

RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA YAZISI

## The Effect of Seasonal Agricultural Worker Mothers' Maternal Gatekeeping Status on Their Emotional Abuse Potential Toward Their 3-6 Years Old Children

### Mevsimlik Tarım İşçisi Olan Annelerin Anne Bekçiliği Durumlarının 3-6 Yaş Çocuklarına Yönelik Duygusal İstismar Potansiyellerine Etkisi

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#### Abstract:

Development is a lifelong process. The roots of this process are formed from early childhood development. The biggest responsibility at this point also lies with the parents. The attitudes adopted in child raising have a direct effect on the personality development of children. From birth, the mother is responsible for caring for the child, creating a special bond between mother and child. The bond established with the father also supports the development of children. However, the mother may sometimes be an obstacle, consciously or unconsciously, in the child's bonding with the father. This obstacle is reflected in the concept of "maternal gatekeeping." "Maternal gatekeeping" not only affects the bonding process but can also lead to the emotional neglect of children. There may be various variables in the formation of maternal gatekeeping. Within the scope of this study, the emotional abuse potential of seasonal agricultural worker mothers, who are among the disadvantaged groups, towards their children aged 3-6 years in the context of maternal gatekeeping was examined in terms of various variables. Participants were administered the Socio-demographic Information Form, Preschool Period (3-6 Years) Maternal Gatekeeping Scale (MLSS): Mother Form, Emotional Abuse Potential Scale for Parents with Children of Age. The statistical analyses of the study were conducted using SPSS 25.00 and the Independent Samples t-test, a one-way analysis variance test when comparing according to demographic variables, and a Scheffe test after the variance analysis. According to the findings of the study, significant differences were found when age, years of marriage, educational status, family type, number of children, emotional abuse, and maternal gatekeeping scores were compared.

**Keywords:** *Adult Bullying, Bully, Bullying, Reliability, Validity.*

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## Öz:

Gelişim yaşam boyu devamlılık arz eden bir süreçtir. Bu sürecin kökleri erken çocukluk dönemindeki gelişimden oluşmaktadır. Bu noktada en büyük sorumluluk da ebeveynlere düşmektedir. Çocuk yetiştirmede benimsenen tutumlar çocukların kişilik gelişimlerini doğrudan etkilemektedir. Çocuğun doğumundan itibaren; annenin çocuğun bakımından sorumlu olması anne ile çocuk arasında özel bir bağ oluşturur. Babayla kurulan bağ aynı zamanda çocukların gelişimini de destekler. Ancak bazen anne bilinçli ya da bilinçsiz olarak çocuğun babayla bağ kurmasına engel olabilmektedir. Bu engel "anne bekçiliği" kavramını ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Annen bekçiliği sadece bağlanma sürecini etkilemekle kalmaz; aynı zamanda çocukların duygusal ihmeline de yol açabilir. Anne bekçiliğinin oluşumunda çeşitli değişkenler olabilir. Bu çalışma kapsamında dezavantajlı gruplar arasında yer alan mevsimlik tarım işçisi annelerin, anne bekçiliği kapsamında 3-6 yaş arası çocuklarına yönelik duygusal istismar potansiyeli çeşitli değişkenler açısından incelenmiştir. Katılımcılara Sosyodemografik Bilgi Formu, Okul Öncesi Dönem (3-6 Yaş) Anne Bekçiliği Ölçeği (MLSS): Anne Formu, Çocuğu Olan Ebeveynler İçin Duygusal İstismar Potansiyeli Ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Araştırmanın istatistiksel analizleri SPSS 25.00 ve Independent Samples t-testi, demografik değişkenlere göre karşılaştırmalarda tek yönlü varyans analizi testi, varyans analizi sonrasında Scheffe testi ile yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre yaş, evlilik yılı, eğitim durumu, aile tipi, çocuk sayısı ile duygusal istismar ve anne bekçiliği puanları karşılaştırıldığında anlamlı farklılıklar bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Anne Bekçiliği, Mevsimlik Tarım İşçisi Anneler, Duygusal İstismar.

## Introduction

The first years of life are critical in the process that affects the whole life. To raise a healthy individual; it's of great importance that a positive early childhood period is spent by meeting the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of the child in the relationship established between parent and child (Bowlby, 1988; Yılmaz Demirel, 2023).

Mothers can exhibit controlling, facilitating, and restrictive behaviors toward child-rearing. This situation can sometimes be women's greatest satisfaction source (Ömeroğlu ve Ulutaş, 2004). Although studies show that fathers are also effective in children's development, the activities of mothers on their children continue to exist intensely. This state of competence in mothers has led to the concept of "maternal gatekeeping."

