



Investigation of the Maternal Gatekeeping Behaviours of Mothers According to Parental Self-efficacy and Attachment Styles

Annelerin, Anne Bekçiliği Davranışlarının Ebeveyn Yetkinliği ve Bağlanma Stillerine Göre İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The purpose of the current study is to examine the maternal gatekeeping of mothers in the context of parental self-efficacy and attachment styles.

Materials and Methods: In this context, 315 married mothers with children between the ages of 5 and 18, who volunteered to participate in the study, constitute the study group.

Results: The findings of the study showed that parental self-efficacy and secure attachment positively and significantly predicted the encouragement sub-dimension, that anxious and avoidant attachment styles positively and significantly predicted the control sub-dimension, and that parental self-efficacy and secure attachment negatively and significantly predicted the discouragement sub-dimension.

Conclusion: Results of the study revealed that the mother's parenting self-efficacy and attachment styles are important predictors of the sub-dimensions of maternal gatekeeping.

Keywords: Maternal gatekeeping, parental self-efficacy, attachment styles, self-efficacy

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu araştırmanın amacı, annelerin anne bekçiliği davranışlarını ebeveyn özyeterliliği ve bağlanma stilleri bağlamında incelemektir.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Bu bağlamda, 5-18 yaş aralığında çocuğu olan ve çalışmaya katılmaya gönüllü 315 evli anne çalışma grubunu oluşturmaktadır.

Bulgular: Araştırmanın bulguları, ebeveyn özyeterliliği ve güvenli bağlanmanın, teşvik alt boyutunu pozitif yönde ve anlamlı olarak yordadığını, kaygılı ve kaçınmacı bağlanma stillerinin kontrol alt boyutunu pozitif yönde ve anlamlı olarak yordadığını ve ebeveyn özyeterliliği ve güvenli bağlanmanın engel alt boyutunu negatif yönde ve anlamlı olarak yordadığını göstermiştir.

Sonuç: Araştırmanın sonuçları, annenin ebeveynlik özyeterliliği ve bağlanma stillerinin, anne bekçiliğinin alt boyutlarının önemli yordayıcıları olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anne bekçiliği, ebeveyn özyeterliliği, bağlanma stilleri, öz-yeterlilik

Introduction

Maternal Gatekeeping

The concept of maternal gatekeeping was first introduced by Allen and Hawkins¹ to describe mothers who hinder co-parenting and prevent their partners from participating in household chores and childcare. Maternal gatekeeping behaviour is defined as a component of the co-parenting relationship that focuses on parenting the child.² In subsequent studies, the concept of maternal gatekeeping ceased to be a restrictive concept for fathers and began to be addressed as

a facilitating factor.³⁻⁵ From this perspective, Puhlman and Pasley⁶ revisited the concept of maternal gatekeeping within the scope of family systems theory. They examined the mother's discouraging, controlling, or encouraging attitudes towards the father, and the effects of the subcategories that constitute these attitudes (traditional gate blockers, passive gate snubbers, facilitative gate openers, passive gate welcomers, confused gate managers, apathetic gate managers, opinionated gate watchers, and invisible gate ignorers) on the father's childrearing attitudes. In this conceptual model of maternal gatekeeping proposed by Puhlman and Pasley⁶ the discouragement sub-

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dimension is considered a maternal gatekeeping behavior that tends to criticize the father, makes the father feel inadequate in his childcare responsibilities, and adopts sarcastic attitudes. Researchers have also emphasized the obstructive nature of discouraging maternal gatekeeping, noting its role in hindering the father's involvement in this process, negatively impacting family dynamics, and disrupting the emotional climate.⁷⁻⁹ In the encouragement sub-dimension, the mother's cooperation with the father on parenting duties, and the father's appreciative and supportive attitude towards parenting roles come to the fore. In families where the encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping is dominant, father involvement is higher, and partners are more willing to co-parent.¹⁰ In the control sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping, the mother's behavior is characterized by the monitoring of interactions between the father and the child, and being the primary decision-maker. In this sub-dimension, the mother is in a dominant position within the home.⁶

