

Parental Socialization of Emotion: How Mothers Respond to their Children's Emotions in Turkey

Ebru Ersay¹

Faculty of Education, Gazi University, Turkey

Several research studies suggest a link between parents' emotion socialization and children's social competence and behavior problems. Parents contribute to their children's emotion socialization, more directly, through responses to their children's emotions. Early emotion socialization experiences with parents establish patterns of emotion experience, expression, and regulation that children carry into their broader social circles. Few scales exist to document parents' responses to children's emotions. The aim of this study was to document mothers' responses to their children's sadness, anger, fear, and being overjoyed. A study sample of 868 mothers of preschoolers completed the questionnaire in Turkey. The validity and reliability properties of the Responses to Children's Emotions (RCE) Questionnaire were also examined. We found that mothers in Turkey preferred to respond differently to children's different emotions. Mothers' responses generally did not differ according to the gender of their children; the only difference was found for sadness. Mothers' responses to their children's emotions related to the children's and mothers' ages, monthly family income, levels of mothers' education, mothers' employment status, birth order of children, and the city they lived in. This study is important in that it is the first to document mothers' emotion socialization strategies for their children in terms of one positive and three negative emotions.

Keywords: emotion socialization, preschool, Responses to Children's Emotions Questionnaire, parents

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Corresponding author. Email address: e3ersay@gmail.com

Introduction

The purpose of emotion socialization is to support the emotional competence of children (Friedlmeir, Corapci, & Cole, 2011). Parents' emotion socialization practices influence their children's learning process of recognizing and labeling emotions, their children's psychological and behavioral capacities for emotional regulation, and their children's strategies for helping other people in emotional situations (Debaryshe & Fryxell, 1998). The emotional understanding and emotional regulation abilities of young children are highly related to their social competences (Garner & Power, 1996) and their school adjustments (Shields, Dicstein, Seifer, Giusti, Magee, & Spritz 2001). Socially and emotionally less competent preschoolers are more likely to experience transition problems into kindergarten and show long-term academic and social problems (Bornstein, Hahn, & Haynes, 2010).

Parents socialize their children's emotions in three main mechanisms: a- Parents' reactions to children's expressions and experiences of their emotions (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998), which is also called 'coaching of children's emotions' (Denham, 1998); b-Parental discussion of emotion; and c- Parents' ways to express their own emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1998), and the ways they handle their own emotions (Cunning, 2002), also known as 'modeling' (Denham, 1998).

Several studies have indicated that parents', especially mothers', reactions to their children's emotions are strongly related to children's emotional competence (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002; Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007; Hastings & De, 2008; Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001; O'Neal & Magai, 2005; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002; Yagmurlu & Altan, 2010). If parents react negatively towards their children's emotional displays, children feel anxious whenever they again face an emotionally evocative situation. Additionally, parents' punitive reactions to children's negative emotions are related to children's intensive experiences and expressions of these emotions (Buck, 1984; Fabes, et al., 2001). Ramsden and Hubbard (2002) have found that mothers' low level of acceptance of the emotions of their children is related to a low level of emotional regulation in their children, which in turn is reflected in high levels of aggressive behavior. If parents ignore or minimize their children's emotions, these children are more likely to be unhappy and fearful (Denham et al. 2007). In addition, Hastings and De (2008) found that mothers' failure to notice or respond to their children's negative emotions related to more internalizing problems in children. Furthermore, mothers' minimization of negative emotions is connected to less social competence in older preschoolers. In another study, children's emotional difficulties were found to be related to parents' lack of accepting or supportive responses (O'Neal, & Magai, 2005). Yagmurlu and Altan (2010) indicated that inhibited young Turkish children had a low level of emotion regulation. Moreover, less emotional competence in Turkish preschoolers was related to having very punitive mothers (Corapci & Yagmurlu, 2008). Finally, mothers' encouragement of young children's emotional expressiveness has been related to children's emotional competence and positive social behaviors (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002). There are very few scales to assess parents' responses to children's emotions (i.e. CCNES, Fabes et al., 2001). Existing scales generally examine mothers' responses to anger and sadness. Distinguishing mothers' emotion socialization strategies for different emotions would provide researchers with more detailed information and the opportunity to study the relationship between children's emotional competence and emotion-specific socialization strategies.

