

A Review on Parenting in The Mediterranean Countries

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The countries in the Mediterranean region are characterized by a great deal of ethnic, religious, cultural and historical diversity. However, some prevalent commonalities make up a homogeneous background which is projected onto the parental beliefs and child-rearing practices in the countries in this region. In this study it was aimed to question whether the characteristics shown by various research studies related parenting indicate typical of the Mediterranean culture. In the first part of the article a general review on parenting based on different theoretical approaches and paradigms was conducted. In the second part of the article the specific research on mother-child interaction in Mediterranean countries, such as Turkey, Y Italy, Spain, and Egypt were examined. Characteristics shown by the research studies on parenting that are examined in this study indicate typical of the Mediterranean culture. Traditional family structure where obedience, dependence, loyalty and empathy to others are important factors promoting interdependency among family members in Mediterranean countries regarded in this study. Material interdependence is also reflected in social values and in the aspirations of the parents for their children in this culture. These family pattern, parenting attitudes and behaviors and the expected values and personality characteristics from children fluctuate according to children' gender and families' socio-economic levels.

Keywords: parenting, mediterranean region, parenting beliefs.

Akdeniz Ülkelerinde Çocuk Yetiştirme Üzerine İnceleme

Akdeniz bölgesinde yer alan ülkelerde uzun yıllar boyunca farklı etnik kökenlere, dini inançlara, değişik kültürel yapı ve örüntülere sahip birey ve gruplar yer almıştır. Fakat bahsedilen bölgede yer alan ülkeler arasında coğrafi, fiziki, sosyal ve kültürel benzerliklerin varlığı göz ardı edilemeyecek kadar fazladır. Tüm bu benzerlikler Akdeniz bölgesinde yer alan ülkelerde yaşayan ailelerin çocuk yetiştirme tutumlarına, ebeveyn inançlarına, çocuklardan beklentilerine dolayısıyla da anne-çocuk ilişki yapı ve örüntülerine yansımaktadır. Akdeniz ülkelerinde gözlemlenen kültürel benzerliklerin anne-çocuk ilişkilerinin yapısına ve işleyişine etkileri kaçınılmaz olacaktır. Bu çalışmada adı geçen bölgedeki ülkelerin coğrafi ve kültürel benzerliklerinin ve örtüşen aile yapısı ve dinamiklerinin çocuk yetiştirmeye ilişkin tutum ve davranışlara yansımaları incelenmiş ve bu bağlamda ortak bir örüntüden bahsedilip bahsedilemeyeceği sorgulanmıştır. Çalışmanın ilk bölümünde genel olarak çocuk yetiştirmeyi ele alan çalışmalarda benimsenen teorik yaklaşımlar ve paradigmlar özetlenmiştir. Çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde Akdeniz bölgesinde yer alan Türkiye, İtalya, İspanya, Mısır ülkelerinde belirtilen konuda gerçekleştirilmiş bazı çalışmalar taranmış ve çocuk yetiştirme bağlamında benzer ve farklı örüntüler olup olmadığı sorgulanmıştır. Yapılan incelemelerde Akdeniz bölgesinde bulunan bu çalışmaya dahil edilen ülkelerde geleneksel aile yapısı içinde itaat, çocuk yetiştirme sürecinde bağlılık, sadakat ve empati değerlerinin gelişiminin aile bireyleri arasında karşılıklı bağlılığı oluşturan temel örüntüler olarak ön palan çıktığı belirlenmiştir. Belirtilen aile yapısı, ebeveyn tutum ve davranışları ile çocuklardan sahip olunması beklenen değer ve kişilik özelliklerinin çocukların cinsiyetleri ve ailelerin sosyal ekonomik yapılarına göre değişimler göstermekte oldukları görülmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: çocuk yetiştirme, akdeniz bölgesi, ebeveyn inançları

The cultural factors play a role on the course of child development, mother's aspirations for the child, parental beliefs and child-rearing practices, short and long term goals of parents for their children which determine the nature of parenting. Harness & Super (2002) emphasize that parenting is culturally constructed. Historical features of cultures influence the ways in which parents care for children in a society, which in turn have lasting psychological and physiological effects on members of that society (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). There is strong empirical evidence that parental goals shape how parents and children interact. Studies comparing families in North America and Europe have found that across these continents parents tend to emphasize different values or characteristics in their children (Harkness, Super, & van Tijen, 2000) and thus interpret child behavior differently.

