

Summary

Who is the Parent? Predictors of 12-year-olds' Parentification Behaviors

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Parents have the leading role in every step of the child development, and they are usually the ones in charge of their children's needs. In developmental psychology, the contemporary view on child development concerns the dialectical relationship between children and their parents, which refers to the active role of children in their own development, as well as their effects on their parents' socio-emotional development (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). However, in various cases, children might start to take over the role of caring for their parents, as well. this phenomenon is called as parentification (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Those children learn to behave as if they are the adults who take the responsibility of other family members and they specifically try to meet the needs of their parents. In the field of clinical psychology, parentification has been extensively studied and the results mostly emphasized various negative outcomes for children.

To further investigate the components of parentification, Minuchin and his colleagues (1974) examined types of parentification and expanded the literature by defining two types; emotional and instrumental parentification. The first one, instrumental parentification, is children's participation in the maintenance and endurance of the family, especially for the physical needs (Champion et al., 2009; Hooper, 2008; Jurkovic et al., 1999). The child is responsible for physical duties and errands, which are mostly related to housework and daily regulations. For example, child usually does the instrumental tasks, such as doing housework, cleaning dishes, paying bills, cooking, or shopping (Champion et al., 2009; Hooper, 2007). This type of parentification could be considered as more material and is found more commonly in most of the families in communal samples. The latter, emotional parentification, is defined as the situation in which children try to meet the emotional needs of their parents (Hooper, 2007). In emotional parentifi-

cation, children deal with emotional problems of their parents although it is not a problem directly related to or involving children themselves. These types of behaviors could be exemplified as just talking about the problems or finding solutions to problems of parents (Champion et al., 2009). The general view suggests that emotional parentification threatens children's psychological development in terms of delivering negative child outcomes, because this type of relationship is usually very demanding for children and the needs of parents often exceed the age-appropriate cognitive and emotional capabilities of children (Hooper, 2007). This phenomenon has been studied in dysfunctional family contexts mostly. Many studies have examined children of alcoholic parents (Burnett et al., 2006), addicted parents, sexually abused parents (Barnett & Parker, 1998), parents with chronic medical illnesses, parents with mental illnesses, immigrant families, divorced parents and such (Abraham & Stein, 2013; Champion et al., 2009; Tompkins, 2007). However, previous studies have been criticized for its pathologically focused perspective and the inadequate research examining parentification in the social and cultural context (Chase, 1999; Earley & Cushway, 2002). It appears that there is still insufficient research examining parentification in non-clinical communal samples, and in social and cultural context (Truong, 2001). Therefore, the current study aimed to examine parentification behaviors in cultural context by examining children's within family roles and responsibilities in terms of instrumental and emotional parentification in a nonclinical sample.

The current study mostly focused on child-related variables that might be related to parentification behaviors. Previous literature explained children's self-construal as a possible predictor of parentification behaviors within the family. Since children's self-construals are likely to be shaped by the culture they live in, it seems important to examine self-construal differences in the

cultural context. It is explained that people who lived in predominantly collectivist cultures become social and relational people; whereas, people in more individualistic cultures are more likely to define themselves as independent. Across the world, different cultures attribute various caregiving roles to children. Although studies in Western cultures claim that giving much responsibility to children is not appropriate, in most of the societies, children could start to contribute to family even during the early years of their developing membership in family context (Hooper, 2008; Rogoff, 2003). For instance, they might help to prepare meals, do housework, or supervise the household etc. Considering these characteristics of Turkish cultural context, children are expected to show care taking behavior to their parents from the beginnings of early years of their lives. Moreover, in most of the societies, gender roles create differences in terms of caregiving behaviors of children. Parents predominantly expect their daughters -rather than sons- to take more responsibilities within the family (Çarkoğlu, 2016). Regarding the differences between self-construal and gender, specifically, we examined the moderator role of child's gender in predicting the relationship between child's self-construal and child's parentification roles in family by controlling maternal attachment anxiety and avoidance.

