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Parenting Practices of Turkish-Dutch and Dutch Mothers

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Abstract

We examined child-rearing behaviors among 33 Dutch and 35 Turkish immigrant mothers living in the Netherlands. Cultural comparisons showed that Turkish-Dutch mothers reported more use of demanding child-rearing behaviors than Dutch mothers. Observational data came from recorded mother-child interactions during free play and book reading. Turkish immigrant mothers were more responsive than

Dutch mothers both in play and book reading sessions; however, the two groups did not differ in any other parenting behavior observed. We found Turkish mothers to be more interactive with their children in general which may lead to more responsiveness.

Parenting Practices of Turkish-Dutch and Dutch Mothers

Developmental researchers have been mostly interested in parenting styles which can be defined as parent's general attitude towards the child (Baumrind, 1991). Four parenting styles have been described in the literature: Authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglectful (Baumrind; Maccoby & Martin, 1983); especially authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles attracted attention. However, although parenting styles are informative for understanding general principles of child rearing, they provide little information on the proximal aspects of parenting that have a direct impact on child development. Darling and Steinberg (1993) argued that parenting practices, which are specific, goal-directed behaviors through which parents perform their parental duties towards their children, directly affect children's developmental outcomes (Wade, 2004).

Some of the most frequently studied parenting behaviors include responsiveness, warmth, induction, power assertion, cognitive stimulation, and demandingness (Dekovic & Janssen, 1992; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004; Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). Although some practices like caring and nurturing the child are found to be intuitive and universal (Bornstein, Tal, & Tamis-LeMonda, 1991), most practices are found to vary with cultural background. In general, parents from collectivistic cultures are found to display a more authoritarian parenting with high levels of parental control, demandingness, and restrictiveness than parents from individualistic cultures who display authoritative parenting more (Chao, 1994; Kagitcibasi, 1970; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Non-Western mothers are found to use more negative parenting, punishment, and control (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000; Kelley & Tseng, 1992) and less praising and verbal encouragement (Bradley, Corwyn, & Whiteside-Mansell, 1996) than Western mothers. For example, studies with African and Chinese Americans in the US revealed that parental control is much more common in the ethnic minority groups than in the mainstream Caucasian families (Kelley & Tseng, 1992). It was also shown that parents from collectivistic background engage in child-rearing practices that support connectedness and relatedness with others more and behaviors that stimulate autonomy of their children less than parents from individualistic backgrounds (Liu et al., 2005).

Parenting practices are often assessed by self-reports of parents. This method is indeed very informative; however, self-reported parenting practices reflect the attitudes and perception of parents about themselves which may not be reflected in their actual parenting behaviors (Liu et al., 2005). The literature confirms the relationship between what parents report they do and what they actually do; however, the predictive value of self-reports for observed parenting practices is very low in magnitude (Goodnow, 1988; Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989; Miller, 1988; Sigel, 1986).

In summary, it can be concluded that parenting practices have a direct relation to children's developmental outcomes and can differ across cultural settings. In this study, we examined observed parenting practices of Turkish immigrant and Dutch mothers residing in the Netherlands, an acculturation context.

Turkish and Dutch Parenting Patterns

The Turkish society is an interdependence-oriented culture (Hofstede, 2001) that is high on conservatism and hierarchy and low on autonomy and egalitarianism (Schwartz, 1999). As can be expected from a collectivistic culture, the Turkish society is characterized by interdependence, close interpersonal relationships, and loyalty (Aygun & Imamoglu, 2002). Parenting patterns of Turkish parents focus mainly on obedience to parents and on having close ties with family members which are highly endorsed in many layers in the society, particularly in rural and low-SES settings. In such contexts, parents show obedience-oriented parenting and low levels of autonomy granting (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Sunar, 2002). On the other hand, well-educated Turkish parents in urban cities in Turkey display more autonomy-oriented values and child-rearing practices (Imamoglu, 1998; Kagitcibasi, 2007). Studies showed that Turkish parents display authoritarian parenting style with high levels of power-assertive discipline techniques and strict control; however, these parenting practices do not exclude emotional closeness and warmth between parent and child (Kagitcibasi, 1970).

