The Predictiveness of Mothers' Emotion Socialization Behaviours on the Attachment Levels of 6 Year-Old Children

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the predictiveness of the emotion socialization behaviours of the mothers of 6-year-old children on the children's attachment levels. The study group of this descriptive research designed with the screening model, one of the quantitative research methods, included 143 pairs of mothers and 60- to 72-month-old normally-developing children attending two kindergartens affiliated with the İstanbul Başakşehir Directorate of National Education during the 2019-2020 academic term. The data collection instruments used in the study were the parent form designed by the authors to collect sociodemographic data from the children and families who participated in the study, the Incomplete Doll Family Story Scale (IDFSS), which was used to determine the children's levels of attachment, and the Coping With Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES). Calculation of descriptive statistics of scores for the Incomplete Doll Family History scale and the Dealing with Children's Negative Emotions scale. The model formed at the end of the multiple linear regression analysis shows that mothers' emotion socialization behaviours accounted for 57% of the variance related to the children's attachment level. The t-test results of the multiple linear regression coefficients revealed that the mothers' emotion socialization behaviours predict children's attachment levels significantly, the problem-focused reactions and minimization reactions sub-scales of emotion socialization behaviours predict children's attachment levels significantly, while the emotion-focused reactions, punitive reactions, distress reactions and expressive reactions sub-scales do not predict children's attachment levels significantly.

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1. Introduction

Parent emotion socialization has recently become one of the most popular issues in child development and psychology. Parent emotion socialization is defined as parents' responses to their children's emotions such as sorrow, fear and anxiety resulting from negative situations and parents' methods of communication with their children in such cases (Eisenberg et al., 1999). The most widely known model in parental emotion socialization is Heuristic Model. Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad (1998) proposed the "Heuristic Model" for parents' socialization of their children's emotions. This model describes three processes related to emotion socialization. These processes could be parents' ways of expressing their emotions, parents' responses to their children's emotions and their discourse on their emotions. In cases where children experience negative

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emotions, it is considered a positive parental emotion socialization strategy to direct their attention to an activity they like, suggest solutions to the problem, talk about their negative emotions, and act as a positive model by showing appropriate responses to negative situations (Fabes et al., 2002).On the other hand, giving anxious reactions to children's negative emotions, belittling these emotions and punishing children are considered as negative parent emotion socialization strategies (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1994).

Parents' emotion socialization behaviours are one of the building blocks for the healthy development of children. Children develop in a family system and healthy child development occurs due to healthy parent behaviours (Saarni, 2001; Whiteman, Mchale, & Crouter, 2007). Parents' positive strategies for the socialization of children's emotions are advantageous, particularly in social and emotional terms (Saarni et al., 2006). It has been reported that children whose parents use positive emotion socialisation strategies are able to appropriately regulate and express their emotions and achieve higher academic success (Fantuzzo, et al., 2005; Cole, Teti, & Zahn-Waxler, 2003), have stronger attention skills and memory (Ferrier, Basett, & Denham, 2014), are less likely to engage in maladaptive behaviours, can easily catch up with social changes, maintain better peer relationships (Denham et al., 1990), have stronger self-confidence, and are competent in communication skills (Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith, 1994).Children whose parents use negative emotion socialization strategies are also reported to have several developmental disadvantages, including difficulty expressing their emotions (Denham, 2007), low socioemotional skills (Huston et al., 1994), and emotion regulation disorders such as temper tantrums (Newland & Crnic, 2011).

The emotional socialization behavior of parents has a significant impact on child development and is influenced by several factors. The emotional atmosphere in the family is one of the most important factors. A warm emotional atmosphere helps parents to show positive emotion socialization strategies (Cheung et al., 2018).It is reported that parents' temperament and characteristics and their physical and spiritual well-being (Giuseppone, 2018; Pérez-Padilla, Menéndez, & Lozano, 2015) are effective on their emotion socialization behaviours. Studies on parent emotion socialization behaviours have also yielded significant findings. For example, Bjork et al. (2020) initiated a positive relationship between parents' distressed responses and externalized behavioral problems. Cui et al. (2020) found that negative emotional socialization behaviors of mothers were associated with internalized behavioral problems. İlhan-Ildız and Seven (2018) found that mothers' higher educational status was positively related to problem-oriented responses and negatively related to punitive behaviours, while fathers' higher educational status was negatively related to punitive and belittling behaviours and positively related to problem-oriented reactions, adding that emotion-oriented reactions of parents to their sons were significantly higher than those of their daughters. İlhan-Ildız, Ahmetoğlu, and Acar (2017) suggested that mothers' unfavourable reactions influence children's emotion regulation strategies and children whose mothers display more unfavourable reactions are likely to have a more reactive temperament and display poor emotion regulation skills. Güven and Erden (2017) reported that children whose mothers adopt negative emotion socialization strategies display behavioural problems.