When the concept of maternal gatekeeping is considered, it is important to recognize that it is influenced by many personal and environmental factors. Therefore, it is more than merely exhibiting discouraging or encouraging attitudes toward parenting roles. One of the factors affecting maternal gatekeeping behavior is the psychological well-being of the mother.¹¹ In this context, although there are no studies directly linking mood states such as depression and anxiety to maternal gatekeeping, researchers emphasize that this concept is dynamic and influenced by various factors. These factors include the child's developmental stage, family conditions⁶ the mother's attitudes towards her own parenting¹² daily stress experiences, and the mother's personality traits.⁶ Among the factors affecting maternal gatekeeping, maternal expectations have also been emphasized in the literature. It has been emphasized that the relationship between partners can affect maternal gatekeeping, especially considering that co-parenting is a component of maternal gatekeeping behaviour.¹¹ This is supported by the fact that mothers' negative and discouraging maternal gatekeeping behaviours are more prevalent in the child-rearing process in divorced couples.¹³ It has been emphasized in the literature that maternal gatekeeping is affected by many factors.

Maternal Gatekeeping Behaviour of Mothers with Different Attachment Styles

It is emphasized that the bonds established in the first years of life are effective in the quality of one's relationships with oneself and others throughout the rest of life.¹⁴ Adult attachment is an essential construct in the transition to parenthood because adults are preoccupied with memories and perceptions of their experiences with their own parents as they create new relationships with their children and establish co-parenting relationships with their partners.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Studies have shown that insecure attachment is negatively correlated with adaptation to parenting responsibilities,¹⁷ that anxiously attached mothers receive less support from their husbands during childrearing,¹⁸ and that fathers with an avoidant attachment style similarly provide less support to their wives.¹⁹ In another study, it

is emphasized that individuals with insecure attachment experience high levels of dissatisfaction with their partner's participation in childcare.²⁰ Similarly, mothers and fathers with both anxious and avoidant attachment styles have been found to exhibit lower co-parenting behaviour.^{21,22} It has been found that mothers with an avoidant attachment style encourage their partners less and discourage more.²³ In addition, the relevant literature has stated that fathers with higher attachment anxiety receive less co-parenting support from their wives during the transition to parenthood.¹¹

Attachment styles, which are one of the important psychological components in the development of the individual, are considered factors that affect the quality of marriage and the relationship between spouses.²⁴ Although studies to date have not established a direct link between adult attachment and maternal gatekeeping behaviour, relevant studies suggest that adult attachment plays a role in co-parenting relationships.

Mothers' Parental Self-efficacy and Maternal Gatekeeping Behaviour

The concept of self-efficacy put forward by Bandura has been applied to many behaviours in the literature. One of them is the concept of parental self-efficacy. Parental self-efficacy refers to parents' expectations that they can fulfil their roles and their perceptions that they can have a positive impact on childrearing.^{25,26} Parental self-efficacy beliefs are defined as the extent to which parents organize and implement their beliefs and judgments regarding parenting.²⁷ Moreover, according to Hassall et al.²⁸ and Ardel and Eccles,²⁹ parental self-efficacy is the degree to which parents see themselves as adequate in their parenting roles. It has been reported that mothers' parental self-efficacy acts as a mediator between many psychosocial variables and their outcomes, and that parental self-efficacy has a mediating role between depression, social support, and the newborn's temperament and maternal behaviours.²⁶

When the relevant literature is reviewed, it is seen that one of the important predictors of maternal gatekeeping behaviour is parental behaviours and personality traits.⁸ It is emphasized that the way mothers define their own "motherhood", particularly in its psychological aspects, is a factor that affects maternal gatekeeping.¹² The way mothers define themselves as parents and their self-perceptions about their ability to fulfil the maternal role determine the nature of mothers' gatekeeping behaviour.

Parental self-efficacy is a vital factor that effectively supports parenting and positive child development.³⁰ Mothers with high levels of self-efficacy in their parenting skills may be more eager to involve fathers in the child-rearing process through active encouragement. In contrast, mothers with high parental self-efficacy may be more likely to experience frustration with fathers who have less parental experience with infants and who are less confident in their parenting.³¹ Therefore, mothers with high parental self-efficacy are more likely to engage in all three sub-dimensions of maternal gatekeeping.

In the literature, studies have found that fathers' parental self-efficacy beliefs are a variable affecting maternal gatekeeping.¹¹ Still, no research has been found on the relationship between mothers' parental self-efficacy beliefs and maternal gatekeeping roles.

