it is thought that compassion and intimacy may cause the child to become spoiled and disrespectful (Ataca, Kagitcibasi & Diri, 2007; Sunar & Fisek, 2005). Recently, researchers have reported that adolescents and young adults from cities have engaged in less communication with their fathers compared to their mothers (Hortaçsu, 1989), and fathers usually do not talk to their young adult children; this leads to a two-way lack of communication (Boratav et al., 2017). Barutcu and Hidir (2016) concluded in their study that fathers could not be close to their own fathers, and they were always distant towards them. However, the quality of communication between father and child is more valuable than its quantity (Punyanunt-Carter, 2007), meaning that the quality of communication the child is having with the father defines the quality of the father-child relationship (Lamb, 2010; Pleck, 2010). The expression of verbal or non-verbal affection contributes to the strength of the emotional closeness between father and child, just like in any other relationship (Floyd, 2006). Floyd and Morman (2003) and Morman and Floyd (1999) found that affectionate communication (verbal, nonverbal, and supportive) was positively correlated with both fathers' and sons' self-disclosure, closeness, and relationship satisfaction. Boratav et al. (2017) found that the fathers had an intimacy problem with their own fathers, and they perceived this problem as resulting from their own father's inability to express their feelings, to not spending time with them, and to lack of communication and their fathers' disinterest. They also found that closeness with fathers is based on sharing activities rather than emotions; many of their participants experienced a sense of deprivation resulting from a lack of emotional closeness in their fraternal relationship.

This study showed the uninvolved parenting attitudes of the fathers as another important determinant of the unsatisfactory father-child relationship. The participants revealed that the main parenting tasks of the fathers were limited to providing for their

material needs, and that mothers were responsible for everything else (e.g., nurturing, caring, supervising school life, etc.).

A number of recent studies report that although the roles and identities of fathers have recently changed, mothers continue to be the main caring figure for children, while fathers hold a secondary position (Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Mathew et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2011). Recent family research in Turkey (ACEV, 2017; Ataca, 2009; Boratav et al., 2017; Sunar, 2002) demonstrates that the roles of males and females, thus of fathers and mothers, still are not equally balanced, despite a decline in gender hierarchy within modern urban families. The comprehensive Turkey report of ACEV (2017) reported that the majority of fathers do not assume responsibility in childcare, and that one of their main parenting responsibilities is maintaining the family [materially]. Ataca (2009) and Sunar and Fisek (2005) concluded that the expressive and childcare roles of mothers are greater than for the fathers and that the financial role of fathers is more significant than is the case for mothers despite recent changes in family relations in Turkey. However, neither mothers nor fathers have superiority in terms of childcare. Both parents engage in childcare activities so that they can get to know their children better, recognize their needs and problems, and become more sensitive towards them. When a parent takes an active role in childcare, the bond between the child and the parent gets stronger. This is because the process of childcare helps both the child and the parent get to know each other, recognize each other's limits, and learn balance to apply in their relationship (Lamb, 2010). The emotional bond between father and child may become problematic when the fathers assume a limited role in childcare compared to mothers, and do not get involved adequately in the lives of their children.

The authority of fathers is another important determinant in the unsatisfactory father-child relationship. The participants indicated that their fathers are stricter and more nervous, recognize the family members only in a limited manner, assign particular importance to their own opinions, and restrict communication compared to the mothers. These narratives also show that the fathers' authoritarian parenting attitudes make the emotional distance between them and their children bigger and cause their children to yearn for closeness.

Authoritarian parents usually attempt to arrange family relationships and responsibilities in a specific way: child care comes first, but is arranged according to gender roles (Lamb, 2010; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004); the parents barely express emotions and expect their statements to be accepted and followed without question by the child instead of resorting to negotiation and the parents keep a distance from the child and spend little time with him/her to maintain parental authority (Bulanda, 2004; Gaertner, Spinrad, Eisenberg & Greving, 2007).

