



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Positive parenting in ethnic minority families. Challenges and outcomes
Emmen, R.

Citation

Emmen, R. (2014, January 28). *Positive parenting in ethnic minority families. Challenges and outcomes*. Uitgeverij BOXPress B.V., 's Hertogenbosch. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/23121>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/23121>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/23121> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Emmen, Rosalia Antonia Grada (Rosanneke)

Title: Positive parenting in ethnic minority families : challenges and outcomes

Issue Date: 2014-01-28

1

General introduction

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Positive parenting is a broad construct including sensitivity, scaffolding, and respect for the child's autonomy. Sensitivity is the most widely used term in research on positive parenting and refers to the ability to perceive and interpret a child's signals and to respond to those signals in a prompt and appropriate way (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1974). It is one of the most important parenting components for young children, since it has been found to predict children's secure attachment across cultures (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003; De Wolff & Van IJzendoorn, 1997; Vereijken, Riksen-Walraven, & Kondo-Ikemura, 1997), as well as positive cognitive development, social behavior, and emotion regulation (e.g., Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). Most studies on (sensitive) parenting have been conducted in Western middle-class samples. Ethnic minority parents have been found to behave less sensitively than majority parents, but this difference may be largely explained by socioeconomic factors (Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, et al., 2012). This is in line with the Family Stress and Family Investment Models that posit that economic pressures results in lower quality parenting and in turn adverse child development (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). However, some studies have corrected for variability in socioeconomic status and still found (attenuated) differences in positive parenting behavior between minority and majority parents (e.g., Berlin, Brady-Smith, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002; Yaman, Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Linting, 2010). These findings raise several questions about the antecedents of positive parenting in ethnic minority families, as well as its role in predicting child outcomes. The overall goal of the current dissertation is to uncover predictors and outcomes of positive parenting in ethnic minority families.

Universal applicability of maternal sensitivity

According to Mary Ainsworth four components of sensitivity can be distinguished, namely (1) parent's awareness of child's signals, (2) the accuracy of the interpretation of these signals, and (3) the promptness, and (4) the appropriateness of their response to these signals (Ainsworth et al., 1974). Most studies on sensitive parenting have been conducted among middle-class European and North-American families, however, Ainsworth's sensitivity construct was inspired in part by her observations in the non-Western context of Uganda (Ainsworth, 1967). In addition, her observational scale to assess sensitivity has also been used in countries outside Europe and North America (e.g., True, Pisani, & Oumar, 2001; Yovsi, Kartner, Keller, & Lohaus, 2009). Nevertheless, research on parental sensitivity in a non-Western context is rare. Studies comparing maternal sen-

sitivity across cultures show that ethnic minority families have been found to be less sensitive towards their children than majority parents (e.g., Barnett, Shanahan, Deng, Haskett, & Cox, 2010; Pungello, Iruka, Dotterer, Mills-Koonce, & Reznick, 2009; Van IJzendoorn, 1990). Cultural and personal differences in ideas about parenting are often viewed as possible explanations for observed differences in behavior (Harwood, Schoe-merich, Schulze, & Gonzales, 1999; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000). Parents from different cultures have been found to have different beliefs about for example strictness and the extent to which children should be encouraged to think independently or should respect authority (Bornstein, Putnick, & Lansford, 2011). In addition, when parents for example express the belief that they value harsh discipline practices, they may also put their beliefs into practice and endorse more harsh discipline responses (Pinderhughes et al., 2000).

Although there is reason to assume that maternal sensitivity is a universally relevant construct (Mesman, Oster, & Camras, 2012; Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, et al., 2012), research to date has not provided clear conclusions about the extent to which cultural and socioeconomic *beliefs* about sensitive parenting are similar. In addition, if different cultures do have convergent beliefs about sensitivity, why then do some studies report mean-level differences in sensitive behavior between cultures? Given the generally lower socioeconomic status (SES) of ethnic minority families compared to majority families (e.g., Barnett et al., 2010; Skinner, MacKenzie, Haggerty, Hill, & Roberson, 2011), and the fact that lower SES relates to less optimal parenting (e.g., Barnett et al., 2010), socioeconomic factors may be important in explaining differences in sensitive parenting between ethnic groups (Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, et al., 2012). The potential mechanisms underlying the association between socioeconomic status and positive parenting are described in the Family Stress Model and the Family Investment Model (Conger & Donnellan, 2007).

Family Stress Model and Family Investment Model

The Family Stress Model (FSM) and Family Investment Model (FIM; Conger & Donnellan, 2007) provide explanations for the relation between SES and child development by proposing family stress (FSM) and family investment processes (FIM) as results of low SES, which lead to unfavorable child outcomes. The FSM proposes that stressors such as socioeconomic strains lead to psychological distress (e.g., depression and family dysfunction), which in turn leads to less positive parenting (e.g., less sensitivity, lack of warmth and support) and adverse child development. There is evidence for the FSM in both majority and minority groups (e.g., Belsky, Schlomer, & Ellis, 2012; Conger et al., 2002; Parke et al., 2004). In addition to general stressors, which can be experienced by

both minority and majority families, ethnic minority parents may also experience stressors that are more directly related to their immigrant history, such as acculturation stress.