Maternal gatekeeping, that is, the role of the mother relative to the father in the child-rearing process, is one of the important variables in co-parenting.^{5,8} Research emphasizes that maternal gatekeeping is a two-way process in which it is both the cause and the result of the father's involvement in childrearing and care.^{6,32} Given that maternal gatekeeping is a dynamic process and that there may be factors that affect and are affected by it, the current study is important for revealing its relationship with study variables.

In this context, the study investigated whether parental self-efficacy and attachment styles (secure, anxious, ambivalent, and avoidant) predict the encouragement, control, and discouragement sub-dimensions of maternal gatekeeping. To this end, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. Do attachment styles and parental self-efficacy predict the encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping?
2. Do attachment styles and parental self-efficacy predict the control sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping?
3. Do attachment styles and parental self-efficacy predict the discouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping?

Materials and Methods

Research Model

This study examines whether attachment styles and parental self-efficacy predict the discouragement, encouragement, and control sub-dimensions of maternal gatekeeping in the relational survey model. In relational survey studies, the aim is to determine the existence and/or degree of covariance between two or more variables.³³

Study Group

The study group consists of 315 married mothers with children between the ages of 5 and 18. The participating mothers were selected using the random sampling method.

Of the participants, 32.4% (n=102) are in the 25-35 age group, 58.1% (n=183) in the 36-45 age group, and 9.5% (n=30) in the 46-55 age group. When the education level of the participants is examined, it is seen that 0.3% (n=1) are literate, 0.6% (n=2) are primary school graduates, 1.6% (n=5) are middle school graduates, 15.6% (n=49) are high school graduates, 9.8% (n=31) are graduates of an associate's program, 45.4% (n=143) are university graduates, and 26.7% (n=84) have graduate education. When the number of children of the participants is examined, we see that 37.1% (n=117) have 1 child, 48.6% (n=153) have 2 children, 12.7% (n=40) have 3 children, and 1.6% (n=5) have 4 or more children.

Data Collection

Before the data collection tools were administered to the participants, they read and signed the informed consent form prepared by the researcher. The data collection tools used in the study were uploaded into Google Forms so that they could be filled out electronically. All data were collected electronically. In addition, approval was obtained from Süleyman Demirel University Ethics Committee before the study (approval number: 138/5, date: 07.06.2023).

Data Collection Tools

• **Parental Self-efficacy Scale for Mothers:** The parental self-efficacy scale for mothers (PSES-M), developed by Coleman and Karraker³⁴ was adapted into Turkish, and its validity and reliability studies were conducted by Demir.³⁵ The purpose of the scale is to determine the self-efficacy level of mothers. The scale consists of a total of 32 items and 5 sub-dimensions (discipline, health, school, emotional support, and free time). A total score can be taken from the scale, and an evaluation based on this total score, or each sub-dimension can be evaluated separately. The discipline sub-dimension consists of items 1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 25, and 32; the health sub-dimension consists of items 12, 19, and 30; the school sub-dimension consists of items 2, 8, 15, 21, 26, 27, and 31; the emotional support sub-dimension consists of items 5, 11, 17, 18, 23, 24, and 29; and the free time sub-dimension consists of items 3, 4, 9, 10, 16, 22, and 28. The reverse-scored items in the scale are items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, and 31. As a result of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis performed for the construct validity of the scale, a five-dimensional structure consisting of 32 items was obtained. The factor loading values of the items in the scale range from 0.57 to 0.86. In the criterion-related validity study of the scale, the parental competence scale was applied, and the correlation between the total score of this scale and the total score of the PSES-M was 0.91. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient, calculated to determine the reliability of the scale, was 0.79, while the test-retest reliability result was 0.84. Within the scope of the current study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.89.

