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## **Sensitive parenting in Turkish ethnic minority families**

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## **Chapter 3**

### **The discrepancy between parenting beliefs and behaviors of ethnic majority and ethnic minority mothers**

Ekmekci, H., Malda, M., Yagmur, S., Mesman, J., & Van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2014).  
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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to test the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors in Dutch ethnic majority and Turkish ethnic minority mothers. Sixty mothers, 30 in the Dutch and 30 in the Turkish group, with a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years participated. The mean age of the children was 2.83 ( $SD = 0.99$ ) years in the Dutch group and 3.47 ( $SD = 0.73$ ) years in the Turkish group. Sensitivity belief scores were derived by correlating the Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (Pederson, Moran, & Bento, 1999), the expert-derived profile of the highly sensitive mother, with mothers beliefs about the ideal mother. For observed sensitive behaviors mothers and children were observed in a free play situation with the Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, 2008). In both groups, sensitivity beliefs were not related to sensitive behaviors. Beliefs of both Dutch and Turkish mothers about the ideal mother converged strongly with the experts' views of the highly sensitive mother. Dutch mothers scored higher on sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors than Turkish mothers. Research examining both sensitivity beliefs and behaviors could inform interventions on how to narrow the gap between the two.

*Keywords:* maternal sensitivity, beliefs, behavior, ethnic minority, socioeconomic status

## Introduction

Parenting beliefs and behaviors are generally studied separately (Barnett, Shanahan, Deng, Haskett, & Cox, 2010), but there is some evidence that parental beliefs and behaviors are related in meaningful ways and converge (Kiang, Moreno, & Robinson, 2004). Sensitive parenting is studied widely across different cultures as an important predictor of positive child development (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003; Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). Agreement has been found on the importance of sensitive parenting in child-rearing across mothers from different cultural and socioeconomic groups, including Turkish second-generation, Moroccan second-generation and Dutch mothers in the Netherlands with low, middle and high education levels (Emmen, Malda, Mesman, Ekmekci, & Van IJzendoorn, 2012). In addition, the same study showed that family income is a predictor of sensitivity beliefs, in that lower family income predicted lower scores on sensitivity beliefs. When it comes to actual sensitive parenting, ethnic minority mothers have been found to show lower levels of sensitivity than majority mothers (Mesman et al., 2012). To our knowledge no studies have yet examined maternal beliefs about sensitivity in different ethnic groups in relation to their actual sensitive behavior towards their children. The goal of the current study is to examine the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors in Dutch ethnic majority and Turkish ethnic minority mothers. In addition, we test whether sensitivity beliefs of mothers with different cultural backgrounds converge and whether the groups differ in their sensitive behaviors toward their child.

Attitudes refer to the psychological tendency to evaluate a certain entity positively or negatively (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007), and include specific beliefs about a certain topic (Olson & Zanna, 1993). Parenting attitudes have been shown to be related to parenting behaviors, not controlled for educational level, albeit not always strongly (e.g., Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, & Moulton, 2002; Kiang et al., 2004; Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989).

One of the parenting domains that is particularly important in early childhood is sensitive responsiveness, which refers to a parent's ability to perceive child signals, to interpret these signals correctly, and to respond to them promptly and appropriately (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1974). Maternal sensitivity and related constructs such as nonintrusive parenting positively influence several aspects of child development such as, secure attachment (e.g., Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2003), self-regulation (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2001), and cognitive competence (e.g., Bernier et al., 2010; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, & Baumwell, 2001). A recent study on sensitivity beliefs of mothers with different cultural backgrounds in the Netherlands showed that mothers from different cultural backgrounds agree on the importance of sensitive parenting in child-rearing (Emmen et al., 2012). Another study showed that middle-class Anglo and Puerto Rican mothers both prefer

emotional intimacy with their children and equally value an emotionally supportive environment for their children (Harwood et al., 1999).