When people of different cultures come into contact, they undergo an acculturation process in which cognitions (e.g., cultural identity) and behaviors (e.g., ways of speaking, dressing and eating) of individuals may change due to intercultural contact. Acculturation stress is a reaction to events that occur during the process of acculturation, such as discomfort with unfamiliar norms and conflicting acculturation strategies within a family (Berry, 2006; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010). Economic stress has been found to be positively related to acculturation stress (Stein, Gonzalez, & Huq, 2012; White, Roosa, Weaver, & Nair, 2009). Only few studies have examined minority-specific stressors in relation to parenting practices and most of these studies focused on adolescents and did not include observed parenting practices. To our knowledge there is no study testing the unique contribution of acculturation stress above general psychological distress in relation to observed positive parenting in ethnic minority families with young children.

The FIM proposes that families experiencing economic hardship are less able to make significant investments in the development of their children, since they have to invest more in immediate family needs, compared to families with greater economic resources (e.g., Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). These investments in children's development include several domains, such as parental stimulation of learning through support and tutoring. Parental investments are in turn related to positive child development (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). There is evidence for the FIM in both majority and minority groups (e.g., Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002; Melby, Conger, Fang, Wickrama, & Conger, 2008), however, research among minorities is limited and only performed in the United States.

Family stress and investment in relation to child development

In the FSM and FIM literature two main types of child outcomes can be distinguished, namely behavioral and cognitive outcomes. Behavioral outcomes include internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors and temperamental effortful control. Cognitive outcomes include school performance and language ability. In young children, family stress processes have been found to be better predictors of behavioral outcomes, whereas parental investments are better predictors of cognitive outcomes (Linver et al., 2002; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). Investigating the FSM and FIM in ethnic minority families is important, because we have little knowledge about within-group variation regarding socioeconomic status, parenting, and investments in these families (Cabrera et al., 2013). To our knowledge, there are no studies testing both the FSM and FIM that

included a behavioral as well as cognitive outcome in (ethnic minority) adolescents. In addition, some child outcomes can be considered to cut across the behavioral and cognitive domains because they refer to cognitive abilities that are shown on the behavioral level. An example of such a cognitive-behavioral outcome is frustration-induced inhibitory control.

Frustration-induced inhibitory control can be seen as a ‘hot’ executive function (EF; Huijbregts, Warren, Sonnevile, & Swaab-Barneveld, 2008). EF refers to cognitive self-regulatory processes that we use in planning, problem solving and goal-directed action via inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory (Zelazo & Carlson, 2012). Inhibitory control is considered to be used in all tasks requiring EF and has a hot and cool variant (Huijbregts et al., 2008). When inhibitory control operates in a motivationally or emotionally significant situation, it is classified as a hot EF process, whereas in a neutral context it is classified as cool EF (Zelazo & Carlson, 2012). Early adolescence may be a particularly relevant period to study factors, such as socioeconomic context and parenting, that contribute to the development of hot EF (Zelazo & Carlson, 2012). Since very few studies have tested the relation between parenting and hot EF in adolescence, more studies are needed to investigate whether (observed) parenting relates to hot EF in adolescence and whether family stress or family investment processes play a role. Children’s self-regulation may serve as a protective factor for an adverse development due to lower socioeconomic status (Lengua, Bush, Long, Kovacs, & Trancik, 2008). Thus, investigating factors that contribute to self-regulation processes (e.g., hot EF) of children in minority families may be particularly important, because they are at risk for an adverse development due to their lower socioeconomic background.

Ethnic minorities in the Netherlands

In the current dissertation, two different samples have been studied; one sample consisted of a socioeconomically diverse Dutch majority group and two Dutch minority groups (Turkish and Moroccan) and one sample that consisted of Turkish ethnic minority families in the Netherlands with young and adolescent children. The first sample, included in the first empirical study presented in this dissertation, is part of a larger international project investigating maternal beliefs about sensitivity across the globe. The empirical data of the second sample, included in the second and third empirical papers in this dissertation, are drawn from the Dutch part of the SIMCUR (Social Integration of Migrant Children: Uncovering Family and School Factors Promoting Resilience) project that was carried out in three European countries; the Netherlands, Germany and Norway. This project uses a longitudinal two-cohort design with three waves: before, during and after

the transition to primary or secondary school.