Method

The purpose of the current study was to investigate mothers' preferences when responding to their children's emotions in Turkey. Data for the study was obtained using the Responses to Children's Emotions (RCE) questionnaire, which was applied with author's permission.

The scale was first translated into Turkish and sent to six experts to assess the quality of the translation into Turkish and its appropriateness to Turkish culture. According to their feedback, the necessary amendments were made. Thereafter, in May 2011, the Turkish RCE scale was completed by 64 mothers in Ankara to see if they easily understood the items of the scale and if the scale had reasonable reliability scores. According to the pilot study, Cronbach's alpha scores for the subscales of the RCE were as follows: Reward .65, Punish .84, Magnify .80, Neglect .70, and Distract .83. The main study was conducted in Spring 2012 in Ankara and İstanbul.

Participants

A total of 868 mothers of young children participated in this study. Participants were recruited from different early childhood settings in the two largest cities of Turkey, Ankara (589 mothers) and İstanbul (279 mothers). Mothers completed the scale for their children, comprising 422 girls and 445 boys (the gender of one child was not indicated), aged between 51 and 81 months ($M=67.41$ month $SD=5.17$) (as in year: aged between 4.25 to 6.75 years; $M= 5.62$ years, $SD= .43$). The participants were chosen from districts where families of low-, middle-, and high-socioeconomic levels lived in Ankara and İstanbul.

Measures

The Responses to Children's Emotions Questionnaire (RCE; adapted from O'Neal & Magai, 2005) The RCE is a 15-item scale that assesses parental emotion socialization of their children. The parent reports how often they use different socialization strategies in response to their children's emotions. The RCE (the Responses to Children's Emotions questionnaire) includes multiple questions representing five global domains of socialization: Reward, Punish, Neglect, Distract, and Magnify. The RCE asks parents to report how often they use different socialization strategies (i.e., reward, punish, neglect, distract, magnify) in response to each emotion (i.e., sadness, anger, fear, overjoyed). For each emotion, three items contributed to each of the five categories of emotion socialization strategies. The RCE uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often); two items are negatively keyed. *Rewarding* responses are positive and accepting, offering a child warmth and assistance for handling the emotion. e.g. 'When my child was sad, I asked my child what made her/him sad'. *Magnifying* responses reflect emotional contagion; whereby the parent experiences the same emotion and reflects it back toward the child. e.g. 'When my child was sad, I got very sad'. *Punitive* responses convey the parent's disapproval and rejection of the child's emotion. e.g. 'When my child was sad, I told my child to stop being sad.' *Neglect* responses indicate that a parent may not notice or respond to the child's emotion. e.g. 'When my child was sad, I did not pay attention to her/his sadness'. *Distracting* responses minimize the child's experience of the emotion by distracting the child or de-emphasizing the emotion. e.g. 'When my child was sad, I bought her/him something s/he liked.'

In order to examine the validity and reliability properties of the scale, Confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha correlation coefficients were used. Results of the analysis show that the RCE has five factors as in the original version of this scale. The cronbach alpha scores for the five subscales are as follows: Reward (.83), Punish (.84), Neglect (.85), Distract (.84), and Magnify (.79).

Results

In this study, the mothers' age ranged from 22 to 49 years ($M= 33.21$, $SD= 5.03$). Most of them were married (96.5%). Only 32.3% of the mothers were employed. Mothers' education attainments were as follows: 33.1% had obtained a high school diploma; 22.7% of them had only completed primary school; 12.4% concluded their education at middle school and 9.8% at junior college; 18.3% had graduated from a college; and 2.4% of them had obtained a Master's or doctoral degree. The majority, 89.2% of mothers did not have any serious health problem. The indicated monthly income of the families ranged from zero to 100.000TL (32051 Euro) ($M=3225$, $SD= 5775.10$; Median= 1750, Mode= 1000). The data was collected from 11 districts (6 from Ankara, 5 from İstanbul). The average monthly family income of each district is shown in Table 1.

