

# **INVESTIGATION OF THE LEVELS OF SELF-EFFICACY AND PERCEIVED MATTERING OF PARENTS WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering of parents with preschool children. The study employed a correlational survey research design. The study group of the research consists of 302 parents whose children attend private preschool educational institutions in the city center of Gümüşhane province, Turkey. The data of the study were collected using *Introductory Information Form*, *the General Self-Efficacy Scale*, and *the Perceived Mattering Questionnaire*. T-test, ANOVA, and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The results of the study revealed that fathers and parents with male children have higher levels of perceived mattering. In addition, it was found that parents who live in a nuclear family, have two children, have a marriage duration of 5-9 years, and are very satisfied with their marriage have high levels of self-efficacy and perceived mattering. It was also found that parents' sense of mattering to their spouses positively affects their self-efficacy levels. In this context, spouses' perceptions of mattering and self-efficacy can be investigated in more detail and this solution-oriented studies can be carried out on this issue.

**Keywords:** parents, child development, mattering, self-efficacy

## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite differences between societies, the family is the smallest unit in society that creates kinship relationships between individuals and ensures communication through marriage, blood ties, and adoption (Canatan, 2016). In a family environment, the social and emotional needs of individuals are met and individuals are provided with food, protection, and shelter. In addition, children are guided by family members in their developmental processes (Baran & Yurteri Tiryaki, 2016). Healthy development of children is only possible in a family environment with effective communication and social support. Children start learning through communication with family members from the preschool age. Therefore, family members are the role models for children in the process of preparing for life, and children gain their first experiences in the

family (Aral, 2011). According to Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, children develop to the extent of their interaction with the social environment. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, children learn by observing and modeling their immediate environment. In Bronfenbrenner's (2000) ecological systems theory, the family, as a microsystem, is the most important factor directly influencing the child's development. In this regard, the family is the foundation, nucleus, and functional element of society, and it is the first and most important institution where social value judgments and education are given to the child.

Children ensure the continuity of the family and society. In this context, the protection of the family is important for the healthy development of the child. For a healthy family structure, the interests, needs, knowledge, and skills of parents and their self-efficacy levels are of great importance (Aral & Sağlam, 2016). This is because the self-efficacy levels of parents directly affect their attitudes and behaviors toward their children. In this context, self-efficacy is defined as an individual's ability to perform the necessary actions to cope with possible events. Thus, perceived self-efficacy is the belief about being able to perform a task (Liu et al., 2022). According to Bandura, parental self-efficacy is closely related to caring for children, taking responsibility, and being sensitive to the child's interests and needs (Bandura, 1977).

Parental self-efficacy has been addressed differently in many studies. For example, parental self-efficacy has been defined in a variety of ways, including parents' expectations that they will perform their role effectively, their belief that they are competent in this regard (Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Hassall, Rose & McDonald, 2005), and their perception that they will have a positive impact on children's development (Coleman, 1991). In their study, Montigny and Lacharite (2005) defined parental self-efficacy as parents' judgments and beliefs about their ability to perform tasks related to the care and education of their children.

However, the quality of the attachment that parents form with their parents and the social support they receive from their relatives and spouses play an important role in the development of parental self-efficacy (Holloway et al., 2005). The schemas about parenting that are formed in the minds of individuals based on their relationships with their parents in early childhood also influence their relationships with their children. However, each society and culture has its own unique set of parenting behaviors and practices. The parenting behaviors of society also affect the self-efficacy of the parents. In addition, an individual's cognitive and behavioral readiness for the parenting role and spousal support are also considered important factors in parental self-efficacy. In this regard, studies in the literature indicate that there is a significant relationship between parental self-efficacy and spousal support. (Anthony et al., 2005; Coleman, 1998; Coleman & Karraker, 2003; Desjardin, 2004; Deleş & Kaytez, 2022; Hassall et al., 2005). It has also been found that effective communication between parents and mattering for each other has a positive effect on parental self-efficacy (Knoche, Givens & Sheridan 2007).

