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An Examination of the Relationship Between Aggressive Tendencies in Preschool-Aged Children and Their Parents' Potential for Emotional Abuse*

Okul Öncesi Dönem Çocuklarının Saldırganlık Yönelimleri ile Ebeveynlerinin Duygusal İstismar Potansiyelleri Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to invenstigate the connection between aggressive behaviors in preschool children and their parents' emotional abuse potential. A correlational methodology was chosen to investigate the associations adressed in this research. The study involved 740 children attending public preschools and kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Etimesgut, Ankara, during the 2023–2024 academic year, along with their parents and teachers. Data collection was carried out using the General Information Form, the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale for Parents with Children Aged 3–6, and the Aggression Tendency Scale for Children Aged 36–72 Months. The obtained data were analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures in the SPSS software program. The findings revealed that significant relationships between the causal dimension of the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale and all subdimensions of the Aggression Tendency Scale, including physical aggression toward others, relational aggression toward others, self-directed aggression, and aggression toward objects/materials. In addition, a significant relationship was identified between the physical aggression toward others subdimension of the Aggression Tendency Scale and the total score of the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale. These findings suggest that as parents exhibit more behaviors associated with emotional abuse, children's aggression tendencies tend to increase accordingly.

Keywords: Aggression, aggressive tendency, emotional bbuse, emotional abuse potential, preschool education.

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, okul öncesi dönem çocuklarının saldırganlık yönelimleri ile ebeveynlerinin duygusal istismar potansiyeli arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Bu araştırmada ele alınan ilişkileri incelemek üzere korelasyonel bir yöntem seçildi. Katılımcılar, 2023-2024 öğretim yılında Ankara'nın Etimesgut ilçesindeki MEB'e bağlı resmi anasınıfı ve anaokuluna devam eden 740 çocuk, ebeveynleri ve öğretmenleridir. Veri toplama işlemi, Genel Bilgi Formu, 3–6 Yaş Arası Çocukların Ebeveynleri için Duygusal İstismar Potansiyeli Ölçeği ve 36–72 Aylık Çocuklar için Saldırganlık Eğilimi Ölçeği kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler, SPSS yazılım programında uygun istatistiksel yöntemler kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, Duygusal İstismar Potansiyeli Ölçeği'nin nedensel boyutu ile Saldırganlık Eğilimi

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Ölçeği'nin başkalarına yönelik fiziksel saldırganlık, başkalarına yönelik ilişkisel saldırganlık, kendine yönelik saldırganlık ve nesnelere/malzemelere yönelik saldırganlık dahil olmak üzere tüm alt boyutları arasında anlamlı ilişkiler olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Buna ek olarak, Saldırganlık Eğilimi Ölçeği'nin "başkalarına yönelik fiziksel saldırganlık" alt boyutu ile Duygusal İstismar Potansiyeli Ölçeği'nin toplam puanı arasında anlamlı bir ilişki tespit edilmiştir. Bu bulgular, ebeveynler duygusal istismarla ilişkili davranışları ne kadar çok sergilerse, çocukların saldırganlık eğilimlerinin de buna paralel olarak artma eğiliminde olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Saldırganlık, saldırganlık yönelimi, duygusal istismar, duygusal istismar potansiyeli, okul öncesi eğitim.

Introduction

The preschool period is a critical stage during which children develop cognitively, physically, linguistically, socially, and emotionally by gaining experiences in a richly stimulating environment filled with diverse stimuli, and prepare for elementary school and life (MoNE, 2024, p. 3). In this stage, families play a key role in creating a safe and nurtiring environment and in meeting the child's needs and preferences without delay, thereby supporting their social and emotional growth. In an environment where the child feels safe, they observe their surroundings more comfortably alongside their sense of curiosity and communicate with and socialize with the people around them. The socialization process that begins within the family continues within the peer group. During this process, children may learn positive social behaviors such as sharing, cooperating, and helping others, as well as antisocial behaviors like stubbornness, defiance, and aggression, based on the experiences they gain (Arslan, 2022, p. 1677; Polat, 2021, p. 48; Yırtıcı & Arı, 2024, p. 8).

Aggression refers to behaviors directed toward oneself, another person, or an object, aimed at causing physical or emotional harm. Aggressive behaviors include hitting, shouting, exclusion, and mocking—actions intentionally carried out to harm others (Allen & Anderson, 2017, p. 10; Katsapi, 2025, p. 152). Although aggression is classified in various ways in the literature, it is generally examined in the broadest sense as physical, verbal, relational, direct, indirect, instrumental, goal-directed, hostile, and reactive aggression (Dip, 2024, p. 7). Physical aggression invelves intentionally causing harm to another person by using physical acts, including hitting, kicking or pinching. Behaviors that involve ezcluding friens from play, ignoring peers or issuing threats are considered relational aggression and often result in the deterioration of peer relationships and social isolation (Juliano et al., 2006, p. 395). Verbal aggression is described as a type of aggression aimed at causing verbal harm to a person through behaviors such as insulting, threatening, or humiliating (Allen et al., 2018).