Compared to Western cultures, it is reported in Turkey that male and female roles are clearly separate: mothers take the primary role in child care, while fathers financially maintain the family, represent it, and take an authoritarian and disciplinary role in which they do not establish any physical and emotional closeness (Fisek, 2018; Sunar & Fisek, 2005). Notably, Sancar (2011) stated that the "new fatherhood" in

Turkey represents a hybrid masculinity, including a mixture of the traditional and modern rather than an antithesis of conservative/traditional masculinity. After that study appeared, some researchers reported that fathers today are less authoritarian than the previous generation (Boratav et al., 2017; Barutcu & Hidir, 2016). However, fathers' roles are arranged according to patriarchal masculine codes even today, and fathers continue to maintain their authoritarian identities (ACEV, 2017; Bozok, 2018).

The second important result obtained in this study is related to the role of mothers in father-child communications. The participants' stated that their mothers were perceived as the family mediators in father-child communications. The mothers assumed roles such as functioning as a bridge, ensuring the sustainability of father-child communications, and making the father more open to communication. Our findings also show that motherhood was defined by these participants using the themes of love and emotional sharing, and that mother-child communications were never interrupted, despite conflicts. These findings are consistent with recent national and international research findings. Family research studies report that despite recent changes in family structure and functions, mothers hold a central position in family relations in several cultures, and in families today, mothers often assume a primary role in household chores and child care, while fathers occupy an inferior/subordinate/peripheral position (Paquette & Bigras, 2010; Vogel et al., 2011). Further, mothers assume a facilitating or inhibiting role in the father-child relationship (Puhman & Pasley, 2013). Some studies also report that mother-child communications are much stronger than father-child communications, and that the mother and child relationship is emotionally closer compared to that of father-child/ren (Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Nielson, 2001; Mathew et al., 2006).

Recent family studies in Turkey indicate that the roles of males and females, thus of fathers and mothers, still are not equally balanced, despite a decline in gender hierarchy within modern urban families (ACEV, 2017; Kagitcibasi, 2010; Sunar & Fisek, 2005). Following an in-depth analysis of familial relationships, Fisek (1995) argued that mothers and fathers are different concerning closeness towards their children in Turkish culture. Fisek (1995) found that mothers' closeness towards their children was more expressive (childcare, kissing, touching, etc.), whereas fathers' closeness was instrumental (financial support, helping in decision-making etc.) also, there is a highly close boundary relation between mother and child. Boratov et al. (2017) reported that open communication exists between mothers and sons, and that they can express their love towards one another since there is no hierarchy between mothers and children. Boratov et al. (2017) also found that mothers occupy a mediator role in father-child communications, and that this is significant in maintaining that communication.

The final important result obtained in this study is that in a family environment wherein the mother occupies a mediator role in father-child communications, on an emotional level fathers are not perceived by their children as a real part of the family system, which brings about a problem regarding the sense of family belonging for the participants. This finding can be evaluated concerning the system theory and theoretical predictions of Kagitcibasi. According to the system theory, the family

system involving the father is a psychological system as well as a physical unit. The communications and relationship patterns among family members allow the family to be a psychological unit. Family members connect through verbal, nonverbal, and emotional exchanges and thereby become special individuals for each other. The psychological and physical adaptation level of the family is set by information about who is "present" and who is "absent" in the system. If it is not clear who is psychologically or physically absent or present in the system, the family system becomes unbalanced (Boss, 2006). Morman and Floyd (1999) reported that fathers who are technically "present" but functionally "absent" concerning parenting style (fathers who are physically present at home but do not get involved in the lives of their sons, or do not psychologically support them) cannot establish close relationships with their children.