In contrast to the cross-cultural agreement on the importance of sensitive parenting, ethnic minority mothers generally seem to behave less sensitively when compared to majority mothers, and these differences generally diminish when controlled for socioeconomic status (SES; Mesman et al., 2012). The reason for this discrepancy is unclear because to date hardly any study includes both parental beliefs about sensitivity and observations of sensitivity in different ethnic groups, although a few studies compare attitudes about parenting in general with actual parenting behaviors. For instance, expectant mothers' negative maternal attitudes about parenting and child-rearing predicted lower sensitivity towards their children at the age of 12 to 15 months in an ethnically diverse sample (Kiang et al., 2004). For sensitivity specifically, one study describes intervention effects on maternal attitudes toward sensitivity and actual maternal sensitive behavior in a Western ethnic majority sample of mothers with children between 1 and 3 years old with high scores on externalizing problem behavior (Van Zeijl et al., 2006). It is interesting to note that the intervention resulted in more sensitive attitudes as well as more sensitive behaviors, but that no correlation between maternal attitudes and maternal behaviors was found. To our knowledge no studies have yet examined maternal beliefs about sensitivity in different ethnic groups in relation to their actual sensitive behavior towards their children.

Several studies have shown the important role of SES in beliefs and behaviors in the rearing of (pre-school aged) children (Bornstein, Hahn, Suwalsky, & Haynes, 2003; Mistry, Biesanz, Chien, Howes, & Benner, 2008; Tekin, 2008). Socioeconomic factors, including income and education, are also related to sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors of minority families towards their children (Mesman et al., 2012). SES can be seen as a confounder in predicting beliefs and behaviors of culturally different mothers, because studies have shown an overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in lower socioeconomic classes, e.g. income and education level, in a lot of countries, including the Netherlands (Barnard & Turner, 2011; CBS, 2012). The Family Investment Model provides an explanation for the relation between SES with parenting beliefs and behaviors, in that parents with higher SES can invest more in financial, social, and human capital for their children (Conger & Donnellan, 2007), whereas this is more difficult for families with a lower SES because of their need to invest more in immediate family needs (e.g. Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). It has been found that the investments parents make are related to positive child development (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). Lower educated mothers generally value close family ties and children being compliant more so than mothers with a higher educational level. In addition, higher-educated mothers valued autonomy, self-confidence and academic success (Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001). In a recent study on Turkish second-generation mothers in the Netherlands maternal age and education seemed to be more important in parenting practices compared to ethnicity (Yaman, Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Linting, 2010).

The Family Stress Model states that socioeconomic strains such as lower incomes cause stress and stress causes lower levels of sensitive parenting (Conger & Donnellan, 2007), which may be another explanation of the lower levels of sensitive parenting in minority families (Mesman et al., 2012). In addition, stress seems to influence parenting beliefs too (Respler-Herman, Mowder, Yasik, & Shamah, 2012). Parents who reported less parenting stress reported more positive parenting perceptions and parents who reported more stress reported less positive parenting perceptions. Thus, given the overrepresentation of low SES in ethnic minorities, such processes may (partly) explain findings that these groups could show lower sensitivity and less optimal beliefs about sensitive parenting. In addition, SES could moderate the relation between beliefs and behaviors. Beliefs about sensitive parenting may be related differently to actual sensitive parenting depending on socioeconomic level, because SES-related stressors may hamper the consistent translation of beliefs into actual parenting practice.

In the current study we focus on Dutch and Turkish second-generation mothers of young children in the Netherlands. The Turkish group represents the largest ethnic minority group in the Netherlands (CBS, 2012). The Turkish immigrants first came to the Netherlands as invited guest workers in the period 1960-1970. Their intention was to make a living and return to their countries of origin, but many stayed in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is considered to have a more individualistic culture (Hofstede, 2001), whereas Turkey is considered to have a more collectivistic culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In collectivistic cultures parenting goals such as obedience are considered more desirable than in individualistic cultures (Harwood, Schoelmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schulze, & Wilson, 1996; Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001; Willemsen & Van de Vijver, 1997). Turkish immigrant parents in the Netherlands have been found to show obedience-oriented parenting and controlling behaviors in their parenting practices (Nijsten, 2006). Higher-educated Turkish parents valued conformity less and autonomy more (Nijsten, Oosterwegel, & Volleberg, 2006; Phalet & Schonplflug, 2001). In Germany, it was found that, after controlling for education, Turkish mothers valued their children's respectful and well-mannered behavior and close family ties together with valuing autonomy whereas German mothers valued independence, social skills and the ability to be able to control negative impulses (Durgel, Leyendecker, Yagmurlu, & Harwood, 2009). In another study on Turkish immigrant and Dutch mothers in the Netherlands and Turkish mothers in Turkey, it was found that Turkish immigrant mothers adhered to values in between those of Dutch mothers in the Netherlands and Turkish mothers in Turkey with regard to child-centered behaviors (Durgel, Van de Vijver, & Yagmurlu, 2013). The predictive value of education was again shown. The second-generation Turkish mothers have been living in the Netherlands for (almost) all of their lives, so they may have adopted some of the Dutch attitudes and behaviors through the process of acculturation (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009). For instance, in a study on parenting practices of Turkish immigrant mothers in the Netherlands, the mothers who felt emotionally connected to the Dutch culture showed more use of authoritative control. In the same study mothers