The concept of maternal gatekeeping was first used by Allen and Hawkins (1999). Maternal gatekeeping refers to some behaviors of mothers that distract fathers from their responsibilities in housework and childcare (Fagan and Barnett, 2003).

While defining the concept of maternal gatekeeping, the "garden" metaphor was used. With this metaphor, home and family are the mother's garden surrounded by locked doors and walls; the mother assumes the role of a caring parent in this garden in accordance with the rules determined by the mother (Aydın ve Akgöz Aktaş, 2017). Although it may seem advantageous for both the mother and the child to concentrate the childcare and nurturing relationship on the mother, it also brings some problems. Primarily, this situation hinders the interruption of the child-father relationship and the dynamics within the family to settle on solid ground.

Neglect and abuse can be realized in "physical, emotional, sexual, economic" types (Akyüz, 2010). Among these, emotional abuse is the most common. Emotional abuse is any action or inaction by adults around the child that prevents the child's emotional development, especially the child's personality (Aktay, 2020). Emotional abuse is considered a type of abuse that is difficult to detect.

Cases of neglect and abuse are more frequently encountered in children from families in socio-cultural and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. The high

number of children in the family, the young age of the parents, the lack of maturity in taking responsibility, and the weak social support increase the predisposition (Arabacı, 2020). Seasonal agricultural workers are also included in this group.

Seasonal agricultural workers are mostly without taking occupational health and safety measures, without social security, and safe transport facilities (Görücü and Akbıyık, 2010). This situation brings many problems them. According to the findings of the research, children of seasonal agricultural workers are six times more likely to be neglected and abused (Kontaş Azaklı, 2021). Being employed in jobs that are not suitable for their age and developmental characteristics, not having enough time for their needs such as sleep, games, and friendship, and not receiving the attention and communication they need from their parents can cause children to become physically, emotionally and sexually vulnerable to abuse (Ağyar and Atış, 2022; Erım, 2023).

In light of the above, how effective mothers are in developing children can be seen. Within the scope of this study, it has been analyzed how mothers' "maternal gatekeeping" status affects their potential to emotionally abuse their children in terms of different variables.

## Method

The study permit was received from Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with decision number 259, dated 12.10.2023. The research was designed in a general survey model from quantitative survey methods. The study group of the research consists of 202 mothers working as seasonal agricultural workers in Ordu province and Gököy, Gürgentepe, Aybastı, Ulubey, Çamaş, Fatsa, Perşembe districts due to the abundance of seasonal agricultural workers. These mothers came from Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Batman, and Şırnak provinces as seasonal workers. In this context, the purposive sampling method, one of the non-probability-based sampling methods, was used. The characteristics of

the relevant population are determined, and the individuals with these characteristics are included in the scope of the study. After the group characteristics are determined, those who want to participate in the study are determined among those who meet the criteria for participation in the study (Budak ve Budak, 2014). The data were collected face-to-face. Those who could be reached and those who agreed to participate in the research were included in the sample for the data collection process.

The participating mothers are over the age of 30, with 50.5%, and 55.9% of them have been married for 11 years or more. The number of 4 or more children is 55.4%. The birth order of children aged 3-6 years is 4 and above, with 52.0%. It is observed that 52.0% of the participants have a nuclear family structure. The rate of education is a in a primary school, at 69.8%.

#### ***Preschool Period (3-6 years) Maternal Gatekeeping Scale (PAPSS)-Mother Form:***

It consists of 6 items in total. In PAPSS, the items are in the form of behavioral patterns, and they are answered on a five-point Likert-type scale. The "I completely agree" option is 5 points, the "I agree" option is 4 points, the "Partly agree" option is 3 points, the "I disagree" option is 3 points, the option receives 2 points, and the option "I strongly disagree" receives 1 point of the scale. The total score is used in the evaluation. Mothers get high scores on the scale. This indicates that they exhibit more maternal watchdog behavior. Cronbach Alpha reliability of this scale is .88.

#### ***Emotional Abuse Potential Scale for Parents of 3-6-Year-Old Children***

The scale, developed in a 5-point Likert model, consists of 2 sub-dimensions, causal and preventive, and 50 items.

For the Causal and Preventive subdimension, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is .96 and .97 for the entire scale.

#### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics of the variables were examined. The mean values of variables are between 2.13 and 3.59, skewness values are between -0.47 and 0.51, and kurtosis values are between -0.71 and -0.66. Since the kurtosis and skewness coefficients are between -1 and +1, it's seen that the data set is normally distributed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2015). Parametric statistics were used to analyze data. Independent samples t-test was used to compare causality, preventive and maternal gatekeeping scores according to age groups, years of marriage, and family type, and one-way analysis of variance was used to compare them according to number of children, birth order, and educational status. The Scheffe test, one of the post-hoc tests, was performed to determine which groups the difference originated in the groups that showed a significant difference after the analysis of variance. The analyses were performed in SPSS 25 package program, and the significance level was set as  $\alpha=0.05$ .