Perceived social support is of great importance in marital relationships. Therefore, an individual's spouse is one of the most important sources of social support (Scull et al., 2022). For a quality marriage, spouses need to care for each other, respond appropriately to each other's behaviors, and support each other emotionally, mentally, and financially (Liu et al., 2022). A healthy family structure is only possible when spouses accept and support each other in every way and develop a relationship based on trust and love. Spouses who are supportive of each other can protect their own mental and physical health and handle domestic conflicts more easily. In addition, they can be more supportive of their children and contribute to their

healthy development (Yıldırım, 2004). Marital support also reduces the stress level of individuals. Individuals feel significant when they receive support from their spouses, which causes them to react less to marital incompatibilities or conflicts (Rix et al., 2022). This is because feeling significant is one of the important factors that increase marital satisfaction (Hines et al., 2022). In this context, spouses' sense of mattering to each other in the marriage will positively affect their self-efficacy levels. Based on this idea, the study aimed to investigate the self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering of parents with preschool children. In line with this purpose, the research seeks answers to the following questions:

- i) Is there a significant difference between parents' self-efficacy levels and the parents' gender, education level, family type, number of children, gender of the child, duration of marriage, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with marriage?
- ii) Is there a significant difference between the perceived mattering and the parents' gender, education level, family type, number of children, gender of the child, duration of the marriage, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with marriage?
- iii) Does parents' perceived mattering by their spouses affect their self-efficacy levels?

## METHOD

### Research Design

The correlational survey research design was used in this study. In the correlational survey research design, the relationship between two or more variables is determined and tested to see whether the variables change together or not (Büyüköztürk, 2011).

### Study Group

The study was conducted with parents whose children attend private preschool educational institutions in the city center of Gümüşhane province, Turkey. The sample of the study consisted of four preschools, which were selected by random sampling method. The purpose of the research was explained to the parents in the predetermined preschools, and 302 parents who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study. In this context, the demographic characteristics of the study group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Frequency and percentage distributions of variables.*

Variables	f	%	
Parent	Mother	190	62.9
	Father	112	37.1
Level of education.	High school and below	21	7.0
	University	281	93.0
Family type.	Nuclear Family	285	94.4
	Extended Family	17	5.6
Gender of the child.	Female	143	47.4

	Male	159	52.6
Number of children.	1	114	37.7
	2	159	52.6
	3	29	9.6
How long have you been married?	1-3 years	103	34.1
	4-9 years	141	46.7
	10-15 years	6	2.0
	>15 years	52	17.2
How do you evaluate your marriage in general?	Very satisfied	105	34.8
	Quite satisfied	72	23.8
	Satisfied	101	33.4
	Not satisfied	24	7.9
	Total	302	100.0

As shown in Table 1, 62.9% of the parents included in the study were mothers, 37.1% were fathers, 7% were high school graduates, and 93% were university graduates. Of the parents, 94.4% were living in nuclear families, 5.6% were in extended families, 47.4% had female children and 52.6% had male children. In addition, 37.7% of the parents had one child, 52.6% had two children, and 9.6% had three children. While 34.1% of the parents had been married for 1-3 years, 46.7% for 4-9 years, 2% for 10-15 years, and 17.2% for more than 15 years, 34.8% were very satisfied, 23.8% were quite satisfied, 33.4% were satisfied, and 7.9% were dissatisfied with their marriages.

### Data Collection Instruments

Introductory Information Form, General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Perceived Matterring Questionnaire were used as data collection instruments in the study.

**General Information Form:** The form includes questions about parents' gender, education level, family type, number of children, child's gender, length of marriage, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with marriage.

**General Self-Efficacy Scale:** The scale, developed by Sherer and Adams (1983) and adapted into Turkish by Yıldırım and İlhan (2010), is a 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale consists of 17 items. Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, and 17 of the scale are reverse scored. The scale has three sub-scales: "willingness to initiate behavior, willingness to expend effort, and persistence." The lowest score that can be obtained from the total scale is 17 and the highest score is 85. The higher scores on the scale indicate higher self-efficacy. In this study, only the total score was taken into consideration. The reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.84.

**Perceived Matterring Questionnaire:** The scale developed by Mak and Marshall (2004) was adapted into Turkish by Kırimer (2014). The scale was developed to measure married couples' level of sense of perceived matterring by their spouses. The 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always) consists of 17 items in total. Items no. 4, 8, 9, and 15 of the unidimensional scale are reverse coded. The reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.90.

**Ethical Aspect of the Study**

Before conducting the research, the necessary permissions were obtained from the private preschool education institutions of the children, and the authors of the measurement instruments. Then, the principals and teachers working in the preschool educational institutions were informed about the research. The study was based on voluntary participation, and the data collection tools were submitted to the parents. Of the data collected, incomplete data were not included in the research.