Direct aggression is aggression that aims to intentionally lead to direct damage to another person, encompassing both physical harm and verbal aggression involving insulting language (Cillesen & Rose, 2005). Indirect aggression is defined as aggressive behaviors that harm an individual's social environment, such as exclusion from a group, slander, or gossip (Björkqvist, 2018, p. 39). Instrumental aggression refers to the use of aggressive behavior as a means to achieve a desired goal for one's own benefit, whereas goal-directed aggression is exhibited in a conscious, forceful, and cold-blooded manner to obtain a reward or achieve a goal (Wei & Williams, 2009, p. 232). Hostile aggression refers to aggressive behaviors exhibited by an individual driven by emotions not previously planned to achieve a goal. Reactive aggression, on the other hand, is described as impulsive and defensive reactions displayed by an individual to protect themselves as a result of anger and loss of control (Merk et al., 2005, p. 199).

During the preschool period, children typically exhibit aggressive behaviors to obtain something they desire or to gain attention from their surroundings. While an

individual's tendency to consistently display aggressive behavior across different situations and their internal predisposition are defined as aggressive orientation, such behavior manifests as physical, relational, object-directed, and self-directed aggression (Boxer & Tisak, 2005). Aggression tendencies in preschool-aged children are influenced by numerous factors, including age, gender, heredity, number of siblings, parents' age and educational level, socioeconomic status, parental dependency, parents' mental health issues, family and peer relationships, and screen exposure (Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2020, p. 6; Tremblay et al., 2004, p. 47; Tunç & Özdemir, 2024, p. 1230).

A child who grows up supported by their parents and surrounded by love and understanding can express themselves freely and resolve their problems more easily. This helps strengthen the child's peer relationships and reduces aggressive tendencies. On the other hand, a child whose parents are indifferent to their needs and desires may suffer emotional harm, neglect, or abuse, which can cause to a loss of self-confidence and social withdrawal. Since parents are the primary role models for children, exposure to violence or negative behaviors within the family may normalize such patterns and lead children to reproduce them in their peer relationships. Parental behaviors involving harsh discipline, violence, and coercion undermine children's self-esteem and negatively impact their emotional development (Navarro et al., 2022, p. 10; Wang et al., 2019, p. 930). Consequently, the nature of the relationship parents establish with their child and the attitudes they display not only influence the child's emotional development but can also significantly shape the child's risk of being subjected to emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse encompasses all behaviors by parents, other adults, or the child's peer group that have the potential to disrupt the child's emotional well-being, such as belittling the child's personality, intimidating the child with various elements, isolating the child, mocking the child, holding unrealistic expectations regarding the child's abilities, assigning age-inappropriate responsibilities, or making the child dependent (Baskak, 2023, p. 63; Şeker, 2025, p. 85). The potential for emotional abuse is identified as the likelihood that a parent's harmful behaviors toward a child may later develop into behaviors classified as emotional abuse (Lang et al., 2022).

The American Professional Society on Child Abuse examines psychological maltreatment of children under seven headings: psychological neglect, rejection and humiliation, setting expectations that exceed the child's developmental capacity, harmful disciplinary practices, intimidation, exploitation, and social isolation (APSAC, 2025). Since emotional abuse, unlike physical and sexual abuse, does not leave visible marks on the body, the failure to recognize that behaviors often interpreted as strict parenting due to cultural differences actually fall under emotional abuse, coupled with children's inability to describe the situation due to fear, guilt, and attachment, creates barriers to reporting and complicates the identification of emotional abuse (Karagöz & Uran, 2021, p. 21).

The existing research comprises investigations into the connection between behavioral issues in young children and the emotional abuse they experience from their mothers, the association between how parents socialize emotions and their likelihood of inflicting emotional abuse, the correlation between parental attitudes and aggressive actions in children, the relationship between mothers' excessibe internet use and the aggression exhibiteh by their kids, research exploring the ties betwwen emotional abuse from mothers and parental behaviors, as well as studies that clarify the relationship betwwen parents skills in managing amotions and children's aggressive tendencies (Bülbül, 2021, p. 5; Çardak, 2022, p. 4; Lau & Williams, 2022, p. 799; Özcan et al., 2022, p. 652; Parsak & Kuzucu, 2020, p. 350; Pekdoğan & Kahraman, 2021, p. 72; Ülker & Aydos, 2024, p. 62; Yağcı, 2019).

However, a review of the literature reveals that while aggressive tendencies and the potential for emotional abuse have been examined with regard to certain variables like age, gender, and educational level, studies addressing emotional abuse by parents of preschool-aged children remain limited. Furthermore, a gap in the literatüre exists concerning the relationship between preschool childre's aggressive tendencies and their parents' emotional abuse potential. In existing studies, aggression has been examined as a unidimensional construct, and emotional abuse has been assessed based on observed behaviors. This study is significant in that it contributes to the literature by offering a holistic perspective that examines the potential for emotional abuse by mothers and fathers—including its causal and preventive subdimensions—and provides a multidimensional analysis of aggressive tendencies in preschool-aged children. The study aims to determine the relationship between the aggressive tendencies of preschool-aged children and their parents' potential for emotional abuse. In line with the general objective, the study sought answers to the following sub-questions:

1. What is the level of aggressive tendencies among preschool-aged children?

2. What is the level of potential for emotional abuse among parents of preschool-aged children?

3. Is there a linkage between the aggressive tendencies of preschool-aged children (physical, relational, directed toward oneself or objects/items) and their parents' potential for emotional abuse (causal and preventive)?