#### **Results**

Table 1 shows the results of the independent samples t-test conducted to compare the emotional abuse - maternal gatekeeping scores of the participants according to their ages. A significant difference was observed in causality ( $t=-12,456, p<0,001$ ), preventive ( $t=12,031, p<0,001$ ), and maternal gatekeeping ( $t=-9,302, p<0,001$ ) scores according to age groups. While the average of the participants over the age of 30 is higher in the causality and maternal gatekeeping scores, the average of the participants aged 19-30 is higher in the preventive score.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Emotional Abuse and Maternal Gatekeeping By Age

		<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Causality	19-30 years old	100	1,82	0,42	-12,456	0,000
	Over 30 years old	102	2,42	0,24		
Preventive	19-30 years old	100	3,91	0,46	12,031	0,000
	Over 30 years old	102	3,27	0,28		
Maternal Gatekeeping	19-30 years old	100	3,09	0,32	-9,302	0,000
	Over 30 years old	102	3,53	0,36		

Table 2 shows the results of the independent samples t-test for the comparison of emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores of the participants according to their years of marriage. A significant difference was observed in causality ( $t=-14,902, p<0,001$ ), preventive ( $t=13,582, p<0,001$ ), and maternal gatekeeping ( $t=-9,124, p<0,001$ )

scores according to years of marriage. While the average of the participants who have been married for 11 years or more is higher in causality and maternal gatekeeping scores, the average of the participants who have been married for 3-10 years is higher in preventive scores.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Emotional Abuse and Maternal Gatekeeping According To Years of Marriage

		n	Mean	SS	t	p
Causality	3-10 years	89	1,76	0,39	-14,902	0,000
	11 years and more	113	2,42	0,24		
Preventive	3-10 years	89	3,97	0,44	13,582	0,000
	11 years and more	113	3,28	0,28		
Maternal Gatekeeping	3-10 years	89	3,07	0,32	-9,124	0,000
	11 years and more	113	3,51	0,36		

Table 3 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance conducted to compare the emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores of the participants according to the number of children. A significant difference was observed in causality ( $F=213,293, p<0,001$ ), preventive ( $F=178,771, p<0,001$ ), and maternal gatekeeping ( $F=54,648, p<0,001$ ) scores according to the number of children. The scheffe test, one of the post-hoc tests, was performed to determine which groups the difference was between. The highest mean in causality scores was found

in those with 4 or more children, then in those with 3 children, and the lowest mean was found in those with 1-2 children, and the difference between all groups was statistically significant. In the preventive scores, the highest mean was in those with 1-2 children, then in those with 3 children, and the lowest mean was in those with 4 or more children, and the difference between all groups was statistically significant. In the maternal gatekeeping scores, the mean of those with 4 or more children was significantly higher than those with 1-2 and 3 children.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Emotional Abuse and Maternal Gatekeeping By Number of Children

		n	Mean	SS	F	p	post-hoc
Causality	1-2 children (a)	44	1,53	0,30	213,293	0,000	a<b<c
	3 children (b)	46	1,93	0,33			
	4 and more (c)	112	2,44	0,20			
Preventive	1-2 children (a)	44	4,18	0,39	178,771	0,000	a>b>c
	3 children (b)	46	3,86	0,34			
	4 and more (c)	112	3,24	0,23			
Maternal Gatekeeping	1-2 children (a)	44	3,00	0,30	54,648	0,000	a,b<c
	3 children (b)	46	3,09	0,33			
	4 and more (c)	112	3,53	0,34			

Table 4 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance for the comparison of emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores according to the birth order of the children of participants. Significant difference was observed in causality ( $F=90,839, p<0,001$ ), preventive ( $F=79,506, p<0,001$ ), and maternal gatekeeping ( $F=33,042, p<0,001$ ) scores according to birth order of the children. The scheffe test, one of the post-hoc tests, was performed to determine which groups the difference was between. The highest mean causality score was found in those with birth order of 4<sup>th</sup> and later, then third child, then

second child, and the lowest mean causality score was found in those with first child, and the difference between all groups was statistically significant. In preventive scores, those with first and second child order had the highest mean, followed by those with third child order, and the lowest mean was observed in those with 4<sup>th</sup> or more children. In the maternal gatekeeping scores, those with first and second child orders, had the lowest mean, followed by those with third child orders, and the highest mean was observed in those with 4<sup>th</sup> or more child orders.