Table I. Monthly family income in each district in the two cities

| | | Min. | Max. | M | SD |
|-----------------|-------------|------|--------|------------------|----------|
| Ankara | | 0 | 8000 | 1738.02* | 1091.77 |
| | Çankaya | 500 | 7000 | 2335.41 | 1316.81 |
| | Sincan | 0 | 2280 | 993.87 | 434.79 |
| | Mamak | 0 | 5000 | 1862.43 | 1147.75 |
| | Etimesgut | 425 | 5000 | 1859.62 | 948.20 |
| | Keçiören | 700 | 8000 | 1866.85 | 1185.17 |
| | Yenimahalle | 0 | 4500 | 1469.74 | 769.31 |
| İstanbul | | 600 | 100000 | 7241.15** | 9919.84 |
| | Sancaktepe | 600 | 9000 | 1882.90 | 1846.04 |
| | Ümraniye | 700 | 3500 | 1782 | 674.84 |
| | Kadıköy | 750 | 10000 | 3470.72 | 1944.76 |
| | Ataşehir | 2000 | 25000 | 10424 | 5209.74 |
| | Beykoz | 7700 | 100000 | 21537 | 17576.01 |

Note. *557 Euro; **2321 Euro

In terms of the birth order of the children studied, most were a first child (51%); 37.6% of them were a second child; and 10% were the mother's third child. Of these children 25.3% had no siblings, 49% of them had one sibling, and 25.7% of them had two or more siblings.

To confirm the original five factor structure of the scale, confirmatory factor analysis was used. Multiple criteria were used to determine the goodness of fit to the data for the indicated structure. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for each domain separately and the results are represented in

Figures 1 to 5. In addition, all items of each subscale had significant *t*-scores. All of the subscales demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency (See Table II).

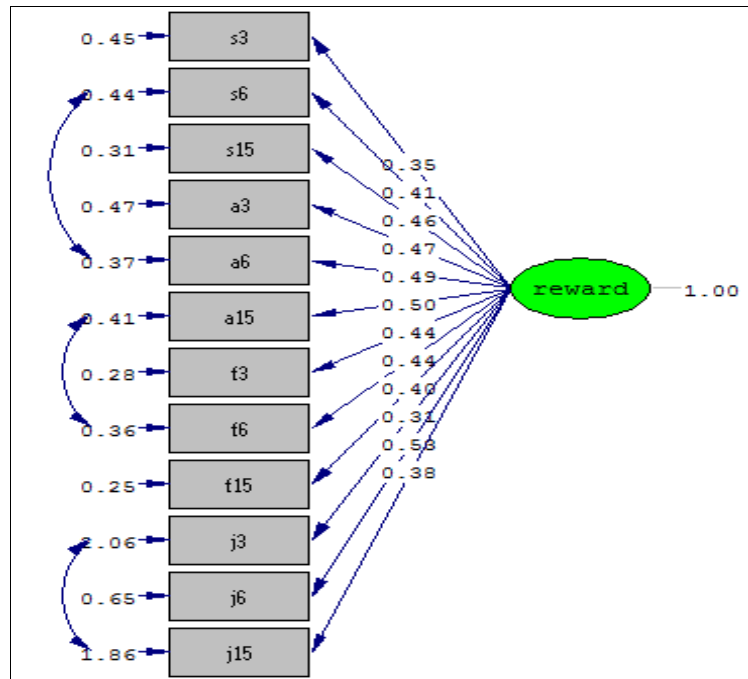


Figure 1. Path diagram of reward subscale.

The goodness of fit to the data for reward subscale: $\chi^2=490.37$, $X^2/sd= 9.62$, RMSEA= 0.099, CFI=0.93, NFI=0.92, IFI=0.93 and NNFI=0.91.