1.1. Relationship Between Emotion Socialization and Attachment

Another factor related to parents' emotion socialization behaviours is attachment. Attachment is defined as the emotional tie established in the early years of life and is shaped by the relationship quality between infant and caregiver (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1982). The innate attachment behaviours of infants mediate the establishment of attachment. Bowlby (1982) defined infant behaviours like crying, smiling and yelling as attachment behaviours and suggested that they enhance mother-infant intimacy and mediate attachment. Attachment behaviours often occur as a result of a need. Consistency of the caregiver in satisfying these needs, as well as the love and affection they display determine the quality of attachment. Infants are expected to develop secure attachment in the presence of a sensitive, consistent, available and loving caregiver. Insecure attachment is expected to develop when caregivers are insensitive to infants' expectations, inconsistent in satisfying their needs or lack love and warmth (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1972; Bowlby, 1982). Another achievement of infants with the mediation of attachment is that they know that their negative emotions are understood, cared for and shared (Cassidy, 1994; Sroufe, 1996).

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

This study, aimed at evaluating the predictiveness of the emotion socialization behaviours of the mothers of 6-year-old children's on their children's attachment levels, is a descriptive study with a survey model, one of the quantitative research methods. Descriptive survey models are suitable for studies that describe a past or current case as it exists (Karasar, 2018).

2.2. Participants

The study population involved students from two kindergartens in İstanbul-Başakşehir provinces attended by children from families of low socio-economic status. The study population comprised 143 pairs of mothers and 60 to 72-month-old normally developing children live with both parents, with no chronic disease and or diagnosis of a psychiatric disorder. They volunteered and were permitted by their families to participate in the study. The demographic distributions of children and families involved in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic Distributions of Children and Families Involved in the Study*

Socio-Demographic Features	Groups	f	%
Children's features Age	60-72 months	143	100
Gender	Girl	65	45.5
	Boy	78	54.5
Parents' features			
Mothers' Educational Status	Literate and Primary school	125	87.4
	Secondary school	18	12.6
Fathers' Educational Status	Literate and Primary School	21	14.7
	Secondary School	119	83.2
	High School	3	2.1

According to the demographic distributions of the children and families presented in Table 1, 100% of the children (f=143) were 60 to 72-months-old, girls comprised 45.5% (f=65), and boys comprised 54.5% (f=78) of the study group, 87.4% of the mothers (f=125) were graduates of primary school and 12.6% (f=18) secondary school. In comparison, 14.7% of the fathers (f=21) were graduates of primary school, 83.2% (f=119) had graduated from secondary school and 2.1 % (f=3) were high school graduates.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Data collection instruments for the study included a parent form designed by the authors to collect sociodemographic data from the children and families who participated in the study, the Incomplete Doll Family Story Scale (IDFSS), which was used to determine children's levels of attachment, and the Coping With Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES).

Parent Data Form. The parent data form includes questions regarding the age and gender of the child as well as the educational status of both parents.

Incomplete Doll Family Story Scale (IDFSS). IDFSS is a projective story-based measurement tool developed by Cassidy (1988) to identify children's attachment styles, which was adapted to Turkish and tested in terms of validity and reliability by Seven (2006). The scale requires children to complete six stories with a doll family, each taking approximately 3 minutes. The goal of the study is to reflect the mental self-representation of individuals concerning attachment and it helps to evaluate whether the children see themselves in a secure relationship with their mothers, the extent to which the children are valued, whether the relationship is considered meaningful and important, if the children feel safe and protected and whether they think that they are in a relationship where conflicts and stressful situations are resolved with the help of the relationship (Cassidy, 1988). Each story is scored with a 5-grade scale concerning its details (Seven, 2006). High scores in the scale indicate a secure relationship with the attachment figure. Each story is included in one of three categories and stories where the infant character is regarded as important and the relationship with the mother is identified to be important, special and warm are classified as secure/strong. A total score ranging between

6-17 is classified as "avoidant attachment" while a 25-30 score range is classified as "secure attachment" (Seven, 2006).