who spoke the Turkish language more frequently showed more sensitive behaviors. These findings suggest that cultural maintenance, in the form of acculturation, and ethnic language use, could both be advantageous in the parenting context (Yaman et al., 2010).

The goal of the current study is to test whether the relation between the perceived importance of sensitivity in child-rearing and actual sensitive behaviors is similar across Dutch and Turkish mothers. In addition, we test whether sensitivity beliefs of mothers with different cultural backgrounds converge and whether the groups differ in their sensitive behaviors toward their child. Three main hypotheses were tested. First, we expected a significant positive association between mothers' sensitivity beliefs and observed sensitivity and non-intrusiveness in both groups. Second, we expected similar scores on sensitivity beliefs and higher scores on sensitivity behaviors in the Dutch group versus the Turkish group. Third, we expected that lower SES would be related to less optimal beliefs about sensitivity and lower levels of observed sensitivity. In addition, we test a potential moderation effect of SES on the relation between beliefs and behaviors.

## **Method**

### **Sample and Procedure**

The sample consisted of 30 Turkish mothers and 30 Dutch mothers in the Netherlands. The Turkish and Dutch groups of mothers differed significantly regarding mean age of the mothers and the target children (Table 1). The mean age of mothers in the Turkish group was 31.30 ( $SD = 3.53$ ) years and 35.60 ( $SD = 4.63$ ) years in the Dutch group. The age range of the children was 2 to 5 years. In the Turkish group the mean age of the target child was 3.47 ( $SD = 0.73$ ) years and in the Dutch group it was 2.83 ( $SD = 0.99$ ) years. The Turkish sample was recruited in the context of a parenting intervention RCT study (Yagmur, Mesman, Malda, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Ekmekci, 2014), based on their children's high levels of externalizing problems as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/1½-5, Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). At least three months after completion of the intervention study, we informed all 35 mothers in the control group about the present study and asked them to participate. Of these mothers, 30 agreed and completed the assessments. All mothers were born in the Netherlands (with at least one of their parents born in Turkey). The Dutch sample was recruited in the context of a large longitudinal study on mothers' and fathers' parenting in relation to young siblings' behavioral development (Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2014). Of the 32 Dutch mothers who were approached, 30 agreed to participate. In the whole group mothers had one to three children, with an average of two children ( $SD = 0.52$ ) and their average age was 33.45 years ( $SD = 4.57$ , range = 23-48). Descriptive statistics of the main variables of the Dutch and Turkish-Dutch group are presented in Table 1. The Dutch mothers for the current study were selected to resemble the Turkish sample as closely as possible with regard to maternal educational level, gender of the focus child, and the level of

Table 1. Means (Standard Deviations) and Ethnic Group Differences for Mothers

|                                     | Dutch    |              | Turkish-Dutch |          | <i>t</i>  | Eta squared  |              |               |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------|---------------|----------|-----------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
|                                     | <i>N</i> | <i>Range</i> | <i>M (SD)</i> | <i>N</i> |           |              | <i>Range</i> | <i>M (SD)</i> |
| Family income                       | 30       | 2-7          | 6.10 (1.27)   | 28       | 3-7       | 5.39 (1.24)  | -2.06*       | 0.07          |
| Educational level                   | 30       | 2-5          | 3.40 (0.81)   | 30       | 1-5       | 3.23 (0.94)  | -0.74        | -             |
| Age target child EA Scales          | 30       | 2-4          | 2.83 (0.99)   | 30       | 2-5       | 3.47 (0.73)  | 2.83**       | 0.12          |
| Age mother                          | 30       | 30-48        | 35.60 (4.53)  | 30       | 23-39     | 31.30 (3.53) | -4.10**      | 0.22          |
| Number of children                  | 30       | 2-3          | 2.07 (0.25)   | 30       | 1-3       | 1.77 (0.63)  | -2.43*       | 0.09          |
| Externalizing problem behavior      | 30       | 3-46         | 20.65 (11.22) | 30       | 4-36      | 19.77 (9.04) | -0.34        | -             |
| Sensitivity beliefs                 | 30       | 0.61-0.82    | 0.74 (0.06)   | 30       | 0.57-0.83 | 0.71 (0.07)  | -2.27*       | 0.07          |
| Observed maternal sensitivity       | 30       | 18-29        | 25.10 (2.50)  | 30       | 12-29     | 22.23 (3.77) | -3.48**      | 0.17          |
| Observed maternal non-intrusiveness | 30       | 13-26        | 21.10 (3.59)  | 30       | 10-24     | 18.57 (3.81) | -2.65*       | 0.11          |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

