

## Summary

# The Effect of Perceived Benefit and Gender Differences on the Relationship Between Parentification and Psychological Symptoms

Duygu Köyden

Sait Uluç

Hacettepe University

In the process of transition from childhood to adulthood, people are expected to take adult responsibilities appropriate to their age. However, this can become a problem if children or adolescents are forced to take their parental responsibilities in an inappropriate manner. Parentification is described as a kind of role reversal in which children have to meet their parents' needs while ignoring their own needs within the family. It is accepted that parentification may negatively affect the child's psychological health in the long-term.

In recent years, the concept of parentification has been redefined under two headings: destructive and constructive parentification (Jurkovic, 1997). The ambiguity of the boundaries between parents and children, the confusion of roles, and the heavy emotional or material burden on the child were accepted as the main indicators of destructive parentification (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper, 2012). Main markers of the constructive parentification, on the other hand, were identified as the recognition and appreciation of the efforts and sacrifices that the child has shown for his or her family. Studies indicated that perceived fairness or perceived benefit of parentification may compensate for the negative effects (Jurkovic, 1997, 1998).

There has been many empirical studies focusing on the relationship between psychological problems and parentification. For example, Hooper et al. (2008, 2011) have shown that psychological disturbances such as depression, anxiety, and somatization can be predicted by emotional parentification (i.e., having to meet the emotional needs of the parent). Jurkovic (1997) argued that parentification negatively affects interpersonal functioning. Moreover, Wells, Glickauf-Hughes and Jones (1999) suggested that dependency and parentification are positively related. Shin and Hecht (2013) pointed out that parentification may be related to later substance use. In one study, Hooper and Wallace (2010) found that

perceived justice constitutes a protective factor in terms of mental health.

In this study, Parentification Inventory, which is commonly used in empirical studies, has been adapted to Turkish language. Secondly, the relationship between psychological symptoms for men and women, and parent focused parentification, sibling focused parentification and perceived benefit were investigated.

### Method

#### Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 301 young adults living in Ankara, whose ages ranged from 18 to 28; 142 of those participants were women (47.2%) and 159 of them were men (52.8%). Participants' maternal education levels were accepted as a socioeconomic status (SES) indicator. One hundred and sixty four participants whose mothers completed less than 8 years of education were classified as low SES (54.5%). A total of 137 of the participants (45.5%) who were educated at high school and above were accepted as high SES. For the 95% of the participants, the number of siblings was seen to be three or less.

#### Measures

The Parenting Inventory was developed by Hooper (2009). It consists of a total of 22 items answered through a retrospective self-report. Participants are asked to score the items on a 5-point Likert-type scale ( $1 = \text{Never}$ ,  $5 = \text{Always}$ ) while thinking of their childhood. The original scale includes three sub-dimensions: Parent-Focused Parenting, Sibling-Focused Parenting, and Perceived Benefits of Parenting. Participants' psychological well-being was assessed by SCL-90 which was developed by Derogatis (1977). The SCL-90 consists of 90 items and contain 10 sub-tests including somatization, obsessive compulsive symptoms, interpersonal

**Address for Correspondence:** Assoc. Prof. Sait Uluç, Hacettepe University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Psychology, Beytepe Campus, Ankara

**E-mail:** psysait@hacettepe.edu.tr

sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid thought, psychotism and supplementary items.

### **Procedure**

The present study was conducted with the permission of the Ethics Committee of Hacettepe University. Volunteered participants filled out a self-report scale under the presence of the first author.

## **Results**

### **Factor Pattern of the Parentification Inventory**

Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to assess the validity of the Parenting Inventory [KMO = (.82) and Bartlett's test,  $\chi^2 = 2097.82$ ,  $df = 231$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. The Turkish form of the inventory was found to be generally consistent with the original form. These three factors (Parent-Focused Parentification, Sibling-Focused Parentification and Perceived Benefit from Parentification) together accounted for 46.93% of the total variance.

### **Observed Differences Based on Gender and SES in the Parentification Inventory**

The results of the analysis showed that the gender main effect was significant (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.95$ ,  $F_{3, 295} = 5.135$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ). The main effect of SES and interaction effect were found to be not significant ( $p > .05$ ). Following analyzes have shown that the significant difference for gender was only in the "Perceived Benefit" subscale ( $F_{1, 297} = 13.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In terms of the perceived benefit, the scores of female participants ( $m = 3.75$ ,  $sd = 0.69$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of male participants ( $m = 3.45$ ,  $sd = 0.71$ ).

### **Relations between Parentification Dimensions and Psychological Symptoms**

Correlation coefficients between the subscale scores of the parentification inventory and SCL-90-R subscales were calculated separately for men and women. The parental focused parentification dimension for women was found to be positively and significantly related to all psychological problems except for the interpersonal sensitivity. The sibling-focused parentification dimension showed significant and positive correlations only with the somatization, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, depression, anxiety and hostility / anger subscales. Finally, it was found that subscales of the perceived benefit dimension were significantly negatively related to all psychological problems. In males, parent-focused parenting dimension was found to have a significant positive correlation only with phobic anxiety scores. The sibling-focused parentification was found to be significantly and positively correlated with somatization, inter-

personal sensitivity, anxiety, phobic anxiety, psychotism, and supplementary scales. Finally, the perceived benefit dimension was found to be significantly and negatively related to all psychological problems.

### **The Role of the Perceived Benefit between Parenting and Psychological Symptoms**

The theoretical model proposed in Figure 1 was evaluated using multiple group analysis method for men and women. When the model fit indexes were examined, it was indicated that structural invariance was provided. In other words, the number of factors and loading patterns for the groups were not different. When the  $\Delta\chi^2$  and  $\Delta CFI$  (comparative fit index) values obtained from the other models were examined, the weak invariance model was significantly different from the structural invariance model and the model was getting worse.

## **Discussion**

In this study, parent-focused parentification (i.e., being a mediator between parents, assuming the role of emotional shelter for parents and relationship patterns such as taking responsibility in important family decisions) has been shown to have a direct disruptive effect on psychological well-being of both women and men. No significant difference was found between parent-focused parentification levels of women and men. However, it was observed that male participants who gave care to their parents showed fewer symptoms. This suggests that girls have more difficulties or more permanent effects when they take parental care.

The increase in the sibling-focused parentification has only raised the somatic symptoms, anger and anxiety. On the other hand, if the female participant perceives this as normal in their social environment, and sees herself as part of a team and feels appreciated, the negative effect of sibling-focused parentification is reversed. This mediation effect of perceived justice was not observed for the male participants.