• **Three-dimensional Attachment Styles Scale:** The scale was developed by Erzen³⁶ to determine attachment styles. The scale consists of 18 items and 3 sub-dimensions. There is no reverse-scored item in the scale. If the aim is to determine the attachment style of each individual, the sub-dimension with the highest score is accepted as the attachment style of that individual. If continuous data related to attachment style are to be used in the analysis, the total score for each attachment style is taken separately, and then the analyses are performed. Since two of the dimensions are negative and one is positive, it is not possible to sum the scores from the three sub-dimensions to obtain a single total score. The agreement rate obtained from two experts for the language validity of the scale is 0.87, and for the content validity, it is 0.72. The exploratory factor analysis showed that the 18 items in the scale were consistently collected

under three dimensions. Construct validity was determined with the goodness of fit index (GFI), the adjusted GFI (AGFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), χ^2 , and the χ^2 /standard deviation (SD) ratio, obtained from a confirmatory factor analysis. In the confirmatory factor analysis, the values were reported as GFI of 0.93, AGFI of 0.90, CFI of 0.90, RMSEA of 0.05, and χ^2 /SD ratio of 2.48. The item-total correlation values of the scale range from 0.49 to 0.75, while the item remainder coefficients range from 0.96 to 0.98. As a result of the reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients for the avoidant, secure, and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles were found to be 0.80, 0.69, and 0.71, respectively. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were found to be 0.69, 0.63, and 0.75 for the avoidant, secure, and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles.

• **Parental Gatekeeping Scale-mother Form:** The purpose of this scale, developed by Puhlman and Pasley³⁷ and adapted to Turkish by Akgöz Aktaş and Aydın,³⁸ is to evaluate the encouraging, controlling, and discouraging behaviours of mothers on fathers. The scale consists of 3 sub-dimensions and 29 items. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale were 0.81, 0.74, and 0.66 for the sub-dimensions of encouragement, control, and discouragement, respectively. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale were found to be 0.86, 0.77, and 0.76 for the sub-dimensions of encouragement, control, and discouragement, respectively.

• **Personal Information Form:** The personal information form prepared by the researcher includes questions to determine the gender and age of the individuals participating in the study, whether they have received face-to-face psychological counselling before, and whether they have received online psychological counselling before.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS Statistics 23.0 was used to analyze the data. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which the independent variables of the study predict the sub-dimensions of encouragement, discouragement, and control of maternal gatekeeping.

Three separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to analyze the data. In the first multiple linear regression analysis, the encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping served as the dependent variable, and parental self-efficacy, secure attachment, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment were taken as the independent variables. In the second multiple linear regression analysis, the control sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping was taken as the dependent variable, and parental self-efficacy, secure attachment, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment were taken as the independent variables. In the third multiple linear regression analysis, the discouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping was taken as the dependent variable, and parental self-efficacy, secure attachment, avoidant attachment,

and anxious attachment were taken as the independent variables.

Before starting the analyses, researchers examined whether the data set met the assumptions required to perform multiple linear regression analysis. In regression analysis, the basic assumptions are that there is a normal distribution, homogeneity of variance, and the independent variables are unrelated.^{39,40} In this regard, first, the kurtosis and skewness coefficients were examined separately for the encouragement, discouragement, and control sub-dimensions to determine whether the scores obtained from the "maternal gatekeeping scale-mother form" exhibited a normal distribution. In addition, to see if there is autocorrelation causing systematic errors, the Durbin-Watson (DW) test was used. To determine if there is a multicollinearity problem between the independent variables, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, tolerance values, and variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined.

Results

In the analyses performed, first, the Skewness-Kurtosis coefficients of the encouragement, control, and discouragement sub-dimensions of the scores taken from the maternal gatekeeping scale were examined to determine whether they were normally distributed. The skewness coefficient for the encouragement sub-dimension was found to be -1.42, and the Kurtosis coefficient was 2.89. For the control sub-dimension, the Skewness coefficient was found to be 0.20, and the kurtosis coefficient was found to be 0.04. For the discouragement sub-dimension, the skewness coefficient was found to be 0.64, and the kurtosis coefficient was found to be 0-0.13. Values in the range of +2 to -2 are considered acceptable for skewness and kurtosis values.⁴¹ When the kurtosis skewness values calculated in the current study were examined, it was seen that the values obtained for the encouragement sub-dimension were outside the acceptable range. In the literature, researchers have stated that the data in many studies conducted in the field of social sciences do not meet the normality assumption.⁴² For this reason, no changes were made to these variables that fell outside the normality assumption values, nor to their analyses. In addition, DW was found to be 2.14 for the scores obtained from the encouragement, 1.90 from the discouragement, and 1.87 from the control sub-dimensions. A DW test value in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 shows that there is no autocorrelation.³⁹ As a result of the analysis conducted to determine whether there is a multicollinearity problem between the independent variables, tolerance values and VIF-variance inflation values were checked. While tolerance values should be greater than 0.10, it is recommended that VIF values should not be greater than 10.⁴³ In the current study, when the encouragement sub-dimension was taken as the dependent variable, it was seen that the tolerance values varied between 0.73 and 0.88, and the VIF values varied between 1.14 and 1.37. When the control sub-dimension was taken as the dependent variable, it was seen that the tolerance values varied between 0.73 and 0.88, and