this child's externalizing problem behavior as measured by the CBCL/1½-5 (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000).

All Turkish and Dutch mothers gave written consent and were visited at home by a trained undergraduate or graduate student. The home visits took approximately one and a half hour and were conducted in Dutch, unless the mother indicated to prefer Turkish. No measures used in the original studies from which the samples were derived could have influenced participants' views of the ideal mother.

## Measures

**Sensitivity beliefs.** To assess maternal beliefs about sensitivity the Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS; Pederson, Moran, & Bento, 1999) was used. The MBQS consists of 90 cards with statements about maternal behaviors that mothers and professionals sorted into 9 stacks from '*least descriptive*' (1) to '*most descriptive*' (9) of the ideal mother. Because the original items were designed to be evaluated by professionals rather than mothers, the behavioral descriptions were simplified for the present study to make them more understandable for (low educated and immigrant) mothers and to extend the items beyond infancy (B for baby in the original items). For example, the item "Provides B with little opportunity to contribute to the interaction" was simplified into "Gives her child little opportunity to play along or to respond". The participants were first asked to sort the cards into 3 stacks: 'do not fit the ideal mother at all', 'do not fit nor do fit the ideal mother' and 'fit the ideal mother really well'. The participants were explicitly told that there are no correct or wrong answers and that it is not about their own parenting behavior, but about what the ideal mother should or should not do. Any question participants had concerning the meaning of an item was answered according to the item explanations in the protocol. When the participants distributed the cards across the three stacks, they were asked to sort each stack into 3 smaller stacks. After the participants distributed all cards across 9 stacks, they were asked to evenly distribute the cards across the stacks until each stack consisted of 10 cards (as described in Emmen et al., 2012). Sensitivity belief scores were derived by correlating the resulting profiles with the criterion sort provided by the authors of the MBQS (Pederson, et al., 1999). Z-scores were computed to detect outliers ( $z$ -scores lower than -3.29 or higher than 3.29) within ethnic groups. One outlying score was found within the Turkish group on sensitivity belief scores and was winsorized for use in the analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

**Maternal sensitivity and non-intrusiveness.** Maternal sensitivity and non-intrusiveness were measured in a 10-minute unstructured free-play episode with toys brought by the assistant. During this episode, mother and child were free to play with all toys, and mothers were instructed to play with their child the way they would normally do.

Mother-child interactions were coded using the Sensitivity and Non-intrusiveness scales of the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Emotional Availability Scales (EA Scales; Biringen, 2008). Each scale consists of seven subscales, two with scores ranging from 1-7 and five with scores

ranging from 1-3 (total potential score range for each scale 7-29) (Biringen, 2008). *Sensitivity* refers to appropriate responding to the child's signals combined with positive affect. *Non-intrusiveness* refers to following the child's lead and waiting for optimal breaks to enter interaction without interfering with the child's activities. During the training of a team of (under-)graduate coders provided by the third author, who completed the online EA Scales-training and who is an experienced coder of parent-child interactions, three types of alterations were made to prevent persistent interpretation problems. These alterations consisted of removing subjective criteria, adjustment of the criteria for some scores on subscales to make them more linear, and improvement of the independence of the separate dimensions by removing overlapping criteria. In addition, one subscale was removed from the non-intrusiveness scale because it referred to child behavior rather than parent behavior (leading to a potential score range of 6-26).

The videos of the Dutch mother and child dyads were coded by seven Dutch coders. Inter-coder reliability on 60 cases from the total sample ranged from .73 to .92, with an average of .81 (intraclass correlation, single rater, absolute agreement). The videos of the Turkish mother and child dyads were coded by two coders from the Turkish group and one Dutch coder. The Dutch coder was assigned to mother-child dyads who communicated in Dutch, and also coded videos of dyads speaking Turkish that had been subtitled in Dutch (by bilingual research assistants). Inter-coder reliability on 15 cases ranged from .73 to .96, with an average of .83 (intraclass correlation, single rater, absolute agreement).