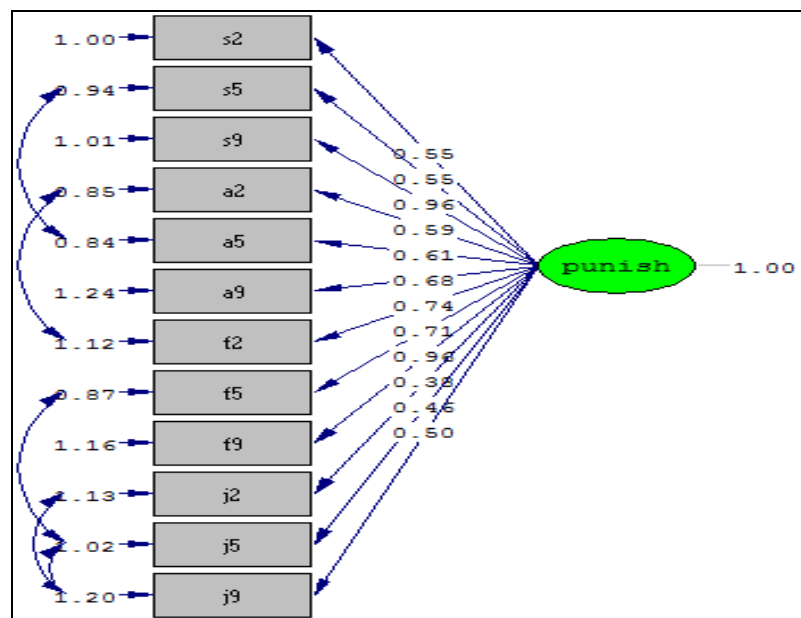


Figure 2. Path diagram of punish subscale.

The goodness of fit to the data for punish subscale: $\chi^2=600.53$, $X^2/sd= 12.26$, RMSEA= 0.113, CFI=0.92, NFI=0.91, IFI=0.92 and NNFI=0.89.

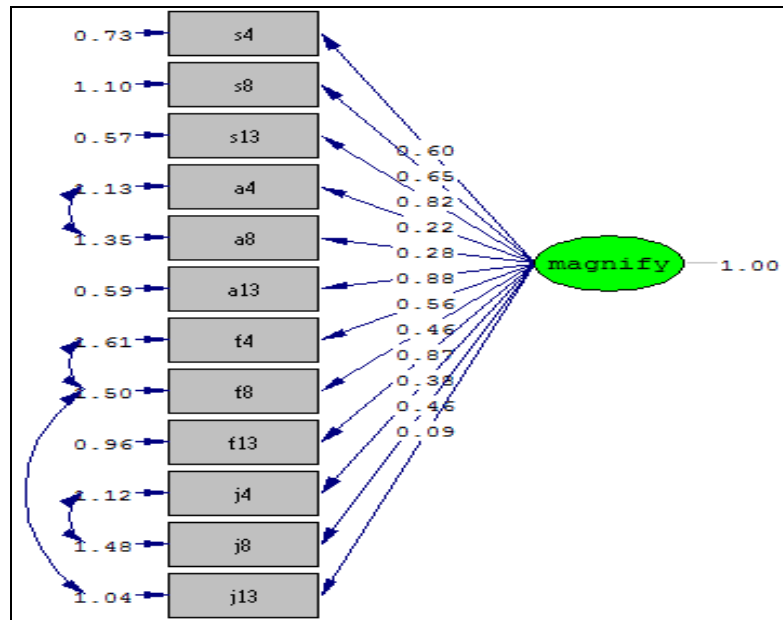


Figure 3. Path diagram of magnify subscale.

The goodness of fit to the data for magnify subscale: $\chi^2=468.95$, $X^2/sd= 9.38$, RMSEA= 0.113, CFI=0.91, NFI=0.90, IFI=0.91 and NNFI=0.88.