the VIF values varied between 1.14 and 1.37. Finally, when the discouragement sub-dimension was taken as the dependent variable, it was seen that the tolerance values varied between 0.73 and 0.88, and the VIF values varied between 1.14 and 1.37.

In addition, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine whether there was a multicollinearity problem among the independent variables. Mean correlation and SD values for the variables of the study are shown in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients of the variables vary between 0.09 and 0.62. A correlation of 0.90 and above between variables indicates that there is a multicollinearity problem.⁴⁰ There was no multicollinearity issue among the variables of the current study.

In the study, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the variables that predict the encouragement sub-dimension. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, parental self-efficacy is a positive and significant predictor of the encouragement sub-dimension ($t=3.657$, $p<0.001$). Secure attachment significantly and positively predicts the encouragement sub-dimension ($t=4.313$, $p<0.001$). Anxious attachment is not a significant predictor of the encouragement sub-dimension ($t=-1.068$, $p>0.05$). Finally, avoidant attachment is not a significant predictor of the encouragement sub-dimension ($t=0.564$, $p>0.05$).

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that parental self-efficacy, secure attachment, anxious attachment, and avoidant attachment significantly predict the encouragement sub-dimension ($R=0.435$, $R^2=0.179$, $p<0.001$), and these variables together explain 43.5% of the total variance of this sub-dimension.

In the study, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the variables that predict the control sub-dimension. Results of the analysis are shown in Table 3.

As seen in Table 2, parental self-efficacy is not a significant predictor of the control sub-dimension ($t=0.009$, $p>0.05$). Similarly, secure attachment is not a significant predictor of the control sub-dimension ($t=-1.496$, $p>0.05$). However, anxious attachment is a significant and positive predictor of the control sub-dimension ($t=3.233$, $p<0.01$). Finally, avoidant attachment is a significant and positive predictor of the control sub-dimension ($t=2.749$, $p<0.01$).

Examination of Table 3 reveals that parental self-efficacy, secure attachment, anxious attachment, and avoidant attachment significantly predict the control sub-dimension ($R=0.356$, $R^2=0.115$, $p<0.01$), and together, these variables explain 35.6% of the total variance in the control sub-dimension.

In the study, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the variables that predict the discouragement sub-dimension. Results of the analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 1. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, mean, and standard deviation values for the variables

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------------|-------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Encouragement | 1 | -0.121* | -0.422** | 0.329** | 0.359** | -0.202** | -0.135* |
| 2. Control | | 1 | 0.622** | -0.093 | -0.225** | 0.292** | 0.288** |
| 3. Discouragement | | | 1 | -0.283** | -0.350** | 0.351** | 0.217** |
| 4. Parental self-efficacy | | | | 1 | 0.278** | -0.267** | -0.091 |
| 5. Secure attachment | | | | | 1 | -0.312** | -0.424** |
| 6. Anxious attachment | | | | | | 1 | 0.404** |
| 7. Avoidant attachment | | | | | | | 1 |
| Mean | 49.65 | 15.74 | 12.27 | 155.81 | 20.90 | 13.41 | 12.66 |
| Standard deviation | 8.54 | 7.22 | 7.29 | 19.55 | 3.20 | 4.91 | 4.63 |

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.001$

Table 2. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the predictors of the encouragement sub-dimension

| Variables | B | Standard error B | β | t | p-value | Bivariate correlation | Partial correlation |
|------------------------|--------|------------------|---------|--------|----------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Constant | 18.768 | 5.133 | | 3.657 | 0.000*** | | |
| Parental self-efficacy | 1.103 | 0.024 | 0.235 | 4.312 | 0.000*** | 0.251 | 0.268 |
| Secure attachment | 0.743 | 0.152 | 0.289 | 4.901 | 0.000*** | 0.221 | 0.238 |
| Anxious attachment | -0.108 | 0.101 | -0.062 | -1.068 | 0.286 | -0.055 | -0.061 |
| Avoidant attachment | 0.062 | 0.110 | 0.034 | 0.564 | 0.573 | 0.029 | 0.032 |

