



THE STUDY OF VARIATIONS OF PARENTING STYLESⁱ

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Abstract:

The current study investigated parenting styles with respect to various demographics. The study sample was made up of 235 preschoolers aged 48-72 months attending to 2 state-funded preschools in İstanbul. Demographics Form and Parenting Attitude Scale were used for the data collection. The scale was completed by the parents. Independent sample t-test was used for the data with a normal distribution. The results showed that parenting styles did not differ by child gender, the number of siblings, maternal age, education and working status, and paternal age and working status. The results also indicated that parents tend to be more protective and permissive towards their first-born children and that the fathers younger than 35-years-old had a more democratic style compared to the fathers who were 36 and older. Longer preschool attendance was associated with less overprotective and less democratic parenting attitudes.

Keywords: parenting styles, overprotective attitude, democratic attitude, permissive attitude, authoritarian attitude

1. Introduction

Family is a key component of child development. It acts as an agent in raising children conforming to social norms and values and helping them become individuals (Aydoğdu & Dilekmen, 2016; Şahin & Neriman, 2012).

Any person who touches a child's life molds while the child does the same for anyone around him/her. In his ecological theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that these environmental systems are inextricably tied to each other. The most immediate surroundings of a child, including family and parental attitudes are described as the

ⁱ Part of this article was presented in Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University Educational Research Congress (FSMVÜ-EAK 2020) held between 9-10 May 2020.

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microsystem, which is the most important system. Parental attitudes are parenting behaviors and quality that define parent-child interactions in various cases (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Parental attitudes are shaped and effected by various factors, especially demographic characteristics. Among the parenting styles, democratic attitude is the most beneficial one to child development. The other attitudes prevent children from having the experiences they need for their social and emotional development and becoming competent individuals and adults (Alabay, 2017).

Democratic parenting involves a respectful, supportive and reassuring attitude towards children (Çağdaş, 2002) where the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors are made clear. Children are free and recognized within these boundaries (Seçer, Çeliköz, & Songül, 2008). Democratic attitude let children have a voice and speak out what they think. Parents having a democratic attitude provide their children with feedback and reinforce their children's positive behavior (Pektaş & Demircioğlu, 2017). Permissive parenting is a type of parenting style where children have too much freedom and where parents tend to be too much tolerant, which leaves children uncontrolled and neglected (Baumrind, 1966). Permissive parents are often child-centered, but they do not allow their children face the negative consequences of their behavior. Children are the very center of the family and all the other members follow the child's demands without questioning. In other words, there are no limits, or the standards of behavior are set based on child demands. It becomes hard to predict how the child behave. Overprotective parenting style involves too much control and caring. Overprotective parents often do not let their children meet their own needs as they usually do the tasks that children are supposed to do (Çağdaş, 2002). Overprotective parenting involves too much control that may have a negative impact on child development. It is hard for children to gain independence and have individual experiences. Authoritarian parenting style is characterized by strict rules and obedience without questioning anything. Therefore, intolerance and lack of understanding dominate the family atmosphere (Yavuzer, 1995). The rules are set by parents and children are expected to obey those rules without questioning. Parents with an authoritarian attitude are less likely to respect their children's wishes and preferences and often resort to punishment (Baumrind, 1966). Democratic parenting styles were associated with higher levels of social-emotional adjustment among children whereas children growing up with authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parents had low levels of social-emotional adjustment (Erkan, 2018). Authoritarian parents often restrict their children and hinder their development when they want to teach them what is wrong and right (Şahin, Karabay, & Demir, 2017).

Children who have parents with negative attitudes tend to develop withdrawal or shyness as they grow missing the opportunities where they learn to be independent (Ural, 2018) while some children may grow into extremely authoritarian, manipulative, irresponsible or spoiled adults (Özyürek & Şahin, 2005).