Coping With Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES). The parents' emotion socialization behaviours were evaluated with the Coping With Children's Negative Emotions Scale developed by Fabes et al. (1990) and adapted to Turkish by Altan, Yağmurlu, & Yavuz (2013). The scale comprises 12 cases that involve negative emotions that children experience such as anger, fear, sorrow, shame and disappointment. Each scenario is followed by 6 different types of reactions that might be given to children's negative emotions. After reading each scenario, parents are asked to choose how often they might use the unnecessary reaction options. These six reactions establish the sub-scales of CCNES. The mean value of the items in each sub-scale determines the points scored in that sub-scale. The sub-scales of the scale include: "Problem-focused reactions (PFR)", which refers to parents' attempts to help their children solve the problem causing the negative emotions, and "Emotion-focused reactions (EFR)", which refers to parents' attempts to make their children feel better. Supportive Emotion Socialization" levels are identified by adding the scores of the "Expressive Encouragement (EE)" scale to these two sub-scales. Other sub-scales are "Minimization Reactions (MR)", which minimize the importance of the child's emotional reactions, "Punitive Reactions (PR)", which impose verbal or physical punishment on the child's expressions, and "Distress Reactions (DR)", which respond to the child's negative emotion with sorrow. Scores obtained in these three sub-scales indicate "Non-supportive Emotion Socialization" levels. Fabes et al. (2002) reported high inner consistency coefficients for the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the Punitive Reactions, Distress Reactions and Minimization Reactions sub-scales are .69, .70. and .78, respectively, while these coefficients are .78 for Problem-focused Reactions, .80 for Emotion-focused Reactions and .85 for Expressive Encouragement. The internal consistency coefficients for the Turkish scale adaptation are .83 for Punitive Reactions, .65 for Distress Reactions, .86 for Minimization Reactions, .72 for Problem-focused Reactions, .79 for Emotion-focused Reactions and .87 for Expressive Encouragement (Altan, Yağmurlu, & Yavuz, 2013).

The internal consistency coefficients found in this study are .762 for emotion-focused reaction, .912 for problem-focused reactions, .753 for punitive reactions, .663 for distress reactions, .816 for minimization reactions and .816 expressive encouragements, respectively.

2.4. Procedure

Before starting the study, relevant permissions were obtained from the Directorates of National Education in İstanbul and Edirne provinces and information related to the schools attended by families of low socio-economic status. The schools for the study were randomly selected. The authors visited these schools and distributed a document describing the aims and practicalities of the study, as well as a parental consent form for participation in the study, to the parents of 60-72-month-old normally developing children from full-term families who had no chronic illnesses and had not been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Families who consented to participate in the study were sent a demographic data form and Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES) inside a closed envelope and asked to return the documents, which were later collected using the school directors. A total of 155 of the 162 volunteer families completed the forms and send them to the schools. 5 children did not respond to the scale. Therefore, 143 children and their families were involved in the study group.

2.5. Data Analysis

The study data were analysed in two stages. In the first stage, the descriptive analysis of children's attachment levels and mothers' emotion socialization behaviours was calculated. Descriptive statistics results were then subjected to multiple regression analysis in the second stage.

2.6. Ethical

The research data were collected in September 2019 and all methods were performed following the Declarations of Helsinki.

3. Findings

Analysis of the collected data began by checking whether the regression hypotheses were met. It was checked whether there was a linear relationship between predictive variables (mothers' emotion socialization

behaviours) and dependent variables (children's attachment levels) and whether the data had normal distribution. Mahalanobis distance values (D2) were used to analyse extreme values that prevented the normality hypothesis from being met (Büyüköztürk, 2018; Koide et al., 2015).

The analysis showed that data of 7 students had extreme values that could affect the normality hypothesis, so they were excluded from the data set. Consequently, data of 143 students were included in the regression analysis. Analysis of the scatter diagram of standardized residual values and dependent values showed that the result defined a linear relationship and points were likely to gather around an axis. At the same time, histogram and normal distribution curves had a nearly normal distribution. To check whether there was a linear relationship between variables, the variance inflation factor was analysed between the children's attachment levels and the sub-scales of the emotion socialization scale of the mothers, yielding the following results: emotion-focused reactions (VIF) (=2.905) and tolerance value (=.204), problem-focused reactions (VIF) (=1.233) and tolerance value (=.160), punitive reactions (VIF) (= 2.345) and tolerance value (=.299) distress reactions (VIF) (=2.192) and tolerance value (=.456), minimization reactions (VIF) (=2.742) and tolerance value (=.365), expressive encouragement (VIF) (=1.150) and tolerance value (=.241), which led to the conclusion that there was no linearity problem related to the data included in the study.