Gender roles, child socialization, close knit familial kinship and communal networks, social interaction patterns and solidarities are frequently encountered dispositions among people living in the countries in Mediterranean region (Kagıtcıbaşı, 1990). These commonalities justify a comparative discussion of research parenting across the above mentioned countries. Family and institution of marriage have both undergone a process of profound changes where a number of different dimensions of transformation of the socio-economic and cultural values converge. The changing role of women in these societies and their relation to formal work and family responsibilities seem to shape the parental behaviors observed the last decade.

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Research on Mother-Child Interaction

Theoretical Perspectives on Child Development In Multicultural Framework

In order to evaluate the research findings on parenting, the innate characteristics, basic needs and disposition of children in the course of development are to be considered. Cultural values and attitudes regulate the child-rearing values, developmental expectation and emotional orientations of the care takers. In addition, when studying mother-child interactions we should consider the child development theories that are instrumental in child socialization. *Biological theories* emphasize the biological basis of child development. Brazelton (1989) focused on the interactive nature of mother-infant relation, especially emphasizing infant's contribution. The various individual differences exhibited at birth are being recognized to be sources of infant behavior, which shape parental behavior. Wolf (1996) suggested that certain behavioral differences of different populations may arise from genetics rather than culture. On the other hand, *Social Learning Theories* are concerned with how behavior is modified through specific social experiences. Finally, *Ecological Theories* recognize the role of context in which children live and are brought up (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). When parenting is in question the child's behavior or characteristics are believed to influence both the parent and the contexts in which the interaction occurs. The child's experiences with the environment in turn influence the child's subsequent behavior and characteristics. This theory is functional in explaining how a child's development takes place within a series of contextual levels.

Socialization Models of Child Development

LeVine (1977) suggests that the cultural values are derived from not only situations that are specific to child care but also from broad orientations associated with the social system and its institutional goals, such as interpersonal relations, personal achievement and social solidarity. Multicultural research on child development - socialization and parenting brings forth the importance of child-rearing practices to adaptation and to the survival of practices. Similarly, *Whiting's Model of Psycho-Social Learning of Childhood* suggests that learning environments of childhood would have to include physical, economic, cultural, and interpersonal factors (Whiting, 1977).

Parents' Belief Systems and Cultural Value

Masten & Coastworth (1998) suggest that parents evaluate their children based on the knowledge about child development that are culturally transmitted from one generation to the next. Miller (1988) & Goodnow (1988) stated that parents' belief systems about child development are culturally constructed rather than individually. The parents assimilate the culturally valued perceptions of competence and use the kind of disciplinary techniques and parenting that increase valued outcomes in children. Belief systems may be an adequate

way to cluster maternal behaviors rather than the study of specific behaviors.

Parenting Styles in Child-Rearing Practices

The most important and direct influence on children's development and well being is the parenting styles they receive. One of the parenting models was developed by Belsky (1984), who suggested that parenting is determined by three major influences. These are parental characteristics and resources; the social context in which the family lives, and the support available in this context; and characteristics of children. She proposed that parental characteristics as well as the spousal relationships are the most potent source for competent parenting. On the other hand, Baumrind (1967) suggests three types of mother - child interaction according to her use of disciplinary practices and attitudes: *authoritarian*, *authoritative* and *permissive*. Authoritarian mothers prefer to control their children through absolute set of rules rarely providing justifications to their children. However, authoritative mothers exercise firm control through directives resisting reactions from their children. The permissive mothers avoid exercising control, use little punishment, act in an accepting positive way toward their children's actions and generally let them regulate their own activities without interfering.

Review of Research on Parenting in The Mediterranean

Research on Parenting in Turkey

Turkish family can be described as somewhat traditional, authoritarian, and patriarchal although there are variations among regions. The social context of the Turkish family system is based on close group ties, accountability, loyalty, and interdependence rather than autonomy and individualism (Okman-Fisek, 1982). Most adolescents, even over the age of 18 (60.9% of the total population) live with their parents and this situation is regarded as normal. Families in Turkish culture meet youngsters' psychological needs (such as dependency) for many years (Gulerce, 1996). Mocan-Aydin (2000, p.284) also supports this view and states that emotional dependency is normally encouraged and is perceived as "the manifestation of being a good son or daughter who respects and cares for the elders of the family" . Many families expect their children to look after them when they become old. This attitude may be contributing to the development of familial and communal values of mutual support rather than individualistic achievement (Kagiticbasi, 2000). In addition, the long-term socialization goals of Turkish mothers change according to educational backgrounds. Low-educated mothers emphasize the importance of relatedness and obedience more than high-educated mothers; and high-educated mothers stress autonomy and self-enhancement as desirable characteristics more than low-educated mothers did. However, both autonomy and relatedness are the main socialization goals of low and high educated Turkish mothers (Yağmurlu, Çıtlak, Dost & Leyendecker, 2009).