**Table 4.** Comparison of Emotional Abuse and Maternal Gatekeeping By Birth Order

		n	Mean	SS	F	p	post-hoc
Causality	First child (a)	34	1,57	0,35	90,839	0,000	a<b<c<d
	Second child (b)	34	1,81	0,40			
	Third child (c)	29	2,04	0,38			
	4 <sup>th</sup> and later (d)	105	2,43	0,20			
Preventive	First child (a)	34	4,15	0,43	79,506	0,000	a,b>c>d
	Second child (b)	34	3,92	0,42			
	Third child (c)	29	3,75	0,44			
	4 <sup>th</sup> and later (d)	105	3,25	0,22			
Maternal Gatekeeping	First child (a)	34	2,99	0,28	33,042	0,000	a,b<c<d
	Second child (b)	34	3,05	0,28			
	Third child (c)	29	3,23	0,42			
	4 <sup>th</sup> and later (d)	105	3,53	0,34			

Table 5 shows the results of the independent samples t-test for the comparison of emotional abuse - maternal gatekeeping scores of the participants according to their family type. A significant difference was observed in causality ( $t=9,045$ ,  $p<0,001$ ), preventive ( $t=-9,143$ ,  $p<0,001$ ), and maternal gatekeeping ( $t=6,719$ ,  $p<0,001$ )

scores according to family type. While the average of the participants living in extended families was higher in Causality and Maternal Gatekeeping scores, the average of the participants living in nuclear families was higher in Preventive scores.

**Table 5.** Comparison of Emotional Abuse and Maternal Gatekeeping By Family Type

		n	Mean	SS	t	p
Causality	Extended family	97	2,38	0,31	9,045	0,000
	Nuclear family	105	1,89	0,44		
Preventive	Extended family	97	3,31	0,34	-9,143	0,000
	Nuclear family	105	3,85	0,48		
Maternal Gatekeeping	Extended family	97	3,49	0,34	6,719	0,000
	Nuclear family	105	3,15	0,39		

Table 6 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance for the comparison of emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores according to the participants' educational status. A significant difference was observed in causality ( $F=57,834$ ,  $p<0,001$ ), preventive ( $F=77,945$ ,  $p<0,001$ ), and maternal gatekeeping ( $F=35,651$ ,  $p<0,001$ ) scores according to educational status. The scheffe test, one of the post-hoc tests, was performed to determine which groups the difference was

between. It was observed that the highest mean in Causality and Maternal Gatekeeping scores was in primary school, then in secondary school, and the lowest mean was in high school, and there was a significant difference between all groups. In the preventive scores, it was observed that the highest mean was high school, then secondary school, and the lowest mean was primary school, and there was a significant difference between all groups.

**Table 6.** Comparison of Emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping according to educational status

		n	Mean	SS	F	p	post-hoc
Causality	Primary School (a)	141	2,29	0,36			
	Secondary School (b)	40	1,75	0,39	57,834	0,000	a>b>c
	High School (c)	15	1,51	0,23			
Preventive	Primary School (a)	141	3,39	0,38			
	Secondary School (b)	40	4,06	0,35	77,945	0,000	a<b<c
	High School (c)	15	4,27	0,31			
Maternal Gatekeeping	Primary School (a)	141	3,44	0,37			
	Secondary School (b)	40	3,03	0,32	35,651	0,000	a>b>c
	High School (c)	15	2,84	0,15			

## Discussion

There was a significant difference between the causality and preventive sub-dimensions of emotional abuse potentials of seasonal agricultural worker mothers with children aged 3-6 years and maternal gatekeeping scores according to age groups. The average of participants over 30 is higher in the causality and maternal care scores, and the average of the participants between the ages of 19-30 is higher in the prevention score. Studies have found that as the age of mothers increases, their attitudes toward preventing emotional abuse also increase, and as their age decreases, their potential to prevent emotional abuse decreases (Nguyen et al., 2010; Dittrich et al., 2018).

It's not possible to speak of a "home" for seasonal agricultural workers as it is commonly understood. We don't know how the meaning of home is constructed for seasonal agricultural workers who spend an average of 7-8 months of the year away from home. It was observed that the participants lived either in tents or in unused old houses provided by the employers and arranged for workers. Easthope (2014) pointed out that in addition to its socio-psychospatial dimensions, it is also an "emotional repository". The home embodies and makes sense of one's emotions and perceptions and is the emotional and relational bond one establishes with it.

