

Patterns of Maternal Responses to Child's Distress, Misbehavior, and Exploration Attempts in the Netherlands, Poland, and Turkey

Nebi Sumer¹, Ozlu Aran², Aysenur Oner¹, Katarzyna Lubiewska³ & Karolina Glogowska⁴
¹Sabancı University, ²University of Denver, ³University of Warsaw, ⁴Kazimierz Wielki University



Introduction



Parental responsiveness is the precursor of healthy child development and quality of attachment bonding (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Pluess & Belsky, 2010) though the patterns of maternal responsiveness have both universal and culture specific aspects (e.g., Mesman et al., 2012). Past work suggest that how mothers response to their children's (1) distress signals, (2) misbehaviors, and (3) exploration attempts are the most critical indicators of responsiveness in many cultures (Bornstein et al., 1992). Therefore, we investigated how mothers respond to the hypothetical situations representing these three specific child behaviors in the Netherlands, Poland, and Turkey using qualitative method in a cross-cultural ("Combination of emic and etic approach to parenting and attachment")*.

Method



We first conducted focus groups in Turkey, Poland, and the Netherlands with mothers who had children between ages of 8 and 12.



Using the answers of participants in the focus group, we created a semi-structure interview that would reveal both etic and emic characteristics of maternal behaviors in each cultural context.



In the third phase of the study, a total of 90 mothers, 30 from each country, answered semi-structured interviews. They were presented with three hypothetical situations in which their child was *distressed*, showing *misbehavior*, and performing an *exploration attempt* (See Table 1,2, & 3).



Answers to interviews were then coded by two independent researchers into the behavioral categories.

Results

Table 1. Stressful Situation

When your child comes back home tries to hide (s)he is upset because of something that happened at school and you notice it. What do you usually do in this situation?	TR	PLP	NLN
try to understand what went wrong and support them	23	23	24
insist to learn the reason	4	??	13

Table 2. Misbehavior

Imagine a situation when your child did something not socially accepted (e.g. shown disrespect to you or an older person). What do you usually do in this situation?	TRTR	PL	NL
verbal warning and reprimand	30	14	24
anger expression in response to misbehavior	4	7	14

Table 3. Exploration

Imagine a situation that your child is just busy with a complicated puzzle. (S)he is looking at the instruction with high interested in building it up, but has no idea how to cope with the task. What do you usually do in this situation?	TRT	PLPL	NLN
autonomy support	15	8	22
frequency of orientating/guiding practice to support child's exploration	11	10	15

Discussion

In the distressed situation, majority of mothers in three countries reported that they would first try to understand what went wrong and then support them. However, their ways of inquiring the reason of the distress differed. Regarding misbehavior, verbal warning and reprimand were the most common responses among Turkish and Dutch but not Polish mothers. Anger expression in response to misbehavior was higher only among Dutch mothers. Regarding exploration, autonomy support was the highest among Dutch mothers. The frequency of orientating/guiding practice to support child's exploration was similar across countries. Results suggested that cultural differences were more evident in the misbehavior and the exploration situations compared situations in which children were distressed, though the similarities are more common than the differences across cultures.

References

- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bornstein, M. H., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Tal, J., Ludemann, P., Toda, S., Rahn, C. W., . . . Vardi, D. (1992). Maternal responsiveness to infants in three societies: The United States, France, and Japan. *Child Development, 63*(4), 808-821.
- Mesman, J., Van IJzendoorn, M. H., Behrens, K., Carbonell, O. A., Carcamo, R., et al. (2016). Is the ideal mother a sensitive mother? Beliefs about early childhood parenting in mothers across the globe. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 40*, 385-397.
- Pluess, M. ve Belsky, J. (2010). Differential susceptibility to parenting and quality child care. *Developmental Psychology, 46*, 379-390. doi:10.1037/a0015203.