The aim of the present study is to investigate the variations of parenting styles by parental and child-related characteristics. Therefore, the following research questions are addressed:

- 1) Do parenting styles differ by child gender?
- 2) Do parenting styles differ by the number of siblings?
- 3) Do parenting styles differ by birth order?
- 4) Do parenting styles differ by the duration of preschool attendance?
- 5) Do parenting styles differ by mothers' age?
- 6) Do parenting styles differ by mothers' educational background?
- 7) Do parenting styles differ by mothers' work status?
- 8) Do parenting styles differ by fathers' age?
- 9) Do parenting styles differ by fathers' educational background?
- 10) Do parenting styles differ by father's work status and the type of work they have?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The current study has a qualitative design with a relational approach in order to better understand the phenomena by investigating the links between variables where the beliefs, opinions, considerations and qualities are identified (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2012).

2.2. Participants

The study sample is made up of 235 preschoolers aged 48-72 months attending to 2 state-funded preschools in İstanbul during the Fall and Spring term in 2019-2020. Participants were selected based on criterion sampling, which is a strategy of purposeful sampling. In an investigation, observation units may consist of persons, events, objects or situations of a particular nature (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). In the current study, having a child aged 48-72 months, having a typically developing child and volunteering to participate were specified as the main criteria.

After getting ethics approval for the current study, preschool teachers were informed about the aim of the study. 202 of the forms were filled by the mothers (%86) and the rest 32 forms were filled by the fathers. 222 children (%94,5) lived with their parents whereas 13 children (%5,5) lived with a single parent. There are 109 girls (%46,4) and 126 boys (%53,6) in the sample. 60 of the children were 5 years-old (%25,5) while 175 of them were 6 years-old (%74,5). 85 of the children (%36,2) do not have any siblings whereas 150 children (%63,8) had at least 1 sibling. 139 children (%59,1) were the first child in their families while 95 children (%40,4) were the second or later child. 123 mothers (%52,3) were under 35 whereas 112 mothers (%47,7) were 36 or older. 70 of the fathers (%29,8) were under 35 whereas 165 fathers (%70,2) were 36 or older. The monthly income for 129 of the households (%54,9) was 5000 TL or less. It was 5000 TL or more for 106 families (%45,1). 126 of the mothers (%53,6) were graduates of primary, elementary or high-school while 109 of them (%46,4) were graduates of higher education. 133 of the fathers (%56,6) were graduates of primary, elementary or high-school whereas 102 of them (%43,4) were graduates of higher education. 122 of the mothers (%51,9) were

unemployed and 113 of the mothers (%48,1) had a job. 90 fathers were self-employed (%38,3) and 145 of the fathers (%61,7) were employees.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Demographics Form and Parenting Attitude Scale were used for the data collection.

2.3.1 Demographics Form

Developed by the researchers, it aims to collect demographic data from the participating children and parents. It was completed by the parents.

2.3.2 Parenting Attitude Scale (PAS)

Developed by Demir and Şendil (2008), it aims to evaluate the parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers towards their children aged between 2-6 years old. The scale consists of 46 items and 4 dimensions, which are Authoritative, Authoritarian, Overprotective and Permissive Attitudes. This scale was collected on 420 parents who had children aged between 2-6 years old from low, middle and high SES households. Another scale for parenting attitudes was used for 56 parents to test the construct validity. Cronbach's alphas for the internal consistency of the democratic, authoritarian, overprotective, and permissive subdimensions were .83, .76, .75, and .74, respectively. The scale was completed by the parents.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data collected with the demographics form and Parenting Attitude Scale completed by the mothers were analyzed with IBM SPSS software. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to verify the normality by controlling skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Mean, median and mode were used as measures of central tendency and the spread of scores in the data set were checked. The skewness and kurtosis coefficients ranged between -1,96 and +1, 96 (Büyüköztürk, 2018) and the data had a normal distribution. Independent sample t-test was applied to the groups with normal distribution.