**Educational level and family income.** Educational level was measured on a 5-point scale: *primary school* (1), *vocational school* (2), *secondary school/middle vocational education* (3), *high vocational education* (4) and *university or higher* (5). Annual gross family income was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) '*no income*' to (7) '*50.000 euro or more*'.

## Results

*T*-tests were conducted to test for significant differences between Dutch and Turkish mothers in socioeconomic background. The Dutch ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) and Turkish ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) mothers were similar in educational level,  $t(58) = -.74$ ,  $p > .05$ . Compared to the Dutch group ( $M = 6.10$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) the Turkish group ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) had a lower family income,  $t(58) = -2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .07$ .

As shown in Table 1, there was strong convergence between mothers' views regarding the ideal mother and expert views about sensitive parenting in both the Dutch mothers, .74 ( $SD = 0.06$ ), and the Turkish mothers, .71 ( $SD = 0.07$ ), indicating that both groups strongly value sensitive parenting. A one-way between-groups ANCOVA was conducted to compare views about sensitive parenting of Dutch and Turkish mothers while statistically controlling for the age of the target child. There was a significant difference

between the Dutch and Turkish group on sensitivity belief scores  $F(1, 57) = 4.84, p < .05, \eta_p = .08$ ). The views of Turkish mothers were significantly less similar to the MBQS criterion sort than those of Dutch mothers. The same analyses were conducted for observed sensitivity and non-intrusiveness. Dutch mothers scored significantly higher on observed sensitivity than Turkish mothers controlled for the age of the child,  $F(1, 57) = 10.47, p < .05, \eta_p = .16$ . Dutch mothers also scored significantly higher on observed non-intrusiveness than Turkish mothers controlled for the age of the child,  $F(1, 57) = 6.00, p < .05, \eta_p = .10$ .

We computed bivariate correlations between (socioeconomic) background variables and sensitivity beliefs, observed maternal sensitivity and observed maternal non-intrusiveness (Table 2). No significant correlations between (socioeconomic) background variables and sensitivity belief scores, observed maternal sensitivity and observed maternal non-intrusiveness were found. Correlations were also examined for the Dutch and Turkish groups separately. Again, no significant correlations were found. Thus, we did not further test a mediation effect of sensitivity beliefs in the relation between SES and sensitive behaviors.

Table 2. *Correlations between Observed Parenting Variables, Parenting Beliefs Variables and Background Variables*

|                               | 1.    | 2.  | 3.  | 4.    | 5.  | 6. |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-----|----|
| 1. Observed sensitivity       | -     |     |     |       |     |    |
| 2. Observed non-intrusiveness | .67** | -   |     |       |     |    |
| 3. Sensitivity belief score   | .19   | .12 | -   |       |     |    |
| 4. Income                     | .13   | .17 | .13 | -     |     |    |
| 5. Education                  | .12   | .02 | .22 | .41** | -   |    |
| 6. Age of the child           | .17   | .14 | .06 | .18   | .11 | -  |

Range of  $n$ : 58 - 60.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Bivariate correlations were computed to test the relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors. Post-hoc power analyses showed that the power of the study was .78 to find a medium correlation of .30, however, bivariate correlations between maternal sensitivity beliefs and observed maternal sensitivity and non-intrusiveness were not significant for the total sample (Table 2). This was also the case for correlations between beliefs and behaviors within the Dutch group, for observed sensitivity and for observed non-intrusiveness, and within the Turkish group, for observed sensitivity and for observed non-intrusiveness (Table 3).