$R=0.435$ $R^2=0.179$
 $F=18.082$ $p=0.000$ ***

*** $p<0.001$

Table 3. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the predictors of the control sub-dimension

| Variables | B | Standard error B | β | t | p-value | Bivariate correlation | Partial correlation |
|------------------------|--------|------------------|---------|--------|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Constant | 12.655 | 4.506 | | 2.808 | 0.005** | | |
| Parental self-efficacy | 0.000 | 0.021 | 0.000 | 0.009 | 0.993 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Secure attachment | -0.199 | 0.133 | -0.091 | -1.496 | 0.136 | -0.079 | -0.085 |
| Anxious attachment | 0.287 | 0.089 | 0.195 | 3.233 | 0.001** | 0.172 | 0.181 |
| Avoidant attachment | 0.266 | 0.097 | 0.171 | 2.749 | 0.006** | 0.146 | 0.154 |

R=0.356 R²=0.115
F=11.246 p=0.005**

**p<0.01

Table 4. Results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the predictors of the discouragement sub-dimension

| Variables | B | Standard error B | β | t | p-value | Bivariate correlation | Partial correlation |
|------------------------|--------|------------------|---------|--------|----------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Constant | 26.997 | 4.332 | | 6.232 | 0.000*** | | |
| Parental self-efficacy | -0.058 | 0.020 | -0.156 | -2.899 | 0.004** | -0.146 | -0.162 |
| Secure attachment | -0.503 | 0.128 | -0.229 | -3.930 | 0.000*** | -0.199 | -0.218 |
| Anxious attachment | 0.246 | 0.085 | 0.233 | 4.059 | 0.000*** | 0.205 | 0.225 |
| Avoidant attachment | 0.018 | 0.093 | 0.011 | 0.190 | 0.850 | 0.010 | 0.011 |

R=0.457 R²=0.198
F=20.416 p=0.000***

p<0.01, *p<0.001

As seen in Table 4, parental self-efficacy is a negative and significant predictor of the discouragement sub-dimension (t=-2.899, p<0.01). Secure attachment is a significant and negative predictor of the discouragement sub-dimension (t=-3.930, p<0.001). Anxious attachment is a positive and significant predictor of the discouragement sub-dimension (t=4.059, p<0.01). However, avoidant attachment is not a significant predictor of the discouragement sub-dimension (t=0.190, p>0.05).

When Table 4 is examined, it can be seen that parental competence, secure attachment, anxious attachment, and avoidant attachment significantly predict the discouragement sub-dimension (R=0.457, R²=0.198, p<0.001), and these variables together explain 45.7% of the total variance of the discouragement sub-dimension.

When Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 were examined, it was observed that parental competence and secure attachment were significant predictors of the encouragement and discouragement sub-dimensions, that anxious attachment was a significant predictor of the control and discouragement sub-dimensions, and that avoidant attachment was a significant predictor of the control sub-dimension.

Discussion

In the current study, the researchers examined whether attachment styles and parental self-efficacy predicted the control, encouragement, and discouragement sub-dimensions of maternal gatekeeping.

According to the results obtained in the current study, the predictors of the encouragement sub-dimension are secure attachment and parental self-efficacy. Secure attachment and parental self-efficacy positively and significantly predicted the encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping.

The encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping, as explained by Puhlman and Pasley⁶ refers to the context in which the mother values the father's involvement in childcare and praises and supports her partner in the care and upbringing of their child. When the personality traits of securely attached individuals are examined, they are characterized by trust in both themselves and others, showing respect for the other person, being less anxious, having a high level of self-control, and being able to seek and provide social support when needed.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶ Securely attached individuals trust both themselves and others and are well-mannered and understanding. At the same time, they have high self-esteem and exhibit extroverted characteristics.⁴⁷ Kobak and Sceery⁴⁶ stated that individuals with a secure attachment style can seek help from others for comfort and support. In this case, it is expected that mothers with a secure attachment style will not interfere with their partners in matters of child-rearing, will collaborate regarding their partner's paternal roles, will trust their partner in this process, will seek support in child-rearing, and will jointly manage the co-parenting relationship, accepting the social support provided by their partner. When the relevant literature was reviewed, no research was found on the subject of maternal secure attachment and maternal gatekeeping.