3. Findings

Table 1: Independent samples t-test results
comparing girls and boys on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Child Gender	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
Girls	109	3,58	,298	,167	,867
Boys	126	3,57	,337		
Authoritarian attitude					
Girls	109	3,48	,331	-,500	,618
Boys	126	3,51	,373		
Overprotective attitude					
Girls	109	2,95	,360	,596	,552
Boys	126	2,92	,386		
Permissive attitude					
Girls	109	2,73	,405	-1,299	,195
Boys	126	2,80	,406		

The results comparing girls and boys on parental attitudes show no significant difference between the groups of democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parents ($p > .05$). In other words, parental attitudes do not differ by child gender.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test results
comparing the number of siblings on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Number of Siblings	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
No siblings	85	3,5654	,32816		
At least one sibling	150	3,5843	,31369	-,437	,663
Authoritarian attitude					
No siblings	85	3,4482	,33331		
At least one sibling	150	3,5287	,36257	-1,682	,094
Overprotective attitude					
No siblings	85	2,9847	,36791		
At least one sibling	150	2,9180	,37722	1,314	,190
Permissive attitude					
No siblings	85	2,8209	,42313		
At least one sibling	150	2,7474	,39612	1,333	,184

The results in Table 2 comparing the number of siblings on parental attitudes show no significant difference between the groups of democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parents ($p > .05$). In other words, parental attitudes do not differ by the number of siblings a child has.

Table 3: Independent samples t-test results
comparing birth order on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Birth Order	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
First-borns	139	3,6094	,30721		
Later-borns	95	3,5437	,30862	1,605	,110
Authoritarian attitude					
First-borns	139	3,5108	,36608		
Later-borns	95	3,4874	,33557	,497	,620
Overprotective attitude					
First-borns	139	3,0252	,37438		
Later-borns	95	2,8168	,34042	4,335	,000**
Permissive attitude					
First-borns	139	2,8593	,39963		
Later-borns	95	2,6538	,38723	3,912	,000**

* $p < .01$

The results in Table 3 comparing children's birth order on parental attitudes indicate a significant difference between the parents of first-borns and the parents of later-borns on overprotective and permissive styles ($p < .01$) whereas there was no significant difference observed for democratic and authoritarian parenting styles ($p > .05$).

Table 4: Independent samples t-test results
comparing the duration of preschool attendance on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Preschool attendance	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
Less than a year	106	3,6532	,34729	3,376	,001*
More than a year	129	3,5153	,27891		
Authoritarian attitude					
Less than a year	106	3,5717	,35261	2,878	,004*
More than a year	129	3,4403	,34472		
Overprotective attitude					
Less than a year	106	3,5717	,35261	2,490	,013**
More than a year	129	3,4403	,34472		
Permissive attitude					
Less than a year	106	3,5717	,35261	1,639	,103
More than a year	129	3,4403	,34472		

*p<,01 **p<,05

The results in Table 4 comparing children's attendance to preschool on parental attitudes indicate a significant difference between the parents of children who have attended preschool for less than a year and the parents of children who have attended preschool for more than a year in democratic, authoritarian and overprotective styles ($p < ,01$) whereas there was no significant difference observed for permissive parenting style ($p > ,05$).

Table 5: Independent samples t-test results
comparing mothers' age on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Mother Age	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
Under 35	123	3,5978	,34129	1,026	306
36 or older	112	3,5551	,29116		
Authoritarian attitude					
Under 35	123	3,5089	,35205	,425	,671
36 or older	112	3,4893	,35675		
Overprotective attitude					
Under 35	123	2,9846	,36056	1,829	,069
36 or older	112	2,8955	,38541		
Permissive attitude					
Under 35	123	2,8067	,39292	1,293	,197
36 or older	112	2,7381	,42023		

Table 5 shows that the democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parenting styles do not differ by mothers' age ($p > ,05$).