Similar trends are observed in “modern” and “traditional” Turkish family patterns. Emotional relatedness and conformity are observed as common expected child characteristics in both family patterns (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). Similar parenting patterns can be observed in children’s identity statuses. Children who perceive their parents as authoritative are more foreclosed than those who perceived their parents as neglectful (Çakır & Aydın, 2005). The reason for this can be that authoritative attitudes tend to lead adolescents into establishing strong identification with their parents and internalization of their parents’ rules and values (Waterman, 1982). Consequently, authoritative attitudes are likely to encourage identity foreclosure status. Okman-Fişek (1982, p.302) reported that “increased democratization in discipline among middle-class parents was not accompanied by increased training for autonomy, in contrast to Western studies, in which the two child-rearing attitudes have been generally found to co-vary”. In other words, while Turkish parents show both acceptance/involvement and control/supervision, they foster dependence in their children by restricting their autonomy and self-direction. This may be considered a culturally modified attitude of authoritative parenting or soft-authoritarian parenting.

In Turkey we can observe significant differences within parenting attitudes and behaviors according to socio-economic levels of parents. The Turkish mothers from high SES tended to receive high scores on encouraging verbalization and equality, rejection of the housewife role and parental conflict. But the mothers of low SES supported the dimension of extreme mothering and protection; discipline and obedience (Lecompte & Ozer, 1978). Furthermore upper SES status, and urban residence or upward social mobility from rural to urban were associated with affection orientation within mother – child relations, which was associated with modern attitudinal tendencies and values among youth. On the contrary, lower SES, rural residence or lack of mobility were associated with a control (strict discipline) orientation within mother – child relations, which was associated with traditional tendencies among the youth (Kagıtcıbası, 1975). The child’s dependence rather than independence was valued in the Turkish society which is explainable by the economic value of children in the context of underdevelopment (Kagıtcıbası, 1980).

The Turkish family is characterized by emotional closeness (Kagıtcıbası & Sunar, 1992). The intra - family relationships are based on role differentiation. The roles of husband and wife are quite sharply distinct. Physical care of children is women’s work. Fathers play the role of distant authority that establishes strict rules of conduct for children. There is greater intimacy between mother and child than between father and child. Husband is the ultimate authority and is entitled to make all decisions for the family. Woman’s status is lower than man’s. Her status starts to increase only after she gives birth to a boy, and reaches the peak of status when she becomes a mother - in - law. In Turkey there is a strict sex role differentiation in child rearing practices of parents. Some independence and

aggressiveness are permitted in boys; dependence and obedience are expected from girls. But parents don’t prefer to encourage interdependence for both girls and boys. As girls become older restrictions of parents become stricter.

Research on Mother- Child Interaction in Italy

Italy is characterized by close, often intense, familial relationships (Claes, 1998). Currently the modal number of children in Italian families is one. Children typically live with their families until early adulthood, due in part to the delayed age of marriage, low rates of pre-marital relations, and difficulties finding employment, and thus the transition to adulthood is delayed (Bonino, Cattelino, & Ciairano, 2005). In addition to age, males and females may respond differently to parental control, though gender differences might be more evident in cultures such as Italy where traditional sex roles are common.

New (1988) suggests that strategies of infant in care in Italy may reflect all three of the concerns itemized in LeVine (1988) hierarchy and the fact that it is particularly true in societies undergoing major transitions. The community life showed a high level of activity, family having primacy and strictly conforming to traditional sex roles among adult men and women. Females were assigned to the domestic life and males assumed the role of wage earners, frequenting the town center and the local liquor bars. Children considered as ties between husbands and wives who were allowed no special activities, such as play. During outdoor excursions toddlers were greeted, admired and encouraged to display how to say goodbye and how to give a kiss etc. Infant care environments consisted of a variety of individuals other than mother and infant. Infants almost spent no time alone and besides the mother others were always present. In spite of the predominantly nuclear-family households, grandparents, extended family members, friends and neighbors were also common to the infant care scene, showing the public quality typical of community social norms.

Studies of Italian child-rearing practices by Goddini & Goddini (1970) compared Italian rural and urban children with Anglo-Saxon middle class children living in Rome. They reported that Italian children were more frequently breastfed for a longer period of time and frequently slept in the same bedroom with their parents.