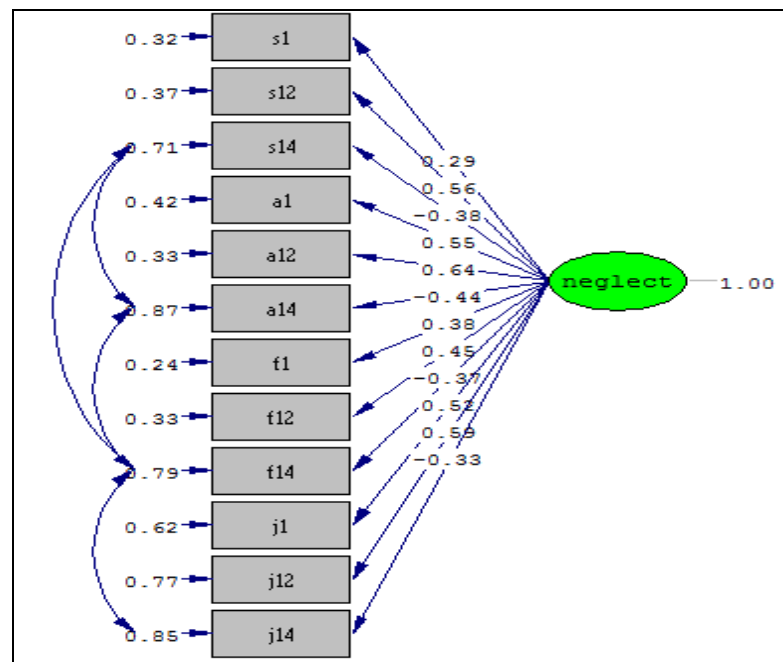


Figure 4. Path diagram of neglect subscale.

The goodness of fit to the data for neglect subscale: $\chi^2=396.24$, $X^2/sd= 7.92$, RMSEA= 0.089, CFI=0.94, NFI=0.94, IFI=0.94 and NNFI=0.93.

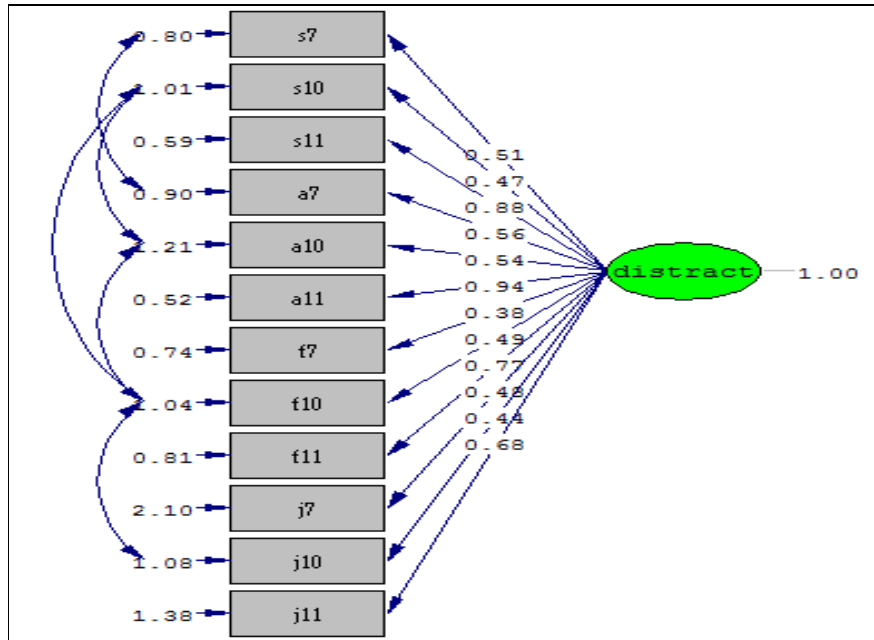


Figure 5. Path diagram of distract subscale.

The goodness of fit to the data for distract subscale: $\chi^2=522.31$, $X^2/sd= 10.66$, RMSEA= 0.105, CFI=0.92, NFI=0.92, IFI=0.92 and NNFI=0.90.