Method

This section covers the research model, the population and sample, data collection tools, the data collection process, and data analysis.

1. Research Model

This study, which aimed to determine the relationship between the potential for emotional abuse by parents of preschool-aged children and their children's aggressive tendencies, employed a correlational survey model. A survey model is a research approach used to describe an event or phenomenon as it naturally exists or has existed, without any intervention by the researcher (Karasar, 2015).

The correlational survey model was chosen because the study aimed to determine the extent of the relationship between parents' potential for emotional abuse and their children's aggressive tendencies, as well as to statistically measure the relationship between these variables.

2. Participants

The study was conducted during the 2023–2024 academic year with children enrolled in public kindergarten classes and preschools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (MEB) in the Etimesgut district of Ankara. According to Ministry of National Education records, 7,597 children were enrolled in early childhood education institutions in the district during this period. After obtaining approval from the relevant ethics committee and permission from the Ministry of National Education, 10 schools in Etimesgut that voluntarily agreed to participate were included in the study. The schools were selected based on their designation by the Ministry of National Education, their accessibility, and the number of children they could serve. The 1,200 children enrolled in these 10 schools constituted the group from which the participating children were selected. The children were selected from this group using a computer-assisted random selection method based on class rosters. Subsequently, data collection tools were

distributed to the parents and teachers of the 900 selected children. Each child was assigned a unique identification code to facilitate the matching of data obtained from different sources. By the end of the data collection process, complete data had been obtained from both the parents and teachers of 740 children. Accordingly, the final study group consisted of the parents and teachers of 740 children, who served as the primary sources of data regarding the participating children. The analyses were conducted using data obtained from these parents and teachers.

Accordingly, demographic information regarding the children participating in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Information on the Children Included in the Study

Variable	**Group**	**Frequency (f)**	**%**
Child's Gender	Female	398	53,8
	Male	342	46,2
Child's Age	3-4 years	101	13,6
	4-5 years	359	48,5
	5-6 years	280	37,9
Number of Siblings	Only Child	180	24,3
	One sibling	441	59,6
	Two siblings	96	13,0
	Three or more siblings	23	3,1
Birth Order	First-born	329	44,5
	Second-born	294	39,7
	Third-born on later	117	15,8
Presence of a Physical or Mental Disability	Yes	32	4,3
	No	708	95,7
Duration of Preschool Attendance	Less than 1 years	309	41,8
	1-2 years	320	43,2
	More than 2 years	111	15,0
Daily Screen Time	Less than 1 hour	264	35,7
	1-3 hours	358	48,4
	3-5 hours	103	13,9
	More than 5 hours	15	2,0
Birth- Related Problems	Born before 38 weeks of gestation or with a birth weight below 2,500 g	98	13,2
	Experienced another complication at birth	55	7,4
	No birth- related problems	587	79,4

A review of Table 1 shows that 53.8% of the children participating in the study were girls and 46.2% were boys. Approximately half of the children (48.5%) were in the 4–5 age group. It was found that the vast majority of participants (59.6%) had one sibling, while 3.1% had three or more siblings. 95.7% of the children had no physical or mental health conditions, while only 4.3% had strabismus (Ö-10), autism (Ö-56), cataracts (Ö-136), cerebral palsy (Ö-150), heart disease (Ö-159), acopa (Ö-179), celiac disease (Ö-233), allergic asthma (Ö-416), developmental delay (Ö-426), encephalitis (Ö-569), or esophageal atresia (Ö-702). It was found that 41.8% of the participants had been in preschool for less than one year, 43.2% had been in preschool for 1–2 years, and 15.0% had been in preschool for more than two years. While approximately half of the children (48.4%) have a daily screen time of 1–3 hours, only 2.0% have a daily screen time of more than 5 hours.

In addition, it was found that the vast majority of children (79.4%) did not experience any health issues during birth, while 7.4% experienced various complications (such as premature rupture of membranes, fetal heart rate abnormalities, the decision to perform a cesarean section due to insufficient contractions or cervical dilation, decreased amniotic fluid, umbilical cord around the baby's neck, etc.), and 13.2% were born before the 38th week of gestation or weighed less than 2,500 grams.