**Data Analysis**

The study data were analyzed using the SPSS program. The t-test and ANOVA analysis were used to compare scale scores based on parents' demographic information. Regression analysis was used to investigate the effect of perceived mattering on self-efficacy levels.

**RESULTS**

The results of the analysis of the research data are presented below following the objectives of the research.

Table 2

*The t-test results of parents' self-efficacy and perceived mattering scores according to parents' gender, education level, child's gender, and family type variables.*

			<b>n</b>	<b>Avg.</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	
General Self-Efficacy Scale	Parent	Mother	190	102.28	11.098	-1.160	.873	
		Father	112	102.53	16.140			
	Level of education	High school and below	21	99.57	12.745	-1.012	.312	
		University	281	102.58	13.197			
	Gender of the child	Female	143	101.57	13.355	-1.006	.315	
		Male	159	103.10	12.998			
	Family type	Nuclear Family	285	108.24	13.291	-1.359	.025*	
		Extended Family	17	102.10	10.334			
	Perceived Mattering Questionnaire	Parent	Mother	190	55.60	6.221	-2.509	.013*
			Father	112	57.75	8.556		
Level of education		High school and below	21	55.76	3.192	-.419	.676	
		University	281	56.44	7.453			
Gender		Female	143	55.07	7.436	-3.056	.002*	

of the child	Male	159	57.59	6.861		
Family type	Nuclear Family	285	59.35	7.349	-.558	.046*
	Extended Family	17	56.34	5.073		

As shown in Table 2, parents' self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering scores were analyzed by t-test according to parents' gender, education level, child's gender, and family type variables. The analysis results showed that there was no significant difference in parents' self-efficacy levels according to parents' gender ( $p > .05$ ); however, there was a significant difference in parents' perceived mattering scores according to parents' gender. It was found that the perceived mattering of fathers was higher than that of mothers ( $p \leq .05$ ). However, the difference was not significant with regard to the variable of educational level ( $p > .05$ ). Accordingly, it was found that there was no significant difference between the level of education and the level of self-efficacy and perceived mattering ( $p > .05$ ). In addition, as a result of the analyses made according to the gender of the child, there was no significant difference in the self-efficacy scores of the parents ( $p > .05$ ), while there was a significant difference in favor of the parents with a male child in the perceived mattering scores ( $p \leq .05$ ). In this context, it was found that parents with male children had higher perceived mattering than parents with female children ( $p \leq .05$ ). Finally, the result of the analyses carried out according to the variable of the family type of the parents showed that there was a significant difference ( $p \leq .05$ ) in the scores of self-efficacy and perceived mattering. In this regard, it was found that the self-efficacy and perceived mattering levels of parents with the nuclear family type were higher than those of parents with the extended family type ( $p \leq .05$ ).

Table 3

*ANOVA test results of parents' self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering scores according to the number of children, duration of the marriage, and marriage evaluation status.*

		n	Avg.	SD	f	p	
General Self-Efficacy Scale	Number of children	1	114	101.37	14.05	3.389	.035*
		2	159	103.95	12.292		
		3	29	97.65	13.159		
	Duration of marriage	1-4 years	103	100.09	13.012	2.877	.036*
		5-9 years	141	104.26	13.293		
		10-15 years	6	109.66	6.531		
		>15 years	52	100.92	12.914		
	Evaluation of marriage	Very satisfied	105	107.10	11.864	11.113	.000*
		Quite satisfied	72	104.20	10.175		
		Satisfied	101	102.29	14.059		
Not satisfied		24	97.089	15.021			
Perceived Mattering	Number of children	1	114	56.894	5.111	10.934	.000*
		2	159	57.10	7.567		
		3	29	50.62	9.803		
	Duration of	1-4 years	103	54.13	8.205	7.890	.000*

marriage	5-9 years	141	58.42	6.822		
	10-15 years	6	56.50	3.209		
	>15 years	52	55.38	4.790		
Evaluation of marriage	Very satisfied	105	60.84	6.230	45.163	.000*
	Quite satisfied	72	57.59	3.706		
	Satisfied	101	52.7327	5.493		
	Not satisfied	24	48.7917	11,049		

As shown in Table 3, parents' self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering scores were analyzed with the ANOVA test according to the number of children, duration of the marriage, and marriage evaluation status. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that there were significant differences between the scores ( $p \leq .05$ ). According to the results of the Tukey test, it was concluded that the self-efficacy and perceived importance of parents with two children was higher than the other groups; the self-efficacy and perceived mattering of parents with a marriage duration of 5-9 years was higher than the other groups; and the participants who were very satisfied with their marriage had higher self-efficacy and perceived importance than the other groups.