Obedience-oriented parenting and controlling behaviors are also common among Turkish immigrant parents in the Netherlands (Gerrits et al., 1996; Nijsten, 2006). Durgel et al. (2009) found that Turkish immigrant mothers expect their children to be well-mannered more than the mainstream European mothers. At the same time, Turkish mothers who are more integrated into mainstream culture seem to value individualistic goals more than Turkish mothers who are more separated from

the mainstream culture (Durgel et al., 2009). Turkish-Dutch and Turkish-German mothers are also shown that they perceive preschool years as “childhood” without much focus on developing and improving skills whereas Dutch and German mainstream mothers perceive children as individuals with their own will, interest, and potential even at very early ages of life (Durgel & van de Vijver, 2008; Otyakmaz, B. O. (in review). Turkish-Dutch mothers are found to display low levels of supportive parenting, autonomy granting, and to provide fewer stimulating materials (e.g., toys, books) that are conducive to the child’s cognitive development compared to Dutch mothers (Leseman & Van den Boom, 1999). Another study which compared Turkish-Dutch and Dutch mothers’ parenting practices used observational methods. Mothers of 2-year-old children were observed during problem-solving and clean-up tasks and the findings showed that Turkish immigrant mothers were less sensitive and more intrusive than the Dutch mothers (Yaman, Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Linting, 2010). In Yaman et al.’s study sensitivity referred to the mother’s expressions of emotional support and positive regard by encouraging and acknowledging the child’s accomplishments on the tasks. Intrusiveness referred to the mother’s lack of respect of the child’s autonomy by interfering with the child’s needs and interests.

The Netherlands is a prototypical culture of independence (Hofstede, 2001) that is high on egalitarianism and autonomy and low on hierarchy and conservatism (Schwartz, 1999). Independence and assertiveness are highly endorsed goals in Dutch families, and even infants are expected to be able to play alone and take care of themselves (Pels, 1991; Willemsen & Van de Vijver, 1997). Dutch mothers often display parenting styles that support both emotional and material independence of the child (Georgas et al., 2006), use less controlling and more autonomy-oriented parenting behaviors (Gerrits et al., 1996) with higher levels of authoritative control (Yaman et al., 2010).

The Present Study

In this study, we were interested in group differences in child-rearing practices between Turkish immigrant and Dutch mothers in the Netherlands. We expected Dutch mothers to display more use of positive parenting (i.e., responsiveness, warmth) and less use of negative parenting (i.e., demandingness), compared to Turkish-Dutch mothers.

Method

Participants

Participants of the study comprised 33 mainstream Dutch and 35 Turkish immigrant mothers living in the Netherlands. All participating mothers had at least one child aged 3 to 5 who was the target child in this study. A mother was classified as Turkish immigrant only if both her parents were born in Turkey and either her parents or she had migrated to the Netherlands; and mothers were classified as Dutch if they were born in the Netherlands, as were their parents and grandparents.

Of the Turkish immigrant sample, mean age of the mother was 33 years ($SD = 3.86$) and mean age of the target child was 57 months ($SD = 13.39$). Ninety one percent of the mothers were born in the Turkey and 9% were born in the Netherlands. The mean age of migration to the Netherlands was 11.96 years ($SD = 8.76$). Of these Turkish-Dutch mothers, 17% were primary school, 14% were middle school, 40% were high school, and 29% were university graduates. The mean years of education Turkish-Dutch mothers had was 12 years ($SD = 3.86$). Sixty two percent were at-home mothers, 32% were working at a part-time job, and 6% had a full-time job. All Turkish-Dutch mothers were married and 9% of them had only one child who was the target child in this study. Forty six percent of the target children were girls.

Among the mainstream Dutch mothers, the mean age was 37 years ($SD = 4.48$) and the mean age of the target child was 51 months ($SD = 12.67$). Thirty one percent of the Dutch mothers were middle school, 49% were high school, and 21% were university graduates. Mean years of education Dutch mothers had was 16 years ($SD = 2.86$). Twenty one percent were at-home mothers, 70% were working at a part-time job, and 9% had a full-time job. Regarding the marital status of Dutch mothers, 53% were married, 41% had partnership, and 6% were divorced. Eighteen percent of the Dutch mothers had only one child who was the target child in this study. Fifty one percent of the target children were girls.

An analysis of variance revealed that Turkish-Dutch and Dutch mothers were significantly different from each other in terms of age and years of education. Turkish-Dutch mothers were significantly younger than Dutch mothers, $F(1, 68) = 17.523$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$. Moreover, Dutch mothers showed a higher level of education than Turkish-Dutch mothers, $F(1, 68) = 23.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$.