Table 6: Independent samples t-test results
comparing maternal education on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Maternal Education	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
High-school graduates	126	3,5784	,34898		
College degree	109	3,5764	,28060	,050	,961
Authoritarian attitude					
High-school graduates	126	3,5063	,35637		
College degree	109	3,4917	,35201	,315	,753
Overprotective attitude					
High-school graduates	126	2,9270	,36297		
College degree	109	2,9596	,38828	-,666	,506
Permissive attitude					
High-school graduates	126	2,7672	,42127		
College degree	109	2,7819	,39107	-,275	,784

The results in Table 6 comparing maternal education on parental attitudes show no significant difference between the mothers graduated from high-school and the mothers with a college degree in democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parenting styles ($p > ,05$).

Table 7: Independent samples t-test results comparing
working and unemployed mothers on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Maternal Working Status	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
Unemployed mothers	122	3,5858	,33765		
Working mothers	113	3,5685	,29752	,417	,677
Authoritarian attitude					
Unemployed mothers	122	3,5197	,34989		
Working mothers	113	3,4779	,35800	,905	,367
Overprotective attitude					
Unemployed mothers	122	2,9238	,36682		
Working mothers	113	2,9619	,38320	-,780	,436
Permissive attitude					
Unemployed mothers	122	2,7778	,42110		
Working mothers	113	2,7699	,39248	,148	,883

The results in Table 7 comparing mothers' working status on parental attitudes show no significant difference between unemployed and working mothers in democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parenting styles ($p > ,05$). In other words, whether the mothers work or not do not make a difference in their parenting styles.

Table 8: Independent samples t-test results
comparing fathers' age on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Fathers' Age	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
Under 35	70	3,6739	,32416	3,080	,002*
36 or older	165	3,5365	,30791		
Authoritarian attitude					
Under 35	70	3,5614	,34020	1,754	,081
36 or older	165	3,4733	,35701		
Overprotective attitude					
Under 35	70	2,9729	,33619	,819	,414
36 or older	165	2,9291	,38981		
Permissive attitude					
Under 35	70	2,8286	,38429	1,342	,181
36 or older	165	2,7508	,41486		

*p<,01

Table 8 shows a significant difference between the fathers who are Younger than 35 and the fathers who are 36 or older in democratic parenting style (p<.01). However, there was no significant difference between two groups in authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parenting styles (p> ,05).

Table 9: Independent samples t-test results
comparing paternal education on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Paternal Education	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
High-school graduates	133	3,5781	,33850	,032	,974
College degree	102	3,5767	,29184		
Authoritarian attitude					
High-school graduates	133	3,5331	,36757	1,665	,097
College degree	102	3,4559	,33139		
Overprotective attitude					
High-school graduates	133	2,9436	,36750	,069	,945
College degree	102	2,9402	,38519		
Permissive attitude					
High-school graduates	133	2,8112	,41641	1,606	,110
College degree	102	2,7255	,39048		

The results in Table 9 comparing paternal education on parental attitudes show no significant difference between the fathers graduated from high-school and the fathers with a college degree in democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parenting styles (p> ,05). That is, whether the fathers are graduates of high-school or college is not decisive in adopting a certain parenting style.

Table 10: Independent samples t-test results
comparing self-employed and employee fathers on parental attitudes

Dimensions/Fathers' work status	n	\bar{x}	Ss	t	p
Democratic attitude					
Self-employed	90	3,5399	,32139		
Employee	145	3,6029	,31501	-1,492	,137
Authoritarian attitude					
Self-employed	90	3,4884	,40787		
Employee	145	3,5071	,31294	-,398	,691
Overprotective attitude					
Self-employed	90	2,9789	,39784		
Employee	145	2,9171	,35703	1,243	,215
Permissive attitude					
Self-employed	90	2,7298	,41341		
Employee	145	2,8040	,40086	-1,374	,171

The results in Table 10 comparing self-employed fathers and the fathers working as employees on parental attitudes show no significant difference between two groups in democratic, authoritarian, overprotective and permissive parenting styles ($p > ,05$).

3. Results and Discussion

The current study investigated the variations in parenting styles with respect to child gender, the number of siblings, birth order, preschool attendance, maternal age, education and working status and paternal age, education and working status.