Another predictor of the encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping is parental self-efficacy. Results of the study showed that parental self-efficacy positively and significantly predicted the encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping. In other words, when the mother feels competent in her parenting, she is cooperative and supportive of the father's involvement in child-rearing. Parental self-efficacy is defined as the parent's judgment and belief that he or she can fulfil their duties in the child-rearing process.⁴⁸ Individuals with high levels of parental self-efficacy beliefs are sensitive and have developed parenting skills.²⁵ Examining how parental self-efficacy develops reveals that this development is also related to the social support that individuals receive from their spouses.⁴⁹ In this context, research findings also support the assumption that mothers who are highly competent in parenting will not experience fear of failure, will have high-level stress coping skills, will seek support from the father when needed, will be satisfied with co-parenting, and will not contribute to feelings of inadequacy in either themselves or the father regarding the father's relationship with the child. In the relevant literature, no study examining maternal gatekeeping and parental self-efficacy has been found, but there are research findings on the effect of maternal gatekeeping on paternal self-efficacy.⁵⁰

Another result obtained in the current study is that the predictors of the control sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping are anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Anxious and avoidant attachment positively and significantly predicted the control sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping. It is emphasized that individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment styles are sceptical, distrustful of others, try to avoid establishing relationships, asking for support, being self-sufficient, and acting independently.^{44,45} In this context, mothers with anxious and avoidant attachment styles avoid seeking support, do not establish relationships, try to be self-sufficient by acting independently from the father during the child-rearing process, and therefore want to control everything that happens around them. On the other hand, the foundations of attachment styles are explained by the quality of communication and interaction that individuals establish with their caregivers during childhood. This internal working model, which begins in infancy, manifests itself in the individual's interactions with others throughout the rest of life.¹⁴ When the literature on attachment is considered, it seems possible that individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment styles may display an overly intrusive and controlling attitude in raising their children. Additionally, they may unconsciously exclude the father from this process to compensate for the communication and interaction they could not establish with their parents. Although maternal gatekeeping was not evaluated based on its sub-dimensions in a study conducted by Aytac and Schoppe-Sullivan²³ they stated that anxiously attached mothers negatively engaged in maternal gatekeeping. Moreover, when research results are examined, it appears that anxious and avoidant attachment styles are associated with low levels of co-parenting and high levels of conflict between parents.²⁰⁻²² In the context of all these findings, mothers with an avoidant attachment style prefer autonomy in

parenting decisions, which may limit father involvement. For this reason, it is hypothesized that interventions to encourage joint decision-making between mother and father in future studies will reduce this tendency.

According to the results of the current study, the predictors of the discouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping are secure attachment, parental self-efficacy, and anxious attachment. Secure attachment and parental self-efficacy negatively and significantly predicted the discouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping, while anxious attachment positively and significantly predicted it. The discouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping is defined as the mother's frequent negative criticism of the father in the child-rearing process, emphasizing the father's incorrect parenting practices, hindering the father's decisions, and exhibiting a sarcastic, indirect, or direct interfering attitude.³⁷ When the discouragement sub-dimension and encouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping are compared conceptually, they represent opposite attitudes and behaviours. In the discouragement sub-dimension, the mother intervenes in the father's parenting behaviours, while in the encouragement sub-dimension, the father's parenting behaviours are approved, valued, and taken into consideration by the mother. In the current study, findings showed that parental self-confidence and secure attachment are positive and significant predictors of the encouragement sub-dimension. Again, the fact that parental self-efficacy and secure attachment are significant predictors of the discouragement sub-dimension, with a negative association, indicates that these two findings support each other. In addition, studies have shown that there is a relationship between mothers' self-esteem and maternal gatekeeping, as mothers with low self-esteem avoid sharing responsibility for childcare.¹² Studies emphasize that self-efficacy has an impact on self-esteem.⁵¹ In this case, parental self-efficacy is thought to be a factor that predicts maternal gatekeeping, just like self-esteem does. When the literature was examined, no studies were found examining the relationship between mothers' parental self-efficacy and maternal gatekeeping behaviours. Finally, findings of the current study revealed that anxious attachment positively and significantly predicted the discouragement sub-dimension of maternal gatekeeping. Derin⁵² states that as mothers' anxious attachment increases, democratic attitudes decrease, while authoritarian attitudes, protective attitudes, and overly permissive attitudes increase. In the same study, it is also emphasized that as the level of anxious attachment increases, self-esteem decreases. Anxiously attached mothers constantly control their partners and do not give them space by intervening in their behaviors. In addition, a sense of distrust prevails in the relationships of anxiously attached mothers.⁵³ This sense of distrust can lead to negative evaluations in one's life. For this reason, the mother may exhibit a discouraging attitude because she does not have confidence in the father's ability to care for the child. In this context, therapeutic interventions or parental psychoeducation programs for mothers with anxious attachment style can be planned to contribute to both individual and partner relationship and the child-rearing process.