In the Turkey sample, the uncertainty regarding the psychological or physical presence or absence of a family member may lead to a challenging situation in the family. This is because the modern Turkish family follows a family model that is built upon a combination of "individualism and group (family) loyalty" and is characterized by the emotional dependency of the members towards each other (Kagitcibasi, 2010). It is out of the question in Turkish culture to think an individual may create an identity independent of his/her family (Nauck & Klaus, 2005). Commitment to family is a significant value in Turkish culture (Kagitcibasi, 2010). In the family model as it is defined today in Turkey, distance based on power is reduced, while distance arose from respect and attention is maintained, and emotional closeness is high. In this model, family values are still more important than individual values, and the emotional bond between parent and child (mother and child in particular) is emphasized (Sunar & Fisek 2005). However, Fisek (1995) underscored that boundary relations in the Turkish family are multi-dimensional; there is a strong togetherness/mutuality between mother and child, which refers to an intense emotional exchange, love, support, loyalty, and closeness, while there is also a separation between father and child due to their relative distance within the structural hierarchy. Recent studies report that the emotional closeness between father and child is less compared to the mother, and that mothers are perceived as more affectionate compared to fathers (Ataca, 2009; Sunar 2002, 2009). Boratav et al. (2017) stated that the emotional closeness between father and child was not equivalent to the intimacy observed between mother and child. Additionally, Hortacsu (1989) reported that less communication was conducted between fathers and children. Given that the emotional closeness and level of communication between father and child are different than for mother and child, and that fathers are perceived as relatively distant, render the observed inconsistency in the sense of family belonging expressed by the participants in this study understandable.

This study is significant for its revelations that the father-child relationship in a family environment wherein mothers occupy a mediator role in father-child communications does not represent a satisfactory relationship for the child, and that this relationship is associated with a sense of deprivation by the children. The study is also important because it shows that the mother-child relationship is defined by the

children using the themes of love and emotional sharing, that mothers are seen as mediators in father-child communications, and this relationship with the parents leads to inconsistencies in perceptions of family belonging. These study findings can be taken as indicators that the reported characteristics of fathers are similar to "traditional" Turkish fatherhood characteristics, and thus the generational hierarchy between the father and child remains.

Another significant contribution of this study is that it reveals an inconsistency between the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fathering. Recent studies report that the father identity in Turkey has changed from that of the previous generation; fathers are now allegedly more affectionate and caring. The majority of these studies are based on the self-evaluations of fathers. On the other hand, this study includes an evaluation of fathers' behaviors from the viewpoints of their children. Our findings show that fathers are still perceived as distant by the children, despite changes in the fatherhood identity in Turkey.

It is important to the father-child relationship that the themes of love and communication mentioned by the children are truly incorporated in the relationship, and that the fathers' parenting practices reach a more egalitarian level with those of the mothers. Recent observations about a developing dominance of authoritarian and oppressive behaviors in Anatolian cities, which inhibit individualism (Toprak, 2009), make this requirement more important. Meeting these requirements will contribute to the reduction of inconsistencies between the culture and conduct of fathers. The findings of this study can contribute to the evaluation of father-child and family relationships in the collectivist culture.

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Baba-Çocuk İletişiminde Annenin Aracılık Rolü ve Aile İlişkileri

Atf:

Celik, H. (2019). The mediator roles of mothers in father-child communications and family relationships. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 84, 135-158, DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2019.84.7

Özet

Problem Durumu: Üyeler arasındaki iletişim tarzı ve iletişim kalitesi aile ilişkilerin en önemli belirleyicilerinden biridir. Aile iletişimi üyelerin birbirlerine bağlanmasının ve ailenin sağlıklı bir şekilde işlevlerini getirmesinin ön koşullarından biri olarak işaret edilir. Ancak ailedeki her üyenin birbiriyle aynı şekilde iletişim kurmadığını gerek ebeveynlerin çocuklarıyla, gerekse çocukların da ebeveynleriyle iletişim kurma tarzları açısından belirgin farklılıkların olduğunu gözlemlenmektedir. Gözlemler özellikle ailedeki kadın üyelerinin iletişim becerilerinin erkek üyelerinin iletişim becerilerinden daha güçlü ve dolayısıyla anne-çocuk iletişiminin baba-çocuk iletişimine nazaran daha kaliteli ve doyurucu olduğunu işaret eder. Gözlemler aynı zamanda baba-çocuk iletişim örüntülerinin 21. yüzyıldaki yeni babalık kimliğine göre yeniden şekillendiğini ve günümüz babalarının bir önceki kuşak babalara nazaran daha sevecen ve iletişime daha açık olduklarını göstermektedir. Ne var ki Türkiye’de anne-çocuk iletişiminin baba-çocuk iletişiminden daha güçlü, babayla iletişiminin görece daha sınırlı olduğu ve çocukla ilgili konularda annelerin birincil, babaların ise daha ikincil konumda kaldığı gözlemlenmeye devam etmektedir. Aile ilişkilerinde ciddi değişimler gözlemlenmesine rağmen günümüz Türkiye’sinde orta sınıfa mensup birçok ailede baba-çocuk iletişiminde annenin aracılık görevi görmesi yani evladın babasına göndermek istediği mesajı annesi aracılığıyla babasına iletmesi ise sıklıkla rastlanan bir olgudur.