The comparative study reported by New & Richman (1996) is based on the framework LeVine’s parental goals theory. This comparative study of maternal beliefs and infant care was carried out in central Italy and a suburb of New England in U.S. The U.S infants were found to spend much of their time in either intense interactions or isolation. One third of the time they were observed alone with their mothers in a baby proofed environment with many objects but few people. Infants had their own rooms, where their toys and other personal belongings were kept. The belief that infant care was primarily mother’s responsibility was acknowledged by all sample mothers. Other than mothers, care was provided by babysitters or grandmothers. Siblings only took part in object play or social stimulation, but not in child-care. In

the Italian sample all infants shared a bedroom with the parent during the first year. The infants had no time alone or space to themselves and rarely were alone with their mother. They were more likely to be in groups of people observing and interacting with many people. Most mothers reported daily visits to the extended family members. High level of social activity dominated their lives with very little solitary activity. In a more recent study Claes, Lacourse, Bouchard, & Perucchini (2003) reported that the country of origin discriminated for most of the parental practice dimensions. Canadian adolescents considered their parents to be more tolerant and rated them as using less punitive measures when rules were broken. Canadian parents also seemed to adopt comparable norms for boys and girls, which could be interpreted as a form of sexual egalitarianism, whereas Italian and French parents appeared less tolerant towards girls. Italian adolescents reported strong emotional bonds with each parent, and also identified more conflicts in their relationships with parents.

Research on Parenting in Spain

In cultural context, Spain has been described as horizontal collectivistic (Gouveia, Clemente, Espinosa, 2003; Triandis, 2001). In this type of context, egalitarian rather than hierarchical relations are emphasized, and strictness in parental practices would not have the positive meaning they would have in other contexts such as the United States—characterized by vertical individualism—or Asian cultures—characterized by vertical collectivism. Whereas in these latter contexts, where hierarchical relations are emphasized more, parental strictness practices would be more effective (Rudy & Grusec, 2006), in horizontal collectivistic countries these practices would be more ineffective or unnecessary for effective socialization (Gouveia Clemente, Espinosa, 2003; Martínez & García, 2007).

Garcia & Gracia (2009) reported that both the indulgent and authoritative parenting styles were associated with better outcomes than authoritarian and neglectful parenting. This finding supported the idea that in Spain the optimum style of parenting is the indulgent one, as adolescents' scores in the four sets of youth outcomes were equal or better than the authoritative style of parenting. The research carried out in Spain compared the parental beliefs among traditional, modern and paradoxical parents. Different educational levels related to parental ideas on the development and upbringing of the children is one of the main issues in parenting. Since these ideas are closely related to the way in which parents stimulate their children at early ages.

Within this regard Palacios, Gonzelas, & Moreno, (1992) investigated parent-child interactions centering on different situations (constructing a pyramid, reading a story, playing with everyday household materials) and stimulation in the home. They reported that in story reading situations a low level of distancing (telling) was found to be predominant in all parents who are expected given the age of children. They also expressed that the frequency of asking increases from traditional to

paradoxical parents and from these to modern. High educated Spanish mothers asked their children more questions and maintained this conduct more consistently throughout the interactions. The mentioned differences within mother-child interaction were seen between different cultures. U.S, France and Japan were compared in respect to mothers' responsiveness to their infants. Japanese mothers were found to be more responsive when their infants were looking at other people compared to the other two samples. (Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackurn, 1984 cited in Holden, 1997, p.54). This may be due to interdependence of social practices favored by the Japanese culture.

Research on Mother-Child Interaction in Egypt

People in Egypt like other Arab culture live in an authoritarian and collective cultural system according to which the family (extended and nuclear) is more important than the individual. Independence and self-actualization are not encouraged but rather are seen as a sort of egoism. Within this system, the psychological individuation of adolescents is not accomplished and the individual's identity continues to be enmeshed in the collective one into adulthood (Dwairy & Menshar, 2006). Some reports indicated that physical and emotional abuses are widespread styles of parenting in Egypt (Saif El-Deen, 2001), especially among low class, uneducated parents, and larger or dysfunctional families. Generally speaking, authoritarianism is harsher toward females than males and they have less choices and options in life (Abd Elkader, 1986; Shabib, 2001). Their lives are limited almost exclusively to the space within the borders of home and family life. Conversely, boys enjoy a wider space of mobility and more choices and options. They are therefore more able to manoeuvre within social authority and to find avenues for self-expression. In addition, with regard to females authoritarianism focuses on modesty, mobility, and sexual behavior, while with regard to males it focuses on social duties and responsibility (Mohamad, 1985, cited in Dwairy & Menshar, 2006). In addition, girls are punished more harshly than boys. In extreme cases immodest girls may be killed in the name of saving the so-called honor of the family (Barakat, 1993; Dwairy, 2004). Despite the strict socialization toward female Arab children and adolescents, and because females are more submissive, some studies indicated that authoritarian parenting and physical punishments are applied more toward boys than girls (Dwairy, 2004).