Table II. Bivariate correlations among subscales of the RCE

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---|
| 1.Reward | - | | | | |
| 2.Punish | .128** | - | | | |
| 3.Magnify | .185** | .563** | - | | |
| 4.Neglect | -.722** | .137** | -.031 | - | |
| 5.Distract | .449** | .597** | .571** | -.274** | - |

** p<0.01

We found that mothers in Turkey generally use a reward response and have a low preference for a neglect response to children's emotions. When we examine responses according to different feelings, we can see that mothers chose reward response mostly for sadness but least for overjoyed. They preferred punitive responses mostly for anger, least for overjoyed. A magnify response was chosen mostly for sadness and least

for fear. A neglect response was preferred mostly for overjoyed and least for fear. Mothers also preferred to use a distract response mostly for sadness and least for overjoyed (see Table III).

In Turkey, mothers' general responses to children's emotions did not differ according to the children's gender. The only gender difference can be seen for children's sadness; for sadness, mothers preferred a magnifying response significantly more for boys ($M=3.94$, $SD=.88$) than for girls ($M=3.81$, $SD=.94$), $t(865) = 2.14$, $p < .05$.

Table III. Descriptive statistics of subscales of the RCE

| | Num. of items | <i>a</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <i>Reward (R)</i> | 12 | .83 | 4.29 | .51 |
| R- sadness | 3 | .63 | 4.49 | .59 |
| R- anger | 3 | .64 | 4.41 | .62 |
| R- fear | 3 | .69 | 4.62 | .54 |
| R- overjoyed | 3 | .52 | 3.65 | .94 |
| <i>Punish (P)</i> | 12 | .84 | 2.69 | .74 |
| P- sadness | 3 | .61 | 2.95 | .95 |
| P- anger | 3 | .54 | 3.14 | .84 |
| P- fear | 3 | .63 | 2.85 | .99 |
| P- overjoyed | 3 | .74 | 1.82 | .94 |
| <i>Magnify (M)</i> | 12 | .79 | 3.08 | .66 |
| M- sadness | 3 | .71 | 3.88 | .91 |
| M- anger | 3 | .54 | 2.84 | .83 |
| M- fear | 3 | .68 | 2.76 | 1.05 |
| M- overjoyed | 3 | .35 | 2.86 | .77 |
| <i>Neglect (N)</i> | 12 | .85 | 1.62 | .54 |
| N- sadness | 3 | .59 | 1.53 | .61 |
| N- anger | 3 | .65 | 1.71 | .70 |
| N- fear | 3 | .65 | 1.42 | .60 |
| N- overjoyed | 3 | .55 | 1.80 | .72 |
| <i>Distract (D)</i> | 12 | .84 | 3.20 | .71 |
| D- sadness | 3 | .57 | 3.49 | .81 |
| D- anger | 3 | .57 | 3.21 | .86 |
| D- fear | 3 | .48 | 3.33 | .81 |
| D- overjoyed | 3 | .55 | 2.75 | .97 |

In order to examine whether demographic information accounted for variance in each type of response, stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed (see Table IV to VIII). For each emotion socialization domain, the following entry format was used: child's age, mother's age, monthly family income, mother's level of education, mother's employment status, birth order of the child, the city where they lived.

Table IV. Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Reward Response (N=868)

| Predictor | | R ² | Adjusted R ² | B | SE B | β |
|-----------|-----|----------------|-------------------------|------|------|--------|
| Step 1 | ME1 | .009 | .008 | -.15 | .05 | -.10** |
| Step 2 | ME1 | .016 | .013 | -.15 | .05 | -.10** |
| | BO2 | | | .13 | .06 | .08* |

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Note. ME1, Mother graduated from middle school; BO2, Child's birth order 3rd or later

In the final regression equation for the rewarding response of mothers, graduating from middle school and having a child with birth order third or later accounted for 1% of the variance in mothers' reward response to their children's emotions. Mothers whose highest education attainment was to have graduated from primary school preferred to use rewarding response more than mothers who graduated from middle school (see Table IV).