The Turks and Moroccans represent the two largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands and their population in the Netherlands is still increasing, which is mostly due to the increase of the second and third generation (Distelbrink & Hooghiemstra, 2005). The Turkish and Moroccan immigrants first came to the Netherlands, mostly from rural areas of the lowest socioeconomic regions of their countries of origin, as invited guest workers around the 1960s. They intended to return to their countries of origin, but many stayed in the Netherlands. Both the Turkish and the Moroccan minority groups in the Netherlands are overrepresented in the lower socio-economic classes (CBS, 2012). In terms of culture, Turks and Moroccans have a collectivistic background in which child-rearing goals such as obedience are considered more desirable than in the individualistic Dutch culture (Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001). First- and second-generation immigrants identify themselves more with their own ethnic culture than with the culture of the host society (Phinney, Horenezyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), have a different religious background (mostly Islamic) than the majority (mostly Christian or non-religious; De Graaf, Kalmijn, Kraaykamp, & Monden, 2011; SCP, 2006), have limited contact with members of the host society, prefer to marry within their own ethnic group, and maintain their own ethnic language (Crul & Doornik, 2003; SCP, 2009, 2011). In the Netherlands, the Turkish minority group, compared to the Moroccan minority group, remains more traditional in their norms and values (Crul & Doornik, 2003; Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001). In addition, there is evidence for diverging acculturation preferences between the Dutch majority and the Turkish minority (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003).

The few studies on Turkish minority families with young children in the Netherlands have shown that Turkish mothers behave less sensitively than Dutch mothers (Leseman & Van den Boom, 1999; Yaman et al., 2010), but it is important to note that this difference was partially explained by socioeconomic status and maternal age (Yaman et al., 2010). To our knowledge, there are no observational studies on parenting behavior among Moroccan families or on parenting in Turkish families with adolescents in the Netherlands. A study using adolescent-reported parenting and child-outcomes showed that a negative parent-child relationship was related to more adolescent behavior problems (Wissink, Dekovic, & Meijer, 2006). Turkish minority adolescents have been found to show more internalizing behavior problems compared to Dutch majority and Moroccan minority adolescents (both adolescent-reported as well as parent-reported), and Turkish minority parents report more externalizing behavior problems compared to Moroccan minority parents (Stevens et al., 2003). No group differences in adolescent-reported externalizing behavior problems have been found (Stevens et al., 2003; Wissink,

Dekovic, Yagmur, Stams, & de Haan, 2008). Turkish and Moroccan minority adolescents have a lower school attainment compared to Dutch majority adolescents (CBS, 2012).

Aim of the dissertation

The overall aim of the current dissertation is to uncover predictors and outcomes of positive parenting in ethnic minority families. This dissertation contributes to the existing literature by aiming to provide some clear answers to questions regarding similarities and differences in *beliefs* about sensitive parenting across different cultures and regarding the role of culture-specific stressors in addition to general stressors in the prediction of positive parenting in ethnic minority families. In addition, our studies also contribute to the literature because of including observational measures of parenting with families with young children as well as adolescents. Studies using observational measures to assess parent-child interactions are limited for ethnic minorities and families with adolescents. Studies on positive parenting in ethnic minority families are relevant, because positive parenting is an important predictor of child and adolescent development in both majority and minority groups (e.g., Conger et al., 2002; Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, et al., 2012). In order to effectively promote positive parenting and, ultimately, positive child development in ethnic minority families, it is important to understand which factors contribute to positive parenting in these families so that culturally sensitive intervention and prevention programs can be designed. The following hypotheses are tested:

1. Beliefs about an ideal sensitive mother are very similar across different cultural and socioeconomic groups.
2. Both maternal psychological distress and maternal acculturation stress mediate the relation between family SES and maternal positive parenting in ethnic minority families with young children.
3. Family stress processes play a role in ethnic minority adolescent behavioral problems, whereas family investment processes play a role in adolescent cognitive development.

Before reporting on the empirical studies, an introduction to the maternal sensitivity construct is provided in the form of a systematic literature review of commonly used instruments to assess parental sensitivity in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, similarities and differences in maternal beliefs about sensitivity are investigated in different cultural and socioeconomic groups in the Netherlands. The main focus in Chapter 4 is testing a minority Family Stress Model in which a stressor specific to ethnic minority status (i.e., ac-

culturation stress) is included in Turkish ethnic minority families with young children. In Chapter 5, the Family Stress and Family Investment Models are tested with a behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, and cognitive outcome in Turkish ethnic minority families with adolescents. Chapters 2 and 3 exclusively focus on a particular component of positive parenting, namely sensitivity, whereas in Chapters 4 and 5 a broader parenting construct (i.e., positive parenting) is studied. Finally, in Chapter 6 the main findings of these studies are integrated and discussed. In addition, limitations, suggestions for further research, and theoretical and practical implications are addressed.