Materials

Mothers' parenting behaviors were measured by observation of the interaction between the mother and the child during 10-minute free-play and 10-minute joint

book reading sessions. Observed maternal behaviors were coded using the Parent-Child Affect, Responsiveness, Connectedness, and Autonomy Scale developed by Durgel and Van de Vijver (2010) on the basis of coding schemes by Liu et al. (2005), Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2004), and Rubin and Cheah (2000). An event-sampling approach was used in this study. Maternal behaviors were coded into six subscales of the Parent-Child Affect, Responsiveness, Connectedness, and Autonomy Scale. These subscales assessed the following parenting behaviors: Positive Affect which reflects the mother's displays of warm and positive affect, attitudes, and emotions towards the child (e.g., "using pet names when calling the child"), Responsiveness which refers to the mother's responding to the child's verbal and nonverbal requests (e.g., "suggesting an activity/drawing attention to a toy when child is unoccupied/bored"), Negative Control which reflects the degree to which the mother is intrusive during interaction and the amount of control the mother exerts over child (e.g., "pulling the book/toy away when the child reaches for it"), Autonomy which refers to the degree to which the mother is willing to let the child direct an activity, initiate an activity and explore (e.g., "letting the child decide about game rules/turns/role assignments"), Connectedness which refers to the mother's behaviors dealing with child's cooperation, emotional closeness, physical/behavioral proximity (e.g., "kissing the child or getting a kiss from the child"), and Number of Sentences Uttered. For Responsiveness, the criteria for the mother to get a score was that the child needed to initiate a request and the mother needed to respond to it within 5 seconds after the child's initiation; these criteria were based on previous coding schemes (Rubin & Cheah, 2000).

The main difference of the coding scheme used in this study compared to the existing coding manuals is that many of the existing coding schemes (e.g., Erikson et al., 1985; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004) use rating systems. In these schemes, coders rate the maternal behaviors on a Likert scale in terms of the degree of the category being assessed. This procedure may not clearly outline what and how should be coded, as the link between the displayed behavior and the 'to be coded' category is not always clear. Therefore, in the coding manual we developed for this study, we created an almost exhaustive list of behaviors for each category based on existing manuals and pilot studies. We tried to list all the possible types of verbal and non-verbal behaviors for each subscale that can occur during mother-child interactions, thereby minimizing the need for more subjective interpretations by the coders. The

coding of the observational data was carried out by the main researcher and Turkish, Dutch, and Turkish-Dutch graduate student assistants. We scored the number of times these behaviors in the list happened during the recorded session. The sessions of free-play and joint book reading were coded in blocks of 20 seconds by scoring a behavior each and every time it happened. The principal researcher trained coders until acceptable interrater agreement was maintained. Interrater reliabilities were calculated based on six randomly selected observations for each sample (20% of the cases). Codings of the principal researcher and the student coders were checked for the percentage agreement for play and book sessions separately. The interrater agreement ranged from 74% to 87% for Positive Affect, from 81% to 90% for Negative Control, from 72% to 89% for Responsiveness, from 79% to 91% for Autonomy, and from 83% to 95% for Connectedness. Subscale scores were computed by dividing the sum of the frequencies of listed behaviors under each category by the length of the recorded interaction since some of the observations took less than 10 minutes. Coding of the recording of one session of a child took approximately 7 hours.

Procedure

All participants were recruited from preschools and Turkish associations in and around Tilburg, the Netherlands as well as through snowball sampling. Mothers were given information on the study and asked whether they were willing to participate. Those who agreed to take part were visited at their home and the data collection lasted about one and a half hours. Dutch mothers were interviewed by a Dutch researcher and Turkish immigrant mothers were interviewed by a Turkish interviewer in either Dutch or Turkish, according to the participants' preference.

The first ten to fifteen minutes of the visit were spared for a warm-up between the researcher and the mother and the child. The researcher conversed with the mother casually about their life in general and initiated chatting with the target child. After the warm-up, the researcher explained the procedure of the study to the mother and once again got permission for the videotaped data collection. After collecting background information, a 10-min free play session between the mother and her child was recorded after giving the instruction to 'play with the provided toys as you usually play together at home'. The toy set included a piano, a telephone, a baby doll, Lego blocks, a doctor kit, an ambulance, a police car, and a fire truck. After 10 minutes of

free play, the mother and the child were asked to put the toys back into the bag so that they could start with the joint book reading session. The session used the book 'Frog, where are you?' (Mayer, 1969) brought by the researcher. This book had only pictures in it (except for the cover) to eliminate the cultural differences that might arise from language issues. The instruction was to 'read the Froggie book as you usually read a book together at home'.