The demographic information for the parents who participated in the study is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Information on Parents Included in the Study

Variable	Group	Frequency (f)	%
Parent Gender	Female (Mother)	376	50,8
	Male (Father)	364	49.2
Mother's Age	20-30 years	64	17,1
	31-40 years	245	65,3
	41-50 years	66	17,6
Father's Age	20-30 years	14	3,8
	31-40 years	219	60,0
	41-50 years	132	36,2
Mother's Educational Level	Primary school or below	19	5,1
	Middle school or high school	128	34,1
	Associate degree	74	19,7
	Bachelor's degree	132	35,2
	Master's or doctoral degree	22	5,9
Father's Educational Level	Primary school or below	16	4,4
	Middle school or high school	126	34,5
	Associate degree	44	12,1
	Bachelor's degree	144	39,5
	Master's or doctoral degree	35	9,6
Marital Status	Married	727	98,2
	Single	13	1,8
Mother's Occupation	Homemaker	235	62,7
	Civil servant	87	23,2
	Worker	26	6,9
	Self-employed	27	7,2
Father's Occupation	Civil servant	137	37,5
	Worker	96	26,3
	Self-employed	120	32,9
	Retired	12	3,3
Mother's Age at First Parenthood	Under 20 years	35	9,3
	21-25 years	139	37,1
	26-30 years	147	39,2
	31-35 years	37	9,9
	36-40 years	17	4,5
Father's Age at First Parenthood	Under 20 years	7	1,9
	21-25 years	60	16,4
	26-30 years	179	49,0
	31-35 years	93	25,5
	36-40 years	26	7,1
Number of Child	One child	178	24,1
	Two children	405	54,7
	Three children	126	17,0

	Four or more children	31	4,2
Family Structure	Extended family	119	16,1
	Nuclear family	613	82,8
	Single- parent family	8	1,1
Presence of a Physical or Mental Health Problem	Yes	12	1,6
	No	728	98,4
Parents' Emotional Response Upon Learning About the Pregnancy	Very happy	650	87,8
	Considered it normal; it was expected	84	11,4
	Felt upset or frightened; considered terminating the pregnancy	6	0,8
Mother's Daily Screen Time	Less than 1 hour	54	14,4
	1-3 hours	212	56,7
	3-5 hours	83	22,2
	5-7 hours	20	5,3
	More than 7 hours	5	1,3
Father's Daily Screen Time	Less than 1 hour	43	11,7
	1-3 hours	166	45,4
	3-5 hours	100	27,3
	5-7 hours	32	8,7
	More than 7 hours	25	6,8

A review of Table 2 shows that 50.8% of the parents participating in the study were mothers, and 49.2% were fathers. The vast majority of mothers (65.3%) and fathers (60.0%) fall within the 31–40 age group. For both mothers (35.2%) and fathers (39.5%), a bachelor's degree represents the highest level of education. It was found that the vast majority of mothers are homemakers (62.7%), while the highest proportion of fathers are civil servants (37.5%). It was determined that the most common age range for mothers to become parents for the first time is 26–30 years (39.2%), and for fathers, it is also 26–30 years (49.0%). It was observed that more than half of the parents (54.7%) have two children, the vast majority (82.8%) live in a nuclear family, and 98.2% are married. Additionally, it was found that 98.4% of parents had no physical or mental health conditions, and 87.8% stated they were very happy when they learned they were expecting a child. In terms of daily screen time, it was determined that 56.7% of mothers and 45.4% of fathers used screens for 1–3 hours per day, while the proportion of mothers (1.3%) and fathers (6.8%) who used screens for more than 7 hours was found to be quite low.

3. Data Collection Tools

The general information forms comprised two distinct sections: one for children, which includes 8 items such as gender, age, siblings, birth order, health conditions, preschool education length, birth complications, and screen time; and another for parents, which contains 11 items including gender, age, education level, marital status, job, number of children, age when they first became parents, family dynamics, health conditions, response to pregnancy news, and daily screen time. These forms were created by the researchers.

In the study, the "Aggression Orientation Scale (AOS) for Children Aged 36–72 Months," developed by Kaynak, Kan, and Kurtulmuş (2016), was used to determine the aggression orientations of preschool-aged children. The scale was designed as a seven-point likert scale to determine toward which targets and individuals children direct their aggressive behaviors. The scale's subscales consist of 8 items for physical aggression toward others (PAO), 7 items for relational aggression toward others (RAO), 5 items for self-directed aggression (SDA),7 items for aggression toward objects and property (AOP). Although there are no negative scores on the scale, the lowest possible score is 27 and the

highest is 149. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was 0.95 for the total scale score, 0.94 for the physical aggression toward others subscale, 0.94 for the relational aggression toward others subscale, 0.85 for the self-directed aggression subscale, and 0.92 for the aggression toward objects and property subscale (Kan & Kurtulmuş, 2016).

In this study, reliability analyses of the scale were also conducted, and the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was 0.77 for the scale as a whole, 0.79 for the physical aggression toward others subscale, 0.80 for the relational aggression toward others subscale, 0.76 for the self-directed aggression subscale, and 0.81 for the aggression toward objects and property subscale.