Amaç: Bu çalışmada baba-çocuk iletişiminde annelerin aracı olduğu aile ortamında büyüyen gençlerin (1) baba-çocuk ilişkisi nasıl algıladıklarını (2) baba-çocuk iletişimde annelerin hangi rolleri üstlendiklerini (3) baba-çocuk iletişiminde annelerin aracı olduğu bir aile ortamında büyümenin aile yaşamlarına nasıl yansıdığına özünün ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Bu çalışmada katılımcıların babalarıyla olan iletişimlerinin ve bu iletişimdeki anne rolünün baba-çocuk ilişkisi ve aile yaşamı üzerindeki yansımalarına ilişkin ortak deneyimlerinin ve inşa edilen ortak anlamların özünü yakalamak amacıyla yorumlayıcı fenomenoloji deseninden (Interpretive Phenomenological Analyses- IPA) yararlanılmıştır. Homojen örnekleme yöntemi kullanıldığı çalışmanın örneklemini Marmara Üniversitesinde Psikolojik Danışmanlık ve Özel Eğitim Öğretmenliği bölümünde öğrenim gören 19-24 yaş aralığındaki (x = 21.33) 9 kadın, 6 erkek lisans öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. Veriler, derinlemesine görüşme yöntemiyle toplanmış ve görüşmelerde yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları kullanılmıştır.

Verilerin analizinde MaxQDA programı kullanılmış olup Smith ve Osburn'un (2003) dört aşamalı verilerin analiz adımları takip edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Bu çalışmada üç ana temaya ulaşılmıştır: (1) tatmin edici olmayan baba-çocuk ilişkisi, (2) anneler: baba-çocuk iletişiminin ilişkisel dayanak noktası, (3) aile etkileşimlerinde sorunlu duygusal tepkiler. Analiz sonuçları, tatmin edici olmayan baba-çocuk ilişkisinin babaların üç temel ebeveynlik özelliğiyle karakterize olduğunu göstermiştir. (i) mesafeli, (ii) sınırlı ebeveynlik rolü ve (iii) otoriterlik. Katılımcı öyküleri baba-çocuk iletişiminin ilişkisel dayanak noktası olarak algılanan anneliğin ise sevgi ve duygusal paylaşım temalarıyla tanımlandığını ve baba-çocuk iletişimine annelerin üç açıdan hizmet ettiğini ortaya koymuştur: (i) köprü görevi, (ii) iletişimin sürdürülebilirliğini sağlama, (iii) babayı iletişime açık hale getirme. Son olarak analizler aile etkileşimlerinde algılanan sorunlu duygusal tepkilerin babaların duygusal açıdan aile sistemine tam olarak dâhil olamamalarıyla ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir.