Results

First of all, we examined similarities and differences in observed parenting practices during free-play setting by a oneway MANCOVA with group as independent variable, observed parenting practices subscales as dependent variables, and maternal education and age as covariates. MANCOVA results showed that two groups significantly differed in the ways they interacted with their children during free-play, Wilks' lambda = .80, $F(1, 68) = 2.89$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .18$. Univariate analyses indicated that, after accounting for maternal age and education, Turkish-Dutch mothers displayed more Responsiveness than Dutch mothers while playing with their children, $F(1, 68) = 8.38$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$.

Additionally, group differences in observed parenting practices during joint book reading session were analyzed. A one-way MANCOVA was conducted with group as independent variable, observed parenting practices subscales as dependent variables, and with maternal education and age as covariates. MANCOVA results (see Table 1) showed that two groups significantly differed in their parenting practices while reading a book with their children, Wilks' Lambda = .77, $F(1, 68) = 3.43$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .24$. Univariate analyses indicated that Turkish-Dutch mothers displayed Responsiveness significantly more frequently than the Dutch mothers, $F(1, 68) = 16.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$.

Lastly, we checked the overall level of interaction during free play and book reading sessions by analyzing the number of sentences uttered by the mothers. It was found that Turkish immigrant mothers used significantly more sentences as they interacted with their children than did the Dutch mothers, both in the free play ($F(1, 68) = 5.07$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$) and in book reading sessions ($F(1, 68) = 4.98$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$).

Table 1

Observed Parenting Practices During Free Play and Book Reading: Means, Standard Deviations, MANOVA and MANCOVA Results (Maternal Education and Age as Covariates)

Scale	Dutch		Turkish-Dutch		η^2 before covariates	η^2 after covariates
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Free Play						
Affect	1.89	1.19	1.67	1.43	.006	.021
Negative control	0.76	0.55	1.29	1.77	.038	.001
Responsiveness	2.07	1.11	3.42	2.19	.133**	.117**
Autonomy	2.51	1.58	3.45	1.95	.067*	.037
Connectedness	3.33	0.88	4.14	1.89	.070*	.015
Number of sentences	10.96	2.99	15.11	6.30	.152**	.074*
Book Reading						
Affect	1.85	1.25	2.29	1.64	.022	.007
Negative control	1.93	1.44	2.06	1.28	.002	.000
Responsiveness	1.72	0.91	3.70	2.03	.287***	.216***
Autonomy	1.53	1.61	1.99	1.51	.023	.029
Connectedness	3.27	0.39	3.68	0.83	.091*	.034
Number of sentences	16.79	4.06	21.33	6.04	.166**	.077*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

Turkish immigrant families form one of the largest immigrant populations in the Netherlands and their adaptation to and performance in the Dutch society have been attracting major academic and public interest; however, there are not many observational studies investigating family dynamics and parenting patterns in this community. We examined observed parenting practices of Turkish immigrant and Dutch mothers in the Netherlands.

Based on literature in the field of parenting practices, we expected Turkish immigrant mothers to display more demandingness and less positive parenting practices compared to the Dutch. It is generally accepted that parents from non-Western, traditional, collectivistic cultures display authoritarian parenting with high levels of obedience and demandingness more than parents from Western, individualistic backgrounds (Chao, 1994; Rudy & Grusec, 2006). However, when

mothers' observed parenting behaviors were examined, the expected differences in parenting practices between the Turkish-Dutch and Dutch mothers were not found.

Our expectations regarding negative parenting practices being displayed more by Turkish immigrants than the Dutch were not supported. One can argue that this result may be associated with how much culture relates to observed and self-reported aspects of parenting. There is an extensive literature in psychology which shows that culture reflects itself in people's attitudes and beliefs more than in their behaviors and that cross-cultural differences in attitudes and beliefs are often larger than in behaviors (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2008; Van de Vijver, 2007). We know that parenting studies largely depend on self-reported data which may not reflect what is actually happening in child-rearing styles of parents.

Another reason we did not find a difference in observed negative parenting practices between the two samples might be related to the nature of the interactions triggered by the experimental conditions. We observed mothers' child-rearing practices in two different conditions; first in a free-play setting in which the mother and her child were playing with the toys we provided, and secondly in a book reading session in which mother and child were asked to explore a picture-based book jointly. None of these sessions were task or performance related which would require disciplining and specific guidelines from the mothers toward their children. Mothers might use control as a discipline technique when they particularly need to guide and lead their children. However in this study neither free play nor book reading sessions were performance related, and mothers were not explicitly asked to guide or lead their children. Thus, we can speculate that the ways mothers' parenting practices were observed in this study did not give much opportunity to capture negative parenting and parental control.