The "Emotional Abuse Potential Scale for Parents of Children Aged 3–6 (EAPS)," developed by Pekdoğan and Kanak (2019) to identify parents' potential for emotional abuse, was used. The scale, which consists of two subdimensions (causal and preventive), is designed as a five-point Likert scale. The causal subscale consists of 29 items that measure behaviors leading to emotional abuse, specifically parents' negative attitudes and behaviors toward their children, and explains 31.8% of the total variance. The lowest possible score on this subscale is 29, and the highest is 145. There are no reverse-scored items in the causal subscale. A high score on the causal subscale is interpreted as indicating a high potential for the parent to cause emotional abuse toward their child. The preventive subscale consists of 21 items that measure parents' behaviors aimed at preventing emotional abuse by engaging in constructive and positive communication with their children, and it explains 28% of the total variance. All items are reverse-scored. The lowest possible score on this dimension is 21, and the highest is 105. A high score indicates that parents exhibit a high level of behaviors aimed at preventing emotional abuse of their children. When examining the reliability coefficients for the scale's subscales during the development process, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the causality and prevention subscales were calculated as 0.96, while the reliability coefficient for the entire scale was 0.97 (Pekdoğan & Kanak, 2019).

In this study, reliability analyses of the scale were also conducted, and the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.82 for the causal subscale, 0.88 for the preventive subscale, and 0.77 for the total scale.

In the study, data on children's aggressive tendencies were collected by preschool teachers who observed the children in the classroom using the "Aggression Orientation Scale (AOS) for Children Aged 36–72 Months," by preschool teachers who observed the children in the classroom setting; data on parents' potential for emotional abuse were collected through parental self-reports using the "Emotional Abuse Potential Scale for Parents of Children Aged 3–6 (EAPS).Therefore, the independent and dependent variables in the study were not derived from the same data source, with the aim of reducing the risk of common method bias.

4. Data Collection

After conducting a literature review for the study, the necessary approvals were obtained from the Gazi Ethics Committee and the Ministry of National Education. Following the approval process, 10 schools located in the Etimesgut district were selected using an appropriate sampling method, all of which had voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. In selecting the schools, consideration was given to the schools designated by the Ministry of National Education, proximity, and the large number of students who could be reached. As part of this initiative, each of the 900 children was assigned a unique code, and printed copies of the "Aggression Tendency Scale for Children Aged 36–72 Months (SYÖ)" were distributed to teachers, while the "Scale for Assessing the Potential for Emotional Abuse for Parents of Children Aged 3–6 (DİPÖ)" was distributed to

parents. At the end of the data collection process, the number of forms returned in full by teachers and parents was determined to be 740. Accordingly, a sample group of 740 children and parents was analyzed.

5. Data Analysis

The gathered data were examined with the help of SPSS software. Prior to carrying out the analyses, the dataset was examined for missing and outlier values, and it was determined that there were no missing values. Since the sample size was greater than 50, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the assumption of normality. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for children's aggressive tendencies (PAO: 0.102, p = 0.000; RAO: 0.034, p = 0.001; SDA: 0.063, p = 0.004; AOP: 0.041, p=0.021; AOS: 0.114, p=0.000) and the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for parents' potential for emotional abuse (Causal: 0.122, p=0.012; Preventive: 0.112, p=0.011; EAPS: 0.041, p=0.004) were found to be significant. Because the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is highly sensitive to small deviations in large sample groups, a decision was not made based solely on the results of this test (Field, 2018, p. 194). Accordingly, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined. George and Mallery (2016) noted that values for skewness and kurtosis must fall within ±2 points to be considered normally distributed. In this study, it was determined that the skewness and kurtosis values of the subdimensions and total scores of the "Aggression Tendency Scale for Children Aged 36–72 Months" and the "Potential for Emotional Abuse Scale for Parents of Children Aged 3–6" fell within the range of ±1. Based on the coefficient of variation and histogram analysis, the data were found to follow a normal distribution; therefore, parametric statistical techniques were used.

To determine whether children's aggression tendencies and parents' emotional abuse potential scores differed according to demographic variables, the t-test for independent samples was used for independent variables with two categories, and one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA) was used for independent variables with more than two categories. In analyses where ANOVA results indicated significant differences, the homogeneity of variances was first examined using Levene's test. When variances were homogeneous, the Bonferroni post-hoc test was used for multiple comparisons; when variances were not homogeneous, the Games-Howell post-hoc test, which does not require the assumption of equal variances, was used. The Bonferroni method was chosen because it controls the probability of a Type I error in multiple comparisons, while the Games-Howell test was selected because it yields results that are highly robust to both different group sizes and unequal variances when the assumption of homogeneity of variances is violated (Field, 2018, p. 460; Howell, 2013, p. 425). A significance level of 0.05 was adopted for all statistical analyses in this study.

Findings

In line with the first sub-goal of the research, the findings pertaining to the question "What is the level of aggressive tendencies among preschool-aged children?" are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Data on Aggression Tendencies in Preschool Children

AOS	n	$\overline{X}$	ss.	Min.	Max.
PAO	740	11.83	3.64	8	50
RAO	740	10.05	5.95	7	38
SDA	740	5.47	2.17	5	33

AOP	740	8.70	4.93	7	46
AOS Total	740	36.13	16.45	27	132

An examination of Table 3 reveals that the scores for physical aggression toward others (PAO)—one of the subscales of the Aggression Orientation Scale—among the children in the sample group ranged from 8 to 50, with a mean of 11.83 ± 3.64. Scores on the scale's "relational aggression toward others" (RAO) subscale ranged from 7 to 38, with a mean of 10.05 ± 5.95. It was found that scores on the self-directed aggression (SDA) subscale ranged from 5 to 33, with a mean of 5.47 ± 2.17. Scores fort he agression toward objects and property (AOP) subscale ranged from 7 to 46, with a mean of 8.70 ± 4.93. Scores on the total scale (AOS Total) ranged from 27 to 132, with a mean of 36.13 ± 16.45. The fact that the maximum scores observed in the study group were below the scale's theoretical maximum scores indicates that the children in the sample group did not exhibit the highest levels of aggressive tendencies. When the mean scores for the subscales and the total score are evaluated together, it is concluded that the children in the study generally exhibited low levels of aggressive tendencies.