The aim of the current study was to examine the moderator role of 12-year-olds' gender on predicting the relationship between child's self-construal and parentification. We hypothesized that children's relational self-construal would predict their emotional parentification, and independent self-construal would predict their instrumental parentification behaviors. We also hypothesized that this relationship would be significant for girls, but not for boys.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 92 mother-child pairs. Before the main analyses, children, who scored higher than the cut-off point on the depression scale, were removed. After that the moderation analyses were run with 78 mother-child pairs. Mean age of mothers was 40.5 ($SD = 5.50$). The reported education level for mothers were as follows; 28 of mothers were graduated from primary school (35.9%), 10 of them were secondary school, (12.8%), 20 of the were high school (25.6%) and 18 mothers were graduated from had college degree (23.1%). The two of the mothers had master's degree (2.6%). 31 of participants were male and 47 of them were female. Mean age for participant children was 12.53 ($SD = .60$).

Measures

Mothers completed a demographic form and *Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory- II, Short Version* (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), which was adapted to Turkish by Selçuk, Günaydın, Sümer, and Uysal (2005) and aimed to measure the dimensions of adult attachment, which are anxiety and avoidance. The short version of the scale was tested by Sümer and Engin (2004). Children were given *Depression Scale for Children* (Kovacs, 1985) and as a self-construal scale, children were given the *Twenty Statement Scale* (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954), in which they were asked to complete sentences starting with "I am...". They were also asked three open-ended questions about three regular family activities in their families; a) bed time, b) breakfast time, and c) dinner time. All narratives on different themes were coded on two main dimensions; emotional and instrumental parentification of children.

Results

Two separate moderation analyses were conducted by using the Process macro in SPSS software (Hayes, 2013). In the first analysis, results revealed that the model, examining independent self-construal of child and child gender after controlling maternal attachment anxiety and avoidance, significantly predicted instrumental parentification of children, $F(5,64) = 6.38$, $R^2 = .33$, $p < .001$. The interaction between child's gender and independent self-construal was significant after controlling for maternal anxiety and avoidance, $B = -.09$, $Sx = .04$, $t = -2.51$, $p = .02$. Specifically, results were significant for girls, $B = -.10$, $Sx = .03$, $t = -3.81$, $p = .003$; but not for boys, $B = -.01$, $Sx = .02$, $t = -.59$, $p = .55$. This set of findings showed that girls, who described themselves as more independent, engaged in less instrumental parentification behaviors; whereas, girls who described themselves as less independent, engaged in more instrumental parentification behavior. Yet, there was no significant difference for boys' independence level in terms of instrumental parentification.

Results of the second analysis revealed that the model, examining independent self-construal of child and child gender after controlling maternal attachment anxiety and avoidance, significantly predicted emotional parentification of children, $F(5,62) = 2.61$, $R^2 = .17$, $p = .03$. The interaction between child's gender and independent self-construal was significant after controlling for maternal anxiety and avoidance, $B = .12$, $Sx = .06$, $t = 2.00$, $p = .04$. This set of findings showed that girls, who described themselves as more relational, engaged in more emotional parentification behaviors; whereas, girls who described themselves as less relational, engaged in

less emotional parentification behavior. Yet, there was no significant difference for boys.

Discussion

In this study, we aimed to show whether individual differences -rooted by different self-construals in children- would change how they perceive their own parentification in family context. While examining these relationships, we examined the role of gender, since gender-related responsibilities start to differ even at very early ages, and culturally girls and boys are expected different set of roles in family context. In this study, maternal relationship anxiety and avoidance was controlled, since previous literature emphasized that children's parentification behaviors could be significantly related to maternal behaviors.

Results of the two different moderation analyses showed that the interaction between children's self-construals and gender reflect differences in regard to both instrumental and emotional parentification. As expected, less independent girls explained more instrumental parentification behaviors in their narratives compared to boys. In regard to emotional parentification, more relational girls explained more emotional parentification. Both findings are in line with the hypotheses of the study. Gender-related roles in Turkish cultural context for girls involve being more concerned about the within family duties and responsibilities (Çarkoğlu, 2016). Besides, it is a plausible explanation for emotional parentification phenomenon to expect girls would provide more emotional support to the other family members, since from the very early years of life they are more relational, compared to boys.

Findings revealed no significant difference for boys neither for instrumental nor for emotional parentification behaviors. As stated in recent studies (Çarkoğlu, 2016), boys are usually not expected to be involved in house works or duties; on the contrary, they are expected to be outside of the house (i.e. meeting friends or having a job). Therefore, regardless of their self-construals, the participant boys in this study explained less parentification. In conclusion, these results showed that parentification behaviors could be also observed in a communal sample; yet, those behaviors differ according to children's gender and self-construals.