While gender perception may be an important factor in the fulfillment of the roles of seasonal agricultural worker women participating in the study as mothers, it was observed that mothers share the responsibility of caring for their daughters or young children with women identified as cooks by the labor group. Seasonal worker women are responsible for caring for children with girls and other women. The main factor behind the parenting standards decided by both fathers and mothers can be considered gender roles (Ebeoğlu et al., 2021) and the expectations arising from these standards. It can be stated that young seasonal agricultural worker mothers are more conscious about mother-child relationships and development and can carry the responsibility and burden of caring for their children more quickly due to the small number of children.

There was a significant difference in causality preventive and maternal gatekeeping scores according to years of marriage. In causality and maternal gatekeeping scores, the average of the participants who were married for 11 years or more was higher, while the average of those who were married for 3-10 years was higher in the preventive score. Akgöz and Aydın (2020) reported that maternal gatekeeping was not related to parents' age and duration of marriage, and Karabulut (2021) reported that maternal gatekeeping differed according to age and education levels. According to the study conducted by Pekdoğan and Gözün Kahraman (2021), as the protectiveness of mothers increases, their scores on preventing emotional abuse decrease. The causality of emotional abuse increases as the duration of marriage increases, and the preventive effect increases as the duration of marriage decreases. This means that young mothers are more likely to make their child happy, respect the child, hug the child, and have an open communication pattern that allows the child to express their feelings freely. Şahingöz and Bütün Ayhan (2020) found that mothers with high levels of knowledge about child development also had low levels of anxiety. According to the study conducted by Çoşkun and Aktaş (2009), it was determined that mothers at the primary education level were more anxious than mothers in the secondary and higher education groups, and mothers in the secondary education group were more anxious than mothers in the higher education group.

There were significant differences between the number of children and emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores. Causality scores increase as the number of children increases, whereas preventive scores decrease as the number of children increases. In the maternal gatekeeping scores, the mean of those with 4 or more children was significantly higher than those with 1-2 and 3 children. According to the study conducted by Kocabay Yıldız and Sezgin (2022), there is a significant difference between the number of children variable and the scores of maternal gatekeeping and modern motherhood. In their study, Arabacı and Ömeroğlu (2013) found that the communication of parents with many children in their families was weaker than that of parents with fewer

children. Alabay (2017) found that parents with two children exhibited less permissive attitudes than parents with three or more children. Studies show that abuse is more common in families with many children (Almuneef et al., 2016; Lang et al., 2022; Karlsson, 2023).

There was a significant difference in birth order, causality, and maternal gatekeeping scores. In causality scores, the highest mean was found in those with a birth order of fourth and later, and the lowest mean was found in those with the first child. The preventive scores found that those in the first and second child order had the highest mean significantly, while those with fourth or more children had the lowest mean. According to the study conducted by Varol (2022), it was found that while mothers' obstructive gatekeeping behaviors differed according to the mother's education level and the father's perceived parenting style, they did not differ significantly according to the child's gender, number of siblings, birth order, parents' age, employment and income status, and duration of marriage.

There was a significant difference in the causality and preventive sub-dimensions of emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores according to family type. While the average of the participants living in extended families was higher in causality and maternal gatekeeping scores, the average of the participants living in nuclear families was higher in preventive scores. Grandmothers, granddaughters, and daughters, often seen as experienced in child rearing, provide support and are involved in childcare when mothers become parents in the extended family and work as seasonal workers. Studies show that relationships between mothers and grandmothers (support or conflict) can influence mothers' parenting and co-parenting behaviors. Support for childcare from grandmothers in early childhood predicts adolescent mothers' parenting self-efficacy (Zeiders et al., 2015).

A significant difference was observed in the causal and preventive sub-dimensions of emotional abuse and maternal gatekeeping scores according to educational status. As the level of education increases, causality and maternal gatekeeping scores decrease. Preventiveness

scores increase as the level of education increases. These results are consistent with the literature (Şenol, 2021; Demir, 2022). According to the study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2010) in the USA, it was found that as the education level of mothers and fathers decreased, the risk of child neglect and abuse increased.

Although it's thought that some limitations of the study's results will contribute to the related field of study, some limitations should be considered. Comparison of the sample group with different groups with different socioeconomic characteristics seems to be important in terms of generalisability and development of preventive intervention programs. It will make important contributions to future research to consist of groups with different characteristics that can enable cultural comparisons.

#### Declarations

#### Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval has been granted to this study by Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Decision no: 15-2023/259; Date: 12.10.2023).

#### Consent for Publication

Not applicable.

#### Availability of Data and Materials

Not applicable.

#### Competing Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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#### Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the planning of the research, obtaining permissions, data collection, analysis, and writing stages. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

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