In accordance with the study's second sub-objective, the findings regarding the question "To what extent do parents of preschool-aged children exhibit potential for emotional abuse?" are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on the Levels of Emotional Abuse Potential Among Parents of Preschool-Aged Children

EAPS	**n**	$\overline{X}$	**ss.**	**Min.**	**Max.**
Causal	740	36.84	6.80	29	87
Preventive	740	30.65	7.00	21	62
EAPS Total	740	67.48	11.71	50	136

An examination of Table 4 reveals that scores on the causal subscale ranged from 29 to 87, with a mean score of 36.84 ± 6.80. It was observed that scores on the preventive subscale ranged from 21 to 62, with a mean score of 30.65 ± 7.00. It was determined that scores on the total scale ranged from 50 to 136, with a mean score of 67.48 ± 11.71. All items in the preventive subscale of the scale are reverse-scored; high scores on this subscale indicate that parents exhibit higher levels of behavior that prevents emotional abuse of their children. In this study, the fact that the scores on the preventive subscale did not reach the theoretical upper limit is not due to reverse scoring. It reflects the natural distribution of the responses given by the parents in the study's sample group to the scale. The fact that scores on the causal subscale also fell below the theoretical maximum indicates that the parents in the sample reported low levels of behaviors that could lead to emotional abuse. Therefore, when the scores obtained from the scale's causal and preventive subscales are evaluated together, it can be concluded that the potential for emotional abuse among the parents in the sample is generally low.

In line with the third sub-objective of the study, the findings regarding the question "Is there a relationship between the aggressive tendencies of preschool-aged children (PAO, RAO, SDA, AOP) and their parents' potential for emotional abuse (causal and preventive)?" are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Findings on the Relationship Between Aggression Tendencies in Preschool-Aged Children (PAO, RAO, SDA, AOP) and Their Parents' Potential for Emotional Abuse (Causal, Preventive)

		Causal	Preventive	EAPS Total
PAO	r	.125	.004	.077
	p	.001*	.920	.036*
	n	740	740	740
RAO	r	.079	-.018	.037
	p	.032*	.620	.312
	n	740	740	740
SDA	r	.092	.020	.060
	p	.012*	.595	.102
	n	740	740	740
AOP	r	.105	-.007	.059
	p	.004*	.852	.111
	n	740	740	740
AOS Total	r	.121	-.006	.069
	p	.001*	.874	.062
	n	740	740	740

*p<.05

An examination of Table 5 reveals that the sum of the "Causal" subscale of the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale and the Aggression Orientation Scale is significantly correlated with physical aggression toward others (r = .125; p< .05), relational aggression toward others (r = .079; p<.05), self-directed aggression (r=.092; p<.05), and aggression toward objects and property (r=.105; p<.05). Accordingly, it was observed that as parents' behaviors that could lead to emotional abuse increased, children's aggression orientation scores also tended to rise, albeit to a very limited extent.

A statistically significant but very weak positive correlation was found between the total score on the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale and the "physical aggression toward others" subscale of the Aggression Propensity Scale (r = .077; p <.05). No significant relationship was found between the total score on the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale and the total score on the Aggression Orientation Scale or its other subscales (RAO, SDA, AOP) (p> .05).

No statistically significant relationship was found between the preventive subscale of the Emotional Abuse Potential Scale and the total score of the Aggression Orientation Scale or any of its subscales (p> .05). In addition, the fact that the correlation coefficients are below .125 indicates that the effect sizes of the statistically significant relationships are quite low. For this reason, the findings suggest the presence of a very weak linear relationship that became statistically significant due in part to the sample size.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

According to the first finding of the study, the children in the sample group exhibited low levels of aggressive tendencies across all subdimensions and on the total scale. It was found that the children's scores for physical and relational aggression toward others were higher than their scores for self-directed aggression. This suggests that children's aggressive tendencies are a form of behavior that emerges temporarily during the developmental process and is shaped by environmental factors. As children aged 3 to 6 develop their social skills with the guidance of parents and teachers, their ability to recognize and identify their emotions, as well as their self-control skills, increases, which