Table V. Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Punish Response (N=868)

| Predictor | | R ² | Adjusted R ² | B | SE B | β | |
|-----------|-----|----------------|-------------------------|------|------|--------|--|
| Step 1 | FI | .080 | .079 | -.25 | .03 | -.28** | |
| Step 2 | FI | .092 | .090 | -.20 | .03 | -.23** | |
| | MW | | | .19 | .06 | .12** | |
| Step3 | FI | .99 | .096 | -.19 | .03 | -.22** | |
| | | | | .18 | .06 | .12** | |
| Step4 | MW | .104 | .099 | .19 | .08 | .09* | |
| | ME1 | | | | | | |
| | FI | | | -.18 | .03 | -.21** | |
| | | | | .17 | .06 | .11** | |
| | MW | | | .20 | .08 | .09* | |
| | ME1 | | | .16 | .08 | .07* | |
| | BO2 | | | | | | |

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Note. FI, monthly family income; MW, Mother currently not working; ME1, Mother graduated from middle school; BO2, Child's birth order 3rd or later

The regression analysis for the punitive response of mothers reveals that monthly family income, being unemployed, graduating from middle school, and having a child whose birth order was 3rd or later explained 10% of the variance in mothers' punitive response (see Table V). Monthly family income explained alone 8% of the variance in the punitive response. In addition, high monthly income negatively related to the

use of a punitive response to children's emotions. Moreover, mothers who were not working were more likely to prefer to use a punitive response to their children's emotions than ones who were working.

Table VI. Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Magnify Response (N=868)

| | Predictor | R ² | Adjusted R ² | B | SE B | β |
|--------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|------|------|--------|
| Step 1 | FI | .059 | .058 | -.19 | .03 | -.24** |
| Step 2 | FI | .064 | .062 | -.17 | .03 | -.22** |
| | MA | | | -.01 | .01 | -.08* |

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Note. FI, monthly family income; MA, Mother's age

Monthly family income and mother's age explained 6% of the variance in the magnifying response of mothers. Furthermore, high family income negatively related to mothers' tendency to feel and express similar emotions to their children (see Table VI).

Table VII. Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Neglect Response (N=868)

| | Predictor | R ² | Adjusted R ² | B | SE B | β |
|--------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|------|------|-------|
| Step 1 | ME1 | .022 | .021 | .23 | .06 | .15** |
| Step 2 | ME1 | .028 | .025 | .23 | .06 | .15** |
| | CA | | | .01 | .00 | .08* |
| Step3 | ME1 | .033 | .029 | .21 | .06 | .13** |
| | CA | | | .01 | .00 | .07* |
| | MA | | | -.01 | .00 | -.07* |
| Step4 | ME1 | .039 | .034 | .22 | .06 | .14** |
| | CA | | | .01 | .00 | .07* |
| | MA | | | -.01 | .00 | -.08* |
| | İstanbul | | | .09 | .04 | .08* |

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Note. ME1, Mother graduated from middle school; CA, child's age; MA, Mother's age

The regression analysis for the neglect response of mothers reveals that graduating from middle school, child's and mother's ages, and living in İstanbul explained 3% of the variance in mothers' neglect response. Interestingly, mothers who graduated from middle school were more likely to prefer to use a neglect response than ones who only completed primary school (Table VII).

Table VIII. Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Distract Response (N=868)

| | Predictor | R ² | Adjusted R ² | B | SE B | β |
|--------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------|------|------|-------------|
| Step 1 | FI | .030 | .029 | -.14 | .03 | -.17** |
| Step 2 | FI | .038 | .035 | -.13 | .03 | -.16** |
| | BO2 | | | .19 | .08 | .09* |
| Step3 | FI | .052 | .048 | -.10 | .03 | -.12** |
| | BO2 | | | .30 | .08 | .14** |
| | MA | | | -.02 | .01 | -.13** |
| Step4 | FI | .057 | .052 | -.06 | .04 | -.07 |
| | BO2 | | | .30 | .08 | .14** |
| | MA | | | -.02 | .01 | -.13** |
| | İstanbul | | | -.13 | .06 | -.08* |

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Note. FI, monthly family income; BO2, Child's birth order 3rd or later; MA, Mother's age

In the final regression equation for the distracting response of mothers, monthly family income, having a child whose birth order was 3rd or later, mother's age, and living in İstanbul accounted for 5% of the variance in distracting response of mothers. As seen in Table VIII, monthly family income was no longer a significant contributor after entering the city variable in the equation.