The results showed that parenting styles did not differ by child gender, the number of siblings, maternal age, education and working status, and paternal age and working status. There are various studies both supporting and contradicting the results of the current study. Aydoğdu and Dilekmen (2016) found that parenting styles did not differ by parental age, family type and the number of children in the family. Although parenting styles differed by parental education in authoritarian and permissive dimensions, there was a significant difference in democratic and overprotective parenting styles. Parents adopted a more authoritarian attitude towards boys compared to girls. Alabay (2017) investigated the link between parents' gender, education, income, the number of children, child gender and the parenting styles and observed that unemployed parents were more protective towards their parents and that parents adopted a more authoritarian attitude towards boys. Özyürek and Şahin (2005) found a positive association between mothers' education and their democratic attitude towards their 5 and 6-year-old children whereas fathers' democratic parenting style remained unchanged regardless of educational background. They also stated that more educated parents are less likely to be authoritarian and overprotective. Furthermore, they suggested that parenting attitudes differed by birth order and the number of siblings, Parents having 3 or more children were more likely to show a rather strict attitude towards their children. Atabey (2017) worked with preschoolers and their mothers and found that the democratic attitude differed by child gender whereas overprotective

attitude differed by the duration of preschool attendance, maternal education, maternal working status and mothers' income. On the other hand, birth order, maternal age and the number of children did not make a difference in parenting style. Yukay, Yüksel and Yıldırım-Kurtuluş (2016) identified an association between low-SES and overprotective parenting attitude, which is congruent with our findings. Şahin and Özyürek (2008) stated that maternal attitudes did not differ by maternal age, profession, child gender and birth order while paternal attitudes differed by paternal age, education and the other individuals living in the same household.

The results of the current study indicated that parents tend to be more protective and permissive towards their first-born children. With the first child, parents often have a deeper sense of parenting. The first-born children become a unique emotional experience for them. They might also want to make sure that their child is safe and sound, which might explain their overprotective and permissive behaviors.

The findings suggested that fathers younger than 35-years-old had a more democratic style compared to fathers who were 36 and older. The increasing number of working women has made a shift in fathers' roles. Today, fathers tend to spend more time caring for their children. Fathers often pay more attention to their education, moral and individual development and physical safety whereas mothers are more focused on emotional adaptation and well-being of their children (Güngörmüş, 1998). The fact that young fathers had a more democratic attitude towards their children is important because they are role models for their children.

The results comparing parents whose children attended preschool for less than a year and more than a year showed significant differences in democratic, authoritarian and overprotective attitudes except for permissive parenting style. School is the very basic and fundamental social environment for children's social development helping children become self-reliant and independent individuals. However, when children start school, parents might worry about their children's safety. As children gain more independence by attending school, parents may become less overprotective gradually, which was also supported by Atabey (2017). She found that mothers of preschoolers attending school for three years had less overprotective attitudes compared to the mothers of preschoolers attending school for two years and one year. The mothers of preschoolers attending preschool for two years were also less overprotective to the one-year group. It supports the findings of the current study suggesting that the longer children attend preschool, the less overprotective parents may get.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the present study showed that parenting styles did not differ by child gender, the number of siblings, maternal age, education and working status, and paternal age and working status. The results also indicated that parents tend to be more protective and permissive towards their first-born children and that the fathers younger than 35-years-old had a more democratic style compared to the fathers who were 36 and older.

Longer preschool attendance was associated with less overprotective and less democratic parenting attitudes.

- a) Based on the findings related to paternal age, people might be encouraged to consider having a child at a relatively younger age without much delay.
- b) Parents might be provided with training on parent-child interactions and parenting attitudes.
- c) A large part of the data used in the current study was obtained from mothers. Future studies might collect more data from fathers and compare and contrast mothers' and fathers' attitudes.
- d) Parenting attitudes in different groups of children, especially disadvantaged and with special needs, might be further investigated.

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