can lead to a reduction in aggressive behavior. The reason for the low level of aggressive tendencies observed in the study may be that, given the sample group, the majority of the children (86.4%) were in the 4–6 age group. During the 4–6-year-old age range, due to the development of social skills such as emotion regulation and self-control, as well as the influence of language development, children may demonstrate verbal communication and problem-solving skills through adult guidance rather than physical aggression when dealing with peer conflicts. These developmental advances may have contributed to the low aggression scores among the children in the sample group. In addition, more than half of the children in the sample group (58.2%) have been attending preschool for at least one year. Since preschool settings are environments that help children develop social skills such as sharing, waiting their turn, and cooperating, and that support peer interaction and conflict-resolution behaviors, they may have contributed to the low levels of aggressive tendencies observed among the children in the sample group. The fact that the majority of children in the sample group (75.7%) had siblings may have contributed to the low levels of aggressive behavior observed, as it allowed them to practice skills such as waiting their turn, sharing, problem-solving, and social interaction throughout the day. Indeed, studies indicate that children with siblings demonstrate more developed skills in waiting their turn, peer communication, and social adjustment compared to only children (Downey & Condron, 2004, p. 345). However, the daily screen time for the majority of children in the sample group (84.1%) is less than three hours. Given studies suggesting that prolonged screen time may be associated with impulsivity and aggressive behavior in children (Çakmak et al., 2025, p. 51; Kolat et al., 2025, p. 32), it is thought that the relatively limited screen time of these children may have contributed to their low levels of aggression. A review of the literature reveals that, in line with the findings of this study, there are studies indicating that children's levels of aggressive tendencies are below average (İkiz & Öztürk Samur, 2016, p. 169; Tuzcuoğlu vd., 2020, p. 19; Wildeboer vd., 2015). In a study conducted by Tremblay et al. (2004), it was reported that children's levels of physical aggression ranged from low to moderate, with only a very small portion of the group exhibiting high levels of aggression. In their study, Crick et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal examination of physical and relational aggression among preschool-aged children. They noted that children's aggression levels were generally low to moderate, that girls' levels of relational aggression were relatively high, and that boys' levels of physical aggression were relatively high.

According to the second finding of the study, it was determined that the potential for emotional abuse among parents of preschool-aged children in the sample group was low. The low potential for emotional abuse among the mothers and fathers in the sample group suggests that they exhibit a sensitive, supportive, and protective attitude toward their children and may have high levels of social skills. However, it is thought that the fact that a large proportion of the mothers (60.8%) and fathers (61.2%) in the sample group are college graduates may be one of the factors explaining the low scores on the causal subscale of emotional abuse. As the level of education increases, parents' knowledge of child development, children's rights, and positive communication may also increase, leading them to exhibit more positive behaviors toward their children. Indeed, studies indicate that dismissive and punitive parental responses increase the potential for emotional abuse (Ülker & Aydos, 2024, p. 64). The fact that the vast majority of parents in the sample group lived in a nuclear family structure (82.8%) and were married (98.2%) may have contributed to the low scores on the causal dimension of the potential for emotional abuse by strengthening parental cooperation and family support. However, parents' lack of knowledge about behaviors classified as emotional abuse can affect their level of awareness regarding the potential for emotional abuse and their use of protective parenting practices. In this regard, the relatively low level of risk factors can be

interpreted to mean that, on its own, it does not imply that knowledge and skills to prevent emotional abuse are sufficient. The fact that the scores for behaviors aimed at preventing emotional abuse did not reach the theoretical upper limit in the study can be attributed to the ongoing process of gaining experience in positive parenting practices, given that the vast majority of mothers in the sample group (85.6%) were under the age of 30 when they became first-time parents. In addition, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of parents (75.9%) have two or more children. It is believed that while this situation enhances the parenting experience, it may also lead to the sharing of attention, time, and emotional resources among siblings and, by reducing the duration of individual interactions, prevent behaviors that prevent emotional abuse from reaching their theoretical upper limit. Furthermore, it is believed that the daily screen time of mothers (28.8%) and fathers (42.8%) in the sample group—which is three hours or more—may be a factor that negatively affects the amount of quality interaction time spent with the child. Parents' screen-use habits may indirectly affect the quality of warm, responsive, and consistent interactions with their children, thereby limiting preventive parenting behaviors. Indeed, studies indicate that high levels of digital device use among parents negatively affect family interaction and parent-child communication (Akbağ & Sayıner, 2021, p. 770). A review of the literature reveals that there are studies consistent with these research findings. A study conducted by Tektimur (2022) found that parents with high levels of social skills exhibited a lower potential for emotional abuse. In a qualitative study conducted by Üstündağ (2022), it was found that parents had incomplete and inaccurate information regarding behaviors classified as emotional abuse; following the training provided, their awareness of the potential for emotional abuse increased, leading to a decrease in behaviors that contribute to emotional abuse. In a study conducted by Yılmaz Demirel and Yılmaz (2025), it was determined that mothers' potential for emotional abuse differed significantly according to various sociodemographic variables, such as age, length of marriage, educational level, family structure, and number of children. This finding suggests that parents' potential for emotional abuse should be considered not only in relation to their parenting behaviors but also in relation to the sociodemographic characteristics of the parents and families.