Discussion

This study, for the first time, documented mothers' responses to children's sadness, anger, fear, and being overjoyed in Turkey. Participants were chosen randomly from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The limit of this study would be that only mothers who lived in two large cities in Turkey were included.

We found that mothers accept and offer assistance mostly when their children are sad. In addition, our mothers mostly disapproved and rejected the emotion if their children were angry. Participants preferred to experience the same emotion and reflect it back to their children when their children were sad; and chose to use magnifying response least when their children were afraid of something. Mothers mostly indicated that they do not pay attention to their children when their children are very happy; and they are less likely to neglect their children's fear. We also found that mothers in Turkey mostly preferred to distract their children and de-emphasize the emotion when their children were sad.

In Turkey, mothers' responses to their children's emotions do not differ according to their child's gender. This accords with another finding where in Canada, mothers' responses also did not differ according to the gender of their children (Hastings & De, 2008). However, in terms of sadness; mothers in Turkey preferred to feel parallel to and reflect the same emotion to their children if their boys were sad.

Mothers' rewarding responses were only explained by two variables: mothers' level of education and the child's birth order. Interestingly, the only difference was found between mothers who only completed primary school education and those who continued to complete middle school. Unexpectedly, mothers who only graduated from primary school, or who had no diplomas at all, chose to use rewarding responses more than mothers who graduated from middle school. Moreover, Turkish mothers offered more help and comfort to their third or later born children than for their first born children. In another study, Hastings and De (2008) found that Canadian mothers were less likely to prefer a reward response to their children's anger if their children were older preschoolers.

Punitive responses of mothers to preschoolers' emotions were explained by family income, mother's employment status and level of education, and preschooler's birth order. Higher income connected to a lower level of punitive responses. Families with high income may have less stress factors, and this may be related to their punitive responses. Additionally, working mothers are less likely to choose punitive response than mothers who are not employed. Working mothers may have to plan their time and may prefer to be more patient with their children. Further research is needed to understand why the employment status of mothers is related to their punitive responses.

Feeling the same emotion and reflecting it back to the child was explained mostly by family income. Families on low income were most likely to prefer to use this kind of response. Furthermore, younger mothers chose magnifying response more often than older mothers.

Turkish mothers' neglecting response was explained by their level of education and their age, their children's ages, and the city they lived in. Although the total percentage of the explained variable was low (only 3%), all contributions were significant. Unexpectedly, mothers who graduated from middle school indicated not to pay attention and to respond to their children's emotions more often than ones who graduated from primary school. Mothers are also more likely to choose to neglect their older children's emotions than those expressed by their younger children. Mothers in the larger city of İstanbul reported neglecting responses more than ones living in Ankara and younger mothers preferred to neglect their children's emotions more often than older mothers did.

The response of distracting the child and de-emphasizing the emotion was explained by family income, birth order of the child, mother's age, and the city they lived in. Remarkably, contribution of family income was not significant anymore after the city variable was entered in the equation. Mothers also prefer to use a distracting response for their third or later children than their first born children.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the Turkish version of the RCE questionnaire can document mothers' responses to their children's emotions of sadness, anger, fear, and being overjoyed. Our findings were obtained using a scale that can help researchers investigating the relation between mothers' emotion-specific socialization strategies and young children's emotional competence. The study therefore adds to our understanding of emotion socialization.

To further investigate mothers' responses to their children's different emotions in Turkey, new studies could be conducted with mothers who live in different locations to the ones studied. To compare mothers' responses, international studies would also be useful. Such studies can help researchers investigating responses of mothers from different cultural backgrounds. Future research should also consider additional variables in motherhood or mothers' emotional competence, so as to more fully understand mothers' emotion socialization strategies.

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