Table 4

*Regression analysis on the effect of parents' perceived mattering on their self-efficacy levels.*

	B	Std. Error	B	t	p
Constant	60.036	5.441		11.033	.000*
Perceived Mattering	.751	.096	.413	7.845	.000*

r: .413;  $r^2$ : .167; ANOVA= .000  $p \leq .05$ ; F: 61.546

Dependent Variable: Self-efficacy level

Independent Variable: Perceived mattering

As shown in Table 4, the effect of parents' perceived mattering by their spouses on their self-efficacy levels was tested with regression analysis. As a result of the analysis, it was found that the perceived mattering had a significant effect on parents' self-efficacy levels at the level of 0.17 ( $\beta$ : .413; t: 7.845;  $p$ : 000  $\leq .05$ ). The P-P plot distribution of the observed values is shown in Figure 1.

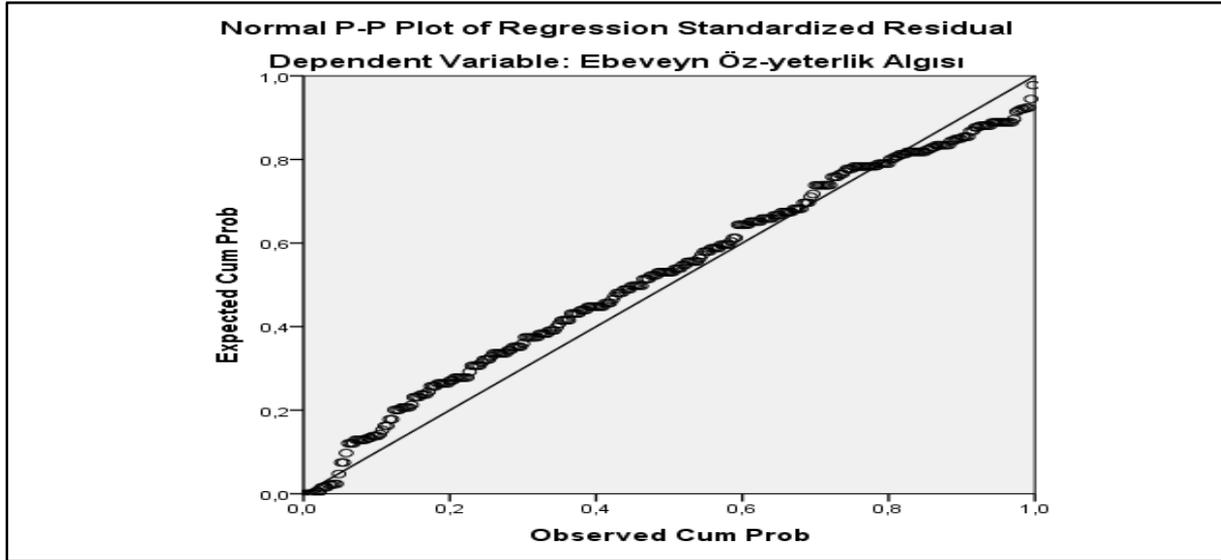


Figure 1. A linear relationship between self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering scores.

## DISCUSSION

As a result of the study, it was found that there was no significant difference between parents' self-efficacy levels and their gender. Similarly, in the study conducted by Deleş and Kaytez (2022), no significant relationship was found between parents' gender and self-efficacy levels. In contrast to this finding, the studies conducted by Büyüktaşkapu (2012) and Liu et al. (2022) found that the parental self-efficacy levels of mothers were particularly high in terms of protection, appreciation, and sensitive care. Parenting self-efficacy is not directly related to the gender of the parents, but rather to marital harmony. However, parents' past experiences may also influence their self-efficacy levels (Hollaway, 2005).

The study did not find a significant difference between education level and self-efficacy level. Contrary to the results of this study, studies conducted by Deleş & Kaytez (2022), Karaçöl (2021), Özkul (2015), Russell & Ingersoll (2021), Ramsey (2021), and Walters (2022) found that parents with a college degree had higher self-efficacy perceptions. This difference may be explained by the fact that the majority of parents in the study were college graduates. In addition, it is believed that parents' personality traits, relationships with their parents, and other environmental factors may also be more influential than parents' level of education.