According to the third finding of the study, a positive, statistically significant but very weak correlation was observed between the causal subscale of parents' potential for emotional abuse and the subscales of children's aggressive tendencies (PAO, RAO, SDA, AOP) as well as their total score. This suggests that as the risk level associated with parental behaviors that could lead to emotional abuse increases, children's aggressive tendencies also increase to a limited extent. Children who are subjected to emotional abuse may experience feelings of helplessness and worthlessness when constantly faced with behaviors that cause emotional abuse—such as criticism, humiliation, blame, and being ignored or threatened. Unable to cope with these feelings, they may blame themselves, isolate themselves from those around them, or exhibit self-directed aggression. A child who is ignored by their parents may resort to aggressive behavior—such as harming themselves or others—in an effort to attract attention. A child who cannot defend themselves against their parents may direct the anger and disappointment they have built up inside toward objects and belongings in their surroundings. A child may view the aggressive and abusive behavior they witness from their parents as a way to solve problems, may model that behavior, and, when facing a problem among their peers, may direct the behavior they observed from their parents—in the form of physical aggression—toward their peers. A child who is belittled at home may exhibit relational aggression toward their peers at school by slandering or insulting others in order to gain power. Parents, on the other hand, may resort to punishment in an attempt to curb their

child's aggressive behavior, thereby engaging in behavior that constitutes emotional abuse.

A review of the existing literature revealed that there are few studies directly examining the relationship between parents' potential for emotional abuse and children's aggressive tendencies; rather, the literature primarily consists of studies investigating the effects of parental emotional abuse on children's psychosocial adjustment, behavioral problems, and developmental outcomes. A study conducted by Akpınar (2025) found that as mothers' potential for emotional abuse increased, the impact on children's psychosocial well-being remained minimal. In a study conducted by Yıldız, Kanak, and Pekdoğan (2025), a significant positive correlation was found between mothers' potential for emotional abuse and their overall health status. The study found that approximately one-third of mothers were at risk for mental health issues and that as mothers' psychological difficulties increased, so did their potential for emotional abuse. This finding suggests that parents' psychological well-being may be a significant risk factor for negative parenting behaviors toward children. Similarly, a study conducted by Rademacher, Zumbach, and Koglin (2025) examined the relationship between parenting style and children's aggressive behavior. The study found that an authoritarian parenting style increases children's difficulties with emotion regulation and, as a result, contributes to an increase in aggressive behavior; in contrast, a warm and supportive parenting style was found to be associated with a decrease in aggressive behavior by supporting children's emotion regulation skills. These findings support the positive relationship identified in the present study between an increase in parents' potential for emotional abuse and an increase in children's aggressive tendencies. In their study, Ülker and Aydos (2024) found that parents' dismissive emotional socialization responses significantly predicted behaviors leading to emotional abuse. A study conducted by Çardak (2022) found that as mothers' potential for emotional abuse increased, children's behavioral problems also increased. A study conducted by Wang, Shi, and Jin (2019) found that childhood emotional abuse influences aggressive behavior to a certain extent. A study by Şenol (2021) found that as a mother's preventive attitudes and behaviors toward emotional abuse increased, the child's social competence increased, while levels of stress and introversion decreased. In this case, the child's social communication skills improve, and aggressive behavior may also decrease. Studies have indicated that emotional abuse has an impact on aggressive behavior. It is believed that this research will contribute to the literature by examining children's aggressive tendencies along with their subdimensions and by analyzing emotional abuse from a holistic perspective in relation to both mothers and fathers. According to the results of the study, it was determined that the children in the sample group exhibited low levels of aggressive tendencies and that their parents had a low potential for emotional abuse. It was observed that children of parents with a high potential for emotional abuse exhibited high levels of physical aggression toward others. It has been found that as parents' behaviors that lead to emotional abuse increase, their children's propensity for aggression also increases. In light of this, the following recommendations are provided:

- The results of the study revealed a statistically significant but very weak association between the causal subscale of parents' potential for emotional abuse and children's aggressive tendencies. In this regard, screening programs can be planned in preschool settings to identify parental behaviors that could lead to emotional abuse at an early stage, and, as needed, training sessions can be conducted to raise awareness of the potential for emotional abuse.
- Since the study found a correlation between parents' potential for emotional abuse and children's scores on physical and relational aggression toward themselves, objects, and others, interventions in preschool settings in response to aggressive

behavior in children should not be limited to child-focused approaches but should also include family-focused interventions that assess parent-child interactions.

- The fact that the correlation coefficient obtained in the study was very weak indicates that children's aggressive tendencies cannot be explained solely by their parents' potential for emotional abuse. For this reason, future research could examine variables such as parental attitudes, peer relationships, temperament, and emotion regulation skills in conjunction with one another.
- Since this study was limited to preschool-aged children and their parents in the Etimesgut district, similar studies could be conducted in areas with different socioeconomic characteristics.
- Since this study was cross-sectional, longitudinal studies could be conducted to determine the effect of changes in parents' potential for emotional abuse on children's aggressive tendencies.
- In this study, since parents' potential for emotional abuse was assessed using a self-report measure, the possibility that parents might report their potential for emotional abuse as more positive or at a lower level than it actually is due to their tendency to seek social approval is considered a limitation of the study. In this regard, future research that incorporates teacher observations, structured observation methods, and multiple data sources—in addition to parental self-reports—may contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of parents' potential for emotional abuse.

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