In general most women in Egypt live in extended families and expect to maintain intimate ties with their children even after when they are adults. They expect their sons will continue to live with them after they are married. They are concerned that the children show loyalty to the family, success in school is not important whereas well-paid job near the village is sought after. For the daughters a good marriage at an early age is desirable, education being unnecessary. The mothers train their daughters teaching them household skills and ensuring they have virtuous reputation. The educated mothers expect their children regardless of sex to be professionals

with high levels of education. Child rearing traits of these educated women are: weaning children early, sleeping in a separate bed, holding infants less, encouraging children to play with manipulative toys, using verbal discipline to internalize norms encouraging children to be ego oriented. The uneducated women raise their children to be dependent on the mother and protective and nurturing toward younger siblings, with primary goals being loyal to their family whereas the educated women train their children to be self-motivated achievers (Brink, 1990). The educated mothers in the village have a child-rearing style that is highly verbal using positive reinforcement to gain children's' compliance. In addition, in Egypt it is observed that in rural communities the authoritarian style is more predominant in the parenting of male adolescents, while the authoritative style is more predominant in the parenting of female adolescents. In urban communities, on the other hand, the authoritarian style was more predominant in the parenting of female adolescents. The connectedness of all female adolescents with their family was stronger than that of male adolescents. The connectedness of girls was found to be more emotional and financial in villages and to be more functional in town. Female adolescents reported a higher frequency of psychological disorders. Mental health was associated with authoritative parenting, but not with authoritarian parenting. It seems that authoritarian parenting within an authoritarian culture is not as harmful as within a liberal culture (Dwairy & Menshar, 2006).

Conclusion

In general we can say that the characteristics shown by the research studies examined in this article represent the typical of the Mediterranean culture. Traditional family structure where obedience, dependence, loyalty and empathy to others are important factors promoting interdependence among family members. Maternal interdependence is also reflected in social values and in the aspirations of the parents for their children. Authority structure demanding traits such as respect and care for elders, compliance, cooperation and group integration rather than competition are highly valued for both girls and boys as children and as adults. In contrast to many Western societies which reflect underlying "individualist" value related to acquisition of individual competence and independence giving way to competition, the Mediterranean countries with traditional cultural groups exhibit more "collectivist" and "interdependent" cultural values (Rosenthal & Roer-Strie, 2000). In these societies collective goals such as learning to live in harmony with one another, participation in social events, obedience to authority and cooperative orientation are more highly valued. The review of the research studies examined in this article introduces the general trend in Mediterranean culture. However, we can see some fluctuations in parenting attitudes and behaviors within the countries representing mentioned culture. Especially socio-economic level is an important variable that can explain these fluctuations. Because we can observe significant differences between parenting attitudes and behaviors of mothers and fathers having low and high education levels within many countries in this region. In addition, the gender of the children is another important

variable in these fluctuations regarding parenting attitudes and behaviors of parents in those countries. For example with regard to the effect of urbanization and sex differences on parenting style, Dwairy & Menshar (2006) showed that the parenting styles in Egypt applied to male and female adolescents in the villages seem to be reversed in town. In the villages, the authoritarian style was applied more in the parenting of male than of female adolescents, while the authoritative style was applied more to female than to male adolescents. In town, on the other hand, the authoritarian style was applied more in the parenting of female than of male adolescents.

When child-rearing practices are reviewed the two different perspectives were concluded: the child's developmental perspective which refers to promote positive child development and parental perspective which refers to need for child care that support parents' beliefs and aspiration. Attitude toward child care vary according to parents' beliefs about who should responsible raising young children, attitudes toward work and family roles. The cultural values and expectations of parents in Mediterranean countries are in marked contrast with those values of Western culture (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2000). The latest theoretical formulations suggest that the cultures themselves provide the clues in understanding socialization practices. Within this framework an understanding of specific parental beliefs, perceptions of children and roles attributed to them, folk beliefs and practices, religious practices, parental strategies, fertility rates and a set of socio demographic factors serve as a guideline to study the context of parenting.

This study has some limitations. The number of countries presenting Mediterranean region is so small. In order to gain more comprehensive view on the commonalities regarding parenting in Mediterranean region more number of countries should be included in the study. In addition, further research including additional variables such as globalization and economical crises at the beginning of 21st century observed in the world and demographic trends in this region can be executed to explain the dynamic of parenting in this region.

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