Children's attachment levels were assigned as the dependent variable, and mothers' emotion socialization behaviours as the independent variables. Pearson correlation was calculated to identify the correlation between the dependent and independent variables and the data were subjected to linear regression analysis. The findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. *Pearson Order Difference Correlation Coefficient Results of the Sub-scales of the Incomplete Doll Family Story Scale and Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1- IDFSS Total Score	--						
2- Emotion-focused Reactions	.671	-					
3- Problem-focused Reactions	.697	.878	-				
4- Punitive Reactions	-.632	-.618	-.667	-			
5- Distress Reactions	-.501	-.576	-.643	.695	-		
6- Minimization Reactions	-.666	-.579	-.621	.777	.606	-	
7-Expressive Encouragement	.644	.828	.850	-.589	-.564	-.597	-

**p<0.01   N= 143

As seen in Table 2, a correlation coefficient in the 0 – 0.30 range indicates that there is no correlation while the 0.31 – 0.49 range indicates a weak correlation, the 0.50 – 0.69 range a moderate correlation and the 0.70 – 1.00 range a strong correlation (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2011). Table 2 shows that the IDFSS total score had a moderately significant positive correlation with the Emotion-Focused Reactions subscale (r=.671; p < 0.01), a moderately significant positive correlation with the Problem-Focused Reactions subscale (r=.697; p < 0.01), a moderately significant negative correlation with the Punishing Reactions subscale (r=-.632; p < 0.01), a moderately significant negative correlation with the Distress Reactions subscale (r=-.501; p < 0.01), a moderately significant negative correlation with the Minimization Reactions subscale (r=-.666; p < 0.01), and a moderately significant positive correlation with the Expressive Encouragement subscale (r=.644; p < 0.01) of the Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES).

Table 3. *Results of multiple linear regression analysis to identify whether mothers' emotion socialization behaviours account for children's attachment levels*

Mode	R	R2	R2(ΔR2) Change	F	B	Std Error	t	p
1.	768[a]	.590	.572	32.608	13.420	3.00118	3.590	.000**

**p<,001; N=143

According to Table 3, mothers' emotional socialization behaviours account for 59 % of the score variance related to children's attachment levels (R2 (ΔR2) Change = .301). t-test results on Table 3 related to multiple linear regression coefficients also show mothers' emotion socialization behaviours significantly predict children's attachment levels (p<.01).

Table 4. *B and Beta Correlation Coefficients and Significance Levels*

Predictors	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	13.420	3.738		3.590	.000**
Emotion-focused Reactions	.120	.079	.183	3.590	.134
Problem-focused Reactions	.125	.063	.273	1.508	.049*
Punitive Reactions	-.070	.060	-.117	1.989	.245
Distress Reactions	.072	.071	.083	-1.168	.309
Minimization Reactions	-.172	.048	-.323	1.020	.001*
Expressive Encouragement	.027	.066	.045	-3.554	.691

As seen in Table 4, an analysis of the B and Beta correlation coefficients and significance levels of the dependent variables reveals that problem-focused reactions (t (1.508), p < .05) and minimization reactions (t (1.020), p < .05) predict children's attachment levels significantly. while emotion-focused reactions (t (3.590), p > .05), punitive reactions (t (1,989), p > .05), distress reactions (t (-1,168), p > .05) and expressive encouragement (t (-3.554), p > 05) do not significantly predict children's attachment levels.

4. Discussion

This study aims to identify the predictiveness of mothers' emotion socialization behaviours on children's attachment levels. As a result of the descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression analysis, mothers' emotion socialization behaviours constitute a significant predictor of the score variance of children's attachment levels.

Pearson Correlation Analysis, carried out to identify the correlation between dependent and independent variables, revealed a significant relationship between the total score of IDFSS and the sub-scales of the Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale. There is a moderate significant positive correlation between IDFSS and the Problem-focused Reactions and Expressive Encouragement sub-scales of the Coping with Children's Negative Emotions scale and a moderate significant negative correlation between IDFSS and the Punitive Reactions, Distress Reactions and Minimization Reactions. Thus, mothers' positive emotion socialization behaviours are positively correlated with children's attachment levels and negative emotion socialization behaviours are negatively correlated with children's attachment levels.