Turkish-Dutch mothers were found to display more responsiveness compared to the Dutch mothers, both in free-play and in book-reading settings. This finding diverges from our expectations based on the previous literature stating the similar (Leseman & Van den Boom, 1999; Yaman et al., 2010). One of the reasons as to why in this study we found Turkish mothers display more responsiveness might be related to the way responsiveness is defined in this study. Our definition of responsiveness referred to mother's responding to the child's verbal and non-verbal requests and it consisted of items such as "helping child when s/he needs help", "reacting to child's excitement/ boredom/ interest", and "responding to child's

expressions of love and affection". However, in one of the very few observational studies comparing Dutch and Turkish-Dutch mothers' parenting practices, Dutch mothers were found to display more sensitive parenting than the Turkish-Dutch immigrants (Yaman et al., 2010). In this particular study, maternal sensitivity was defined as mother's expressions of emotional support and positive regard by encouraging child's accomplishments on the tasks (during a problem-solving task session). It is generally accepted that praising and encouraging the child's task-related accomplishments are more Western, individualism-oriented parenting practices (Kagitcibasi, 2007; Liu et al., 2005). It can be tentatively concluded that the cross-cultural differences between Dutch and Turkish-Dutch mothers in responsiveness may be restricted to task-related situations.

This finding may also be related to the way responsiveness was coded in this study. We gave a mother a score for responsiveness, if she responded to child's requests within 5 s after the child's initiation. Any response later than the first 5 s was not counted. For instance, if the child was struggling with opening the Lego box or undressing the baby doll and the mother helped within 5 s, then a score was given. When looked at this way of coding, one can think of many reasons leading to the observed group difference. Firstly, it might be that Dutch children initiated fewer requests than the Turkish children which led to more opportunities for the Turkish mothers to respond (note that responsiveness was considered only if the child initiated a request from the mother). This could well be related to the notion of Western children being more autonomous and assertive than non-Western children (Kagitcibasi, 2007). Thus, Dutch children might solve their needs more without involving their mothers as compared to the Turkish-Dutch children. However, in order to make sure this was the reason, we would need to recode the child's behaviors.

Secondly, we gave mothers a responsiveness score only if they displayed a reaction towards their children's needs within 5 s. It could be that Turkish mothers reacted immediately whereas Dutch mothers gave more time for their children to find out the solution themselves before they interfere with the issue. This argument is again in line with Western parenting patterns which support children's self-sufficiency and autonomy (Kagitcibasi, 2007). The use of a more liberal time limit might change the findings.

Lastly, we found that Turkish-Dutch mothers uttered more sentences while interacting with their children compared to the Dutch mothers which means Turkish

mothers were more verbally interactive than their Dutch counterparts. One can argue that since Turkish mothers talked more and engaged more verbally with their children, they were also more likely to respond to their children's requests. These explanations amount to a picture that is in line with a view of the Turkish culture as interdependent. Helping the child and using verbalizations to support these actions is probably an effective tool in developing and maintaining a close relationship between caregiver and child. High levels of responsiveness that are not restricted to a specific type of input (such as control) but cover various domains, as we found in the present study, may be indicative of indulgent parenting and foster the close mother—child relationship, supposedly a strong feature of more collectivistic groups. Focusing on praise as has been done in previous studies may restrict responsiveness to a specific domain (cognition and learning) that is not appropriate to do justice to the way Turkish-Dutch mothers interact with their children.

This study is not free from limitations. Most importantly, the manual used to code mothers' observed parenting behaviors as they were interacting with their children was developed by the authors specifically for this study and was used for the first time in this study. As a consequence, we cannot compare our results to the findings of previous studies with various cultural groups. Secondly and lastly, differences found in responsive parenting behaviors might be related to child's behaviors as well, as discussed earlier in the discussion. For the next studies, it is important to code and analyze children's behaviors as they interact with their mothers as well.

To conclude, although Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands receive much academic and public interest, there are not many studies focusing on their family dynamics and parenting patterns. The present study has significance in this regard, since it is one of the very few in-depth studies examining Turkish-Dutch parents' child-rearing beliefs and practices. Moreover, observational studies in this cultural context are scarce even though they provide us with a better understanding of what is going on in the day-to-day interactions between parents and their children. More observational studies on Turkish immigrant parents' child rearing and linking it to the developmental outcomes of their children would be very helpful to further develop prevention and intervention studies focusing on Turkish immigrant children who are reported to be behind their mainstream counterparts (Te Nijenhuis, Tolboom, Reising, & Bleichrodt, 2004).

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