Sonuç ve Öneriler: Bu çalışma baba-çocuk iletişimde annelerin aracı rol üstlendiği bir aile ortamındaki baba-çocuk ilişkisinin evladın gözünde doyum sağlayıcı bir ilişki olarak algılanmadığını ve deneyimlenen bu ilişkinin onlarda yoksunluk hissi yaratan bir tür ilişkisel yara olarak algılandığını ortaya çıkarması bakımından önemlidir. Katılımcı öyküleri babaların mesafeli, otoriter ve ev-çocuk bakımında anneye kıyasla daha az sorumluluk alan ebeveyn olarak algılandıklarını ve babaların bu özelliklerinin tatmin edici olmayan baba-çocuk ilişkisinin oluşumuna hizmet ettiğini işaret etmiştir. Çalışma anne-çocuk ilişkisinin sevgi ve duygusal paylaşım temaları üzerinden tanımlandığını açığa çıkarması ve annelerin baba-çocuk iletişimin temel ilişkisel dayanağı olarak algılandığını göstermesi bakımından ayrıca önemlidir. Bu çalışma annelerin baba-çocuk iletişimde köprü görevi görme, baba-çocuk iletişimin sürdürülebilirliğini sağlama, babayı iletişime açık hale getirme gibi roller üstlendiklerini göstermiştir. Bu çalışma baba-çocuk iletişimde annenin aracılık rolü üstlendiği aile ortamında babaların duygusal açıdan aile sistemin tam olarak bir parçası olarak algılanmadığını göstermesi ve ebeveynlerle olan ilişkilerin aile aidiyet duygusunda tutarsızlıklara yol açtığını göstermesi bakımından ayrıca önemlidir. Çalışma bulguları babaların sahip olduğu babalık özelliklerinin geleneksel babalık özellikleriyle ilişkili olabileceğini dolayısıyla baba-çocuk arasında kuşak hiyerarşisinin devam ettiğini göstergesi olarak değerlendirilebilir. Çalışma babalık kültürü ve babalık icrası arasında bir tutarsızlığa işaret etmesi bakımından önemlidir. Son dönem araştırmaları Türkiye'de babalık kimliğinin bir önceki kuşaktaki babalık kimliğine göre değiştiğini ve babaların daha sevecen ve daha ilgili olduklarını bildirmektedir. Ne varki ilgili çalışmaların çoğu babaların kendi babalık davranışlarını değerlendirmelerine dayanır. Bu çalışma ise evladın gözünden babalık davranışlarını değerlendirmesi içermektedir. Çalışma bulguları babalık kimliğinin değişime rağmen evladın gözünden hala daha uzak ve mesafeli ebeveyn olarak algılanmaya devam ettiğini işaret etmektedir.

Bu çalışma baba-çocuk ikili ilişkisinin, baba-çocuk özelinde gerçekleşmesine, ilişkideki sevgi ve iletişim temalarının çocuğun ihtiyaçlarına ve beklentilerine göre yeniden tanımlanmasına, ebeveynlik pratiklerinin daha eşitlikçi bir seviye taşınmasına duyulan ihtiyacı ortaya çıkarması bakımından önemlidir. Günümüzde Anadolu

kentlerinde bireyselliğe izin vermeyen yetkeci ve baskıcı bir kültürün egemen olmaya başladığına dair gözlemler bu ihtiyacı daha da önemli kılar. Bu ihtiyaçların karşılanması babalık kültürü ve babalık icrası arasındaki tutarsızlıklarında azalmasına katkı sağlayacaktır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları kollektivist kültürdeki baba-çocuk ve aile ilişkilerini değerlendirme katkı sağlayabilecek niteliktedir.

Bu yorumlayıcı fenomenoloji araştırması baba-çocuk iletişiminde annelerin aracı olduğu aile ortamındaki baba-çocuk ilişki dinamiğini ve bunun aile yaşamına olan yansımalarını anlaşılmasını sağlamak için tasarlanmıştır. Örneklemin büyüklüğü ve homojenliği yorumlayıcı fenomenoloji araştırmalarının belirli bir gurup insanın belli bir olay karşısında verdiği tepkilerin ayrıntılı bir şekilde açıklanmasını yapabileme vaadini karşılamaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular genelleme amacı taşımamaktadır. Bu çalışma orta sınıfa mensup ailelerde büyüyen gençlerin deneyimlerini anlamada önemli bir adımdır. Ancak araştırma yalnızca evlatların deneyimlerini yansıtmaktadır. Hem babaların, hem annelerin hem de evlatların deneyimlerinin karşılaştırmalı olarak değerlendirmesinin yapılması alan yorumların daha zenginleşmesini ve aile ilişkilerine yönelik daha bütünlükçü bir resmin elde edilmesine katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Baba-çocuk ilişkisi, anne-çocuk ilişkisi, iletişim, aile etkileşimi, Türk aileleri.