Multiple linear regression analysis, carried out to identify the predictiveness of mothers' emotion socialization behaviours on children's attachment levels revealed that dependent variables have 59% predictiveness on the independent variables (R^2 = .590; p < 0.01**), while analysis of the B and Beta correlation coefficients and significance levels indicated that problem-focused reactions (p < 0.05) and minimization reactions (p < 0.05) predict children's attachment levels significantly, whereas emotion-based reactions (p > 0.05), punitive reactions (p > 0.05) distress reactions (p > 0.05) and expressive encouragement (p > 0.05) do not significantly predict children's attachment levels. According to this result, it can be thought that problem-focused and dismissive reactions may increase children's stress and cause insecure attachment.

The results of the study show similarities with the results of the previous studies. Chen, Lin, and Li (2012) suggested that children whose mothers show positive emotion socializations have more secure attachment patterns, while children whose emotions are ignored by their mothers have lower attachment levels. In a similar study, Roque, Veríssimo, Fernandes and Rebelo (2013) dealt with the correlation between children's attachment styles and their emotion regulation and emotional expression. They concluded that children with secure attachment were more likely to use emotional expressions in a meaningful way and secure attachment had a positive effect on their emotion regulation. Leerkes, Bailes and Augustine (2020) found that parent emotion socialization had four profiles; teaching and problem-focused parent, supportive parent, balanced parent and overly attached parent. These profiles depended on income, ethnicity, families' expressionism, parent and child emotion regulation disorders. They concluded that parents with supportive teaching and problem-focused profiles had less emotion regulation than balanced and overly attached parents. Ahmetoğlu, İlhan-Ildız, Acar and Encinger (2018) studied the correlation between parent emotion socialization and children's emotion regulation and attachment to parents. Results revealed that parents' minimization reaction to children's emotions moderated the association between children's emotion regulation and attachment to parents.

An attachment relationship requires the caregiver to give consistent responses and comfort the infant in cases of discomfort and distress (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Infants who lack the skills to cope with negative emotions need the caregiver's comfort to cope with negative emotion such as anxiety, fear and anger. Infants who are not comforted by their parents fail to cope with negative emotions and reflect this emotion to their primary caregivers, which affects the attachment relationship unfavourably (Bowlby, 1969). In this case, according to the "Heuristic Model" proposed by Eisenberg, Cumberland and Spinrad (1998) for parents' emotion socialization behaviours, it could be said that positive parent emotion socialization strategies are one of the basic parental behaviours required for secure attachment. According to Southam-Gerow (2014), emotion socialization is built using parent-child attachment, modelling of parents and emotional speech between parent and child. Studies are suggesting that supportive behaviours that help children understand emotions, model them using appropriate emotional reactions and help them build their emotion regulation influence children's emotion socialization behaviours (Birle & Losif, 2014; Boldt, Goffin & Kochanska, 2020; Garner et al., 2008; Blair et al., 2014; Fabes et al., 2001; Garner et al., 2008; Mcelwain, Halberstadt & Volling, 2007; Root & Stifter, 2010).

Considering the study findings in the context of "Attachment Theory" and "Heuristic Model", the fact that mothers' emotion socialization behaviours significantly predict children's attachment levels overlaps with the theoretical framework.

5. Limitations and Future Work

This study, aiming to identify the predictiveness of mothers' emotion socialization behaviours on children's attachment levels, has several limitations. The study was carried out based on a quantitative research paradigm. Observation and survey methods might enable a comprehensive analysis of the subject in studies dealing with children's attachment styles and parents' emotion socialization behaviours. The study involves children from families of low socio-economic status. Future studies could involve families and parents of low, middle and high socio-economic status to analyse the relationship between parent emotion socialization behaviours and children's attachment levels in the context of socio-economic differences. The study was carried out with 143 child-mother pairs; therefore, extending the study group might produce different results.

6. Conclusions

This study was carried out to identify the predictiveness of mothers' emotion socialization behaviours on children's attachment levels. It was concluded that mothers' emotion socialization behaviours significantly predict children's attachment levels. Mothers are the most important attachment figures for children, and the fact that mothers' reactions, especially to their children's emotions, predict children's attachment strength is consistent with the theoretical framework. It is expected that the results of the study will contribute to the theoretical body of knowledge and inform researchers.

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