The study found no significant difference between children's gender and parental self-efficacy. However, it was found that parents with male children had higher perceived mattering. Coley & Morris (2002) found that the child's gender did not affect parental self-efficacy. This may be explained by the fact that there is no longer a distinction between boys and girls due to the increased emphasis on child development in recent years, the increase in the level of education of parents, and the rejection of traditional parenting attitudes. In addition, the reason for the higher perceived mattering among parents with male children can be explained by gender roles. A review of relevant studies in the literature shows that social gender perceptions affect individuals' attitudes (Aydoğdu, 2020; Pappalardo et al. 2022; Zhu & Chang, 2019). In this regard, the roles attributed to women and men by society are accepted, while attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to the roles of women or men are not accepted (Razzaq

& Hashmi, 2022). Furthermore, men have been found to have higher gender perceptions (Parlak et al., 2021). In this context, the higher perceived mattering of fathers may be due to the roles assigned to men by society.

In the study, it was found that the self-efficacy and perceived mattering of parents living in nuclear families were high. In the studies conducted by Deleş & Kaytez (2020), Telli & Özkan (2016), and Türkoğlu & Akduman (2016), it was found that parents in nuclear families were more involved in child care. Today, the active role of women in the workforce, the increase in urbanization rates, and the increase in the division of labor between spouses for economic reasons have accelerated the transition to nuclear families (Tezel Şahin & Özyürek, 2010). In the nuclear family structure consisting of parents and children, gender roles are not as clear as in the traditional extended family. The roles of men and women are relatively more equal, and the responsibilities related to housework and children are shared among all family members (Yağan Güder & Güler Yıldız, 2016; Zhao & White, 2022). Probably, that's why parents who live in nuclear families have higher levels of self-efficacy and perceived mattering. In the study, it was found that the self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering of parents with two children were higher than those of parents with one and three children. This may be explained by the fact that parents with two children have a division of labor in child care, and having two children increases their experience and competence in parenting, which in turn has a positive effect on self-efficacy.

The study found that parents with 5 to 9 years of marriage had higher levels of self-efficacy and perceived mattering. Similarly, studies conducted by Pappalardo et al. (2022) and Zhao and White (2022) found that the duration of marriage affected the self-efficacy levels of individuals, and accordingly, the self-efficacy perceptions of newly married couples were lower. This can be explained by the increase in sharing between spouses and the support that spouses provide to each other over the course of their marriage.

The study found that parents who were highly satisfied with their marriages had high levels of self-efficacy and perceived mattering. Similarly, the studies conducted by Alvarado et al. (2020), Anthony et al. (2005), Coleman, (1998), Coleman & Karraker, (2003), Desjardin, (2004) Deleş & Kaytez (2022) have found that positive relationships between spouses and satisfaction with marriage positively affect the level of self-efficacy. This can be explained by the increase in sharing between spouses, the formation of a sense of mutual trust, and the positive effect of satisfaction with marriage.

The study found that parents' perceived mattering increased as their self-efficacy increased. Individuals with higher perceived mattering receive high satisfaction from marriage, can offer solutions to problems, do not show excessive emotional reactions, and can come to a compromise with their spouses. In this case, it positively affects self-efficacy levels, strengthens marital relationships, and positively supports the healthy development of children. In this regard, Pappalardo et al. (2022) and Zhao & White (2022) found that effective communication between spouses positively affected their self-efficacy levels. This can be explained by the fact that an individual's self-perception as an adequate individual depends on the positive relationships they have with their environment.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the research, it was found that parents' self-efficacy levels and perceived mattering did not differ according to the education level variable. Fathers and parents with male children were found to have higher levels of perceived mattering. In addition, it was found that parents who lived in a nuclear family had two children, had a marriage duration of 5-9 years, and those who were very satisfied with their marriage had high levels of self-efficacy and perceived mattering. It was also concluded that parents' perceived mattering by their spouses positively influenced their self-efficacy levels. In line with the research findings, free family therapy and premarital counseling services can be provided to couples who have problems in their marriages. Seminars on effective communication between spouses can be organized in order to increase social awareness. Parents' self-efficacy and perceived importance can be assessed according to several variables. Family education programs can be organized to help spouses get to know each other better. Experimental studies can be conducted on perceived importance and self-efficacy.

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