To test a potential moderator effect of socioeconomic factors on the relation between beliefs and behaviors, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analysis with maternal education, family income, and sensitivity beliefs as predictors of observed sensitivity and observed non-intrusiveness, including two-way interactions between beliefs and maternal education and family income. In addition we controlled for the age of the child in this analysis. All variables were centered to reduce multicollinearity, to simplify the interpretation

of the main effects, and to compute the interaction terms. In the first step, age of the child was entered, in the second step maternal education and family income were entered, in the third step sensitivity beliefs were included, and in the fourth step the two interaction terms were added. There was no main effect of the age of the child on observed sensitivity,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .21$ , or observed non-intrusiveness,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .29$ . Corrected for the age of the child, there was no main effect of family income on observed sensitivity,  $\beta = .08$ ,  $p = .60$ , and observed non-intrusiveness,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .25$ . Corrected for family income, there was no effect of maternal education on observed sensitivity,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $p = .62$ , or on observed non-intrusiveness,  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $p = .65$ . Sensitivity beliefs did not add to the prediction of observed sensitivity,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p = .24$ , or observed non-intrusiveness,  $\beta = .11$ ,  $p = .42$ . The interaction terms between beliefs and maternal education and between beliefs and family income also did not add to the prediction of observed sensitivity, respectively,  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p = .75$ ,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .56$ , or observed non-intrusiveness, respectively,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .63$ ,  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $p = .80$ .

Table 3. *Correlations between Observed Parenting Variables, Parenting Beliefs Variables and Background Variables for Dutch majority (above diagonal) and Turkish minority (below diagonal) mothers*

|                               | 1.    | 2.    | 3.   | 4.    | 5.   | 6.   |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|------|
| 1. Observed sensitivity       | -     | .52** | .05  | -.07  | -.09 | .11  |
| 2. Observed non-intrusiveness | .70** | -     | -.05 | .16   | -.07 | .01  |
| 3. Sensitivity belief score   | .10   | .10   | -    | -.28  | .28  | -.06 |
| 4. Income                     | .09   | .02   | .34  | -     | .26  | .34  |
| 5. Education                  | .19   | .03   | .13  | .51** | -    | .39* |
| 6. Age of the child           | .09   | .20   | .08  | -.24  | -.36 | -    |

*N* Dutch majority mothers: 30

Range of *n* Turkish minority mothers: 28 - 30.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

Sensitivity beliefs and sensitive parenting behaviors were unrelated for the total group and for both the Dutch and Turkish mothers. Dutch mothers had beliefs about the ideal mother that converged more with the expert-derived profile of the highly sensitive mother (i.e. MBQS), and showed higher levels of actual sensitive and nonintrusive behaviors in comparison with Turkish mothers. We did not find significant relations between SES and sensitivity beliefs and between SES and sensitive behaviors and therefore we did not test a mediation effect of sensitivity beliefs in the relation between SES and sensitive behaviors. The relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors was not moderated by SES.

Although earlier studies have shown a rather modest relation between attitudes and behaviors in parenting (Dagget, O'Brien, Zanolli, & Peyton, 2000; Kiang et al., 2004; Kochanska et al., 1989), a study focusing specifically on sensitivity showed no relation between attitudes and behaviors (Van Zeijl et al., 2006). In our study we also failed to find a

relation between sensitivity beliefs and sensitive behaviors for Dutch mothers or for Turkish mothers. It seems that the extent to which a mother values sensitivity in child-rearing does not necessarily translate into the extent to which she behaves sensitively. A possible reason for not finding a relation between sensitivity beliefs and behaviors could be that sensitivity is generally not an aspect of parenting that is consciously applied and is very difficult to self-monitor. Other studies on parenting beliefs and behaviors focused on more concrete behaviors that are part of a more explicit parenting repertoire, such as discipline practices (Celik, Halmatov, & Saricam, 2012; Coplan et al., 2002). When parents express the belief that specific discipline practices are important in parenting, it is reasonable to expect that they also put this belief in to practice, because it refers to a concrete and voluntary behavior. In contrast, sensitivity is far less concrete as it does not describe actual specific behaviors, but rather refers to parents noticing child signals and responding to these appropriately, in more abstract terms (e.g., MBQ item 20: "Responds well when her child is sad"). In addition, several aspects of sensitivity refer to intuitive behaviors, such as smiling back when a child smiles, or imitating infant vocalizations (e.g., Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, Powers, & Wang, 2001), rather than planned behaviors such as applying strict discipline techniques. Some parents may feel like they are generally appropriately responsive to their children, but this may not converge with the evaluation of their behaviors during free play by experts on sensitive parenting. Attachment representations refer to parents' mental representations of their relationship with their own parents. Individuals with a dismissive attachment representation show the following behaviors: insisting verbally on lack of memory for childhood, derogating attachment, limited thinking about attachment-related experiences and emotions, reporting unrealistic or idealized representations that are not coherent with experience (Pianta, Egeland, & Adam, 1996). The lack of a relation between beliefs and behaviors could, according to the literature, be related to attachment representations of parents, as dismissive parents tend to have inflated views of their own (parenting) abilities (Pianta et al., 1996), which could lead to a discrepancy in beliefs and behaviors about parenting. Assessing attachment representations of parents together with their beliefs and behaviors in parenting could provide a more complete picture. Thus, the abstract nature of the sensitivity construct and the more intuitive nature of sensitive responding versus other aspects of parenting may be responsible for the lack of convergence between parental beliefs and behaviors regarding sensitivity.