Study Limitations and Recommendations

The data collected in the current study are limited by the capabilities of the measurement tools used and the responses given by the participants. Although this study has many strengths, it also has some limitations. The data in this study are limited to those collected from mothers with children between the ages of 5 and 18. Maternal gatekeeping in the context of different age group can be analysed within the framework of these concepts. Maternal gatekeeping was examined in the context of mothers' attachment styles and parental self-confidence. However, this process also involves fathers in childcare. To evaluate maternal gatekeeping from the perspective of both the mother and father, and to assess how the attachment style and parental self-efficacy of both parents affect the process, fathers can be included in the study group, and results can be comparatively evaluated.

The information obtained from the participants is subjective. This situation poses a limitation influencing social desirability bias. In addition, data in the study were collected from married mothers. Future research could examine maternal gatekeeping behaviors and co-parenting behaviors of divorced parents. In families where there is a stepmother, the stepmother's attachment styles and gatekeeping behaviors can be examined. In addition, future studies could focus on the concept of maternal gatekeeping together with the personality traits of the mother and father. In future studies to be conducted on this subject, it will be useful not only to ensure comprehensive information is obtained from mothers, but also to evaluate fathers' perceptions of maternal gatekeeping, or to analyze the data dyadically for support.

As a suggestion for future research, longitudinal rather than cross-sectional studies can examine changes in maternal gatekeeping behaviours of mothers and paternal involvement in childcare over time. Or, both parents can be included in a parenting programme based on co-parenting skills and maternal gatekeeping for 10-12 sessions, and the effects of the programme on the change in maternal gatekeeping behaviours, co-parenting skills, and child development can be examined. Furthermore, in future studies, father involvement, parental self-efficacy, and/or maternal gatekeeping behaviours of divorced or single parents can be examined. Finally, culture-specific differences can also be addressed in future studies, and data can be analysed comparatively in the context of different cultures.

Within the framework of recommendations for policymakers plans can be made to disseminate various parenting programmes under titles such as responsible parenting, co-parenting, cooperation, and father involvement in child rearing by experts in the field, especially among couples who are expecting a baby or who have recently become parents.

In the field of practice, therapists, psychologists, and psychological counsellors are encouraged to enhance parenting and co-parenting self-efficacy, encourage receiving social support, and plan and include awareness-raising practices about parenting skills in therapy.

Conclusion

Research results show that the concept of maternal gatekeeping is related to parental self-efficacy and attachment styles. It is seen that mothers with high parental self-efficacy or those with a secure attachment style exhibit more encouraging behaviours towards the father in the child-rearing process and avoid discouragement, while mothers with attachment styles such as anxious and avoidant are more control-oriented in child-rearing. In this study, the concept of maternal gatekeeping was analysed by considering different variables. Maternal gatekeeping is a new concept in the literature and has not previously been examined about research variables. In this respect, the research findings are expected to contribute to both the literature and practitioners.

Ethics

Ethics Committee Approval: In addition, approval was obtained from Süleyman Demirel University Ethics Committee before the study (approval number: 138/5, date: 07.06.2023).

Informed Consent: Before the data collection tools were administered to the participants, they read and signed the informed consent form prepared by the researcher.

Footnotes

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