Sensitivity beliefs of Dutch and Turkish mothers correlated highly with the criterion sort, which means that mothers' views about ideal sensitivity converged with behavioral patterns that are considered indicative of sensitivity by the authors of the MBQS. Dutch and Turkish mothers scored high on sensitive behaviors too, indicating that they know how to react sensitively to child signals. Despite these general high scores on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors, Dutch mothers still scored higher on sensitivity beliefs, observed sensitivity, and observed non-intrusiveness than the Turkish mothers.

Contrary to findings in the current study, previous research has shown that SES

plays a role in beliefs and behaviors in child-rearing (e.g., Mistry et al., 2008; Tekin, 2008), and several studies have shown that differences in sensitivity or attachment security between majority and minority mothers diminish when controlling for SES (e.g., Chaudhuri, Easterbrooks, & Davis, 2009; Letourneau, Hungler, & Fisher, 2005; Van IJzendoorn, 1990). We did not find any direct nor moderation effects of family income and education. Although low family income is generally a stress factor, perhaps it only negatively affects family functioning when being below a certain threshold. The lowest family incomes in our sample were still in the middle income range and these families could therefore not be considered as poor. In addition, educational level of minority parents may be less indicative of their cognitive skills (and associated parenting abilities) than in majority families. Even when minorities achieve high scores on a standardized exam (e.g., CITO in the Netherlands), they have a higher chance of attaining low education levels compared to majorities with similarly high test scores (CBS, 2009). Similarly, in our study mothers in both groups were matched on education level, however, the income of Turkish families was still lower compared to the income of Dutch families. In addition, minority status could be related to different kinds of stressors, such as acculturation processes (Berry, 1997).

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, it was not possible to fully match participants on SES. Since earlier studies showed effects of SES on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors, full matching may have provided a better test of group differences. The samples used in this study were not normative in that Turkish children were selected for an intervention study based on high scores on child externalizing problems. However, only mothers from the control group condition were included here to prevent interference from the intervention and the groups did not differ on externalizing problem behaviors of the children. It is also important to note that we compared two groups with different cultural backgrounds within one country, which limits interpretations about the role of culture as a broader construct on parenting beliefs and behaviors. However, the advantage of comparing two ethnic groups within one country is that they are preparing their children for the same society, which means that differences between the groups in sensitivity beliefs are less likely to be due to differences in the broader societal context. Furthermore, it is important to note that despite high scores of both groups on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors, the majority group still scored higher on sensitivity beliefs and behaviors compared to the ethnic minority group. Although distal SES-related stressors could be partly responsible for these findings (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Mesman et al., 2012; Respler-Herman et al., 2012), more proximal stress processes may prove more informative in explaining ethnic differences in parenting beliefs and behaviors. These processes can include minority-specific stressors such as acculturation stress, language difficulties, and discrimination (Berry, 1997). The specific role of these different levels of stress on child-rearing should be investigated in future studies. The attachment representations of parents could also be included to control for its influence on parenting beliefs and behaviors and their interrelations (Pianta et al., 1996). Finally, the sample size was very small, which could account for not finding a significant relation

between beliefs and behaviors.

In conclusion, we did not find a relation between sensitivity beliefs and behaviors in the current study, as opposed to other studies showing meaningful relations between beliefs and behaviors for other parenting aspects. This may be due to the less concrete nature of sensitivity which makes it less easy for parents to consciously put their ideals about sensitivity behaviors into practice. Because of the particular importance of maternal sensitivity for child development, several interventions have been developed with the focus on enhancing maternal sensitivity, and have been successfully applied in various ethnic groups (e.g., Bjørknes & Manger, 2013; Reid, Webster-Stratton, Beauchaine, 2001). To help parents, it is important to know what they want to achieve by assessing their ideals, and to conduct observations to uncover actual sensitivity levels of parents, so that the gap between ideals and behaviors can be bridged by interventions.

