

Examining the Relationship between Mothers' Self-Compassion Levels and Children's Loneliness

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Abstract

Purpose of the research is to examine the predictive effect of self-compassion levels of preschool period children's mothers over children's loneliness levels. The research was conducted with 196 children, between the ages of 60-72 months and who are attending preschool education in a metropolis in the South-eastern Anatolia Region, and their mothers. In this quantitatively designed study, the relational screening model was used. The Personal Information Form, Self-Compassion Scale and Children's Loneliness and Dissatisfaction Scale were adapted in the research. According to the research results; there is a negative, high level and significant relationship between self-compassion, self-kindness and common humanity levels of mothers and loneliness levels of preschool period children. There is a positive, high level and significant relationship between self-judgement, isolation and over-identification levels of mothers and loneliness of children. Research findings indicate that mothers' self-compassion is associated to and predicts loneliness of preschool period children. In light of the information in the literature, results of this study can be interpreted as the mother's self-compassion towards herself may reduce the child's level of loneliness by positively affecting her relationship with her child. Since there is not enough research on the subject in Türkiye, it is thought that the findings will have significant contributions to the literature.

Keywords: Self-compassion, Loneliness, Preschool period, Mother-child relationship

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Introduction

The preschool period is a critical period that is very effective in the psychosocial development of the child. One of the factors that can affect the emotional and social development of the child is the emotional psychological state of the mother, who is the child's caregiver during this period (Öngider, 2013). There are many effects of the mother-child relationship over the child (Tezel Şahin, 2014). It is stated that the most important role in the child's development of a healthy emotional identity falls to the mother (or primary caregiver) (Dalgat et al., 2022). Previous research (Doksat and Çiftçi, 2016; Gülay Ogelman et al. 2013; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Pianta, Nimetz and Bennet, 1997; Solomon and George, 2011) shows that a healthy relationship between the mother and child positively affects the child's social adaptation and emotional development. Meeting the child's needs on time and adequately during this relationship between the mother and child positively affects the child's sense of confidence, thus prepares the child to be open to new interactions and experiences. The mother-child relationship affects the child's way of perceiving the world, problem-solving skills and social relationships (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991; Türköz, 2007).

Considering the inadequacy of studies on the subject in the literature, it was found important to examine self-compassion in the context of family and preschool children's development. In this context, the predictive effect of the self-compassion levels of mothers of preschool children on the children's loneliness levels was investigated.

The interaction within the family directly affects the child's behaviours (Önder and Gülay, 2007). During this interaction process, the mother's reactions, stress level, and emotional state may cause similar reactions on the children (Hollenstein et al., 2017). During the preschool period, where mothers are important role models for children, mothers' methods of coping with stress, methods of solving social problems and ability to show compassion towards themselves are determinant in children's ability to have such skills (Abraham and Kerns, 2013; Moreira et al. 2015). Adequate care given by the mother is effective in the development of the child's self-esteem and self-perception (Hopkins and Klein, 1993). Research shows that children's self-perception is influenced more by their mothers' parenting rather than their actual value. This is related to Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) "Looking-Glass Self" theory (Tomasetto et al., 2015). Cooley was working to develop the idea that the self is actually a social construct. During these studies Cooley used mirror images to show people how they appear to others and how they incorporate what they imagine into their own self-concept (Dunn, 2007). Looking-glass self; "Refers to the process by which an individual defines his or her self by reflecting the reactions and attitudes of other people." (Zengin, 2024). The concept is included in the literature as "reflected self" or "reflected evaluation" (Ochsner et al., 2005). Looking-glass Self functions as a magnifying glass for one's self-perception, thus, what the child sees in his/herself through his/her parent's eyes has a significant impact on self-development (Tice, 1992). In reflected evaluation children see their mother as their mother evaluates herself. For this reason, it is considered that the mother's self-improvement in every sense and her mental and physical health will have an impact on the child. At this point, one of the important concepts is the concept of self-compassion. Self-compassion is defined as entailing three main components that are being compassionate to oneself, common humanity and mindfulness; the individual displaying a kind attitude towards oneself against difficult instances and emotions, accepting that others also undergo these difficult experiences and understanding his/her feelings and thoughts with awareness (Neff, 2003; Neff, 2009). Self-compassion can be referred to as the affection an individual feels for oneself as a way to manage his/her own feelings and thoughts about him/herself more healthily (Gilbert, & Procter, 2006). Showing compassion to oneself refers to the individual being aware of his/her own pain, showing kindness and understanding to oneself, desiring his/her own well-being, displaying a non-judgemental attitude to oneself against shortcomings and failure (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion can provide an important protective function for the individual when faced with difficulties (Cary and Felter, 2020). Neff (2003), who has conducted remarkable studies on the subject, defines self-compassion as a self-reflective process involving several theoretical facets, each of which have a positive and negative pole that distinguishes between compassionate and uncompassionate behaviour. Neff marks these facets as 1) self-kindness and self-judgment, 2) isolation and a sense of common humanity, and 3) mindfulness and over-identification (Neff, 2003). The concept consists of six key components organized into three bipolar dimensions; these are, self-kindness versus self-judgment (refers to the tendency to be accepting, kind and noncritical toward oneself when the individual experiences a suffer, failure, or feels inadequate rather than ignoring the pain or adopting a self-judgmental and self-critical attitude), common humanity versus isolation (refers to the individual seeing his/her own experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separate and isolating), and mindfulness versus over-identification (refers to the individual maintaining his/her painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them) (Neff, 2003). In order to develop self-compassion as a well-being strategy, the focus must be on positive components (self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness) rather than negative components (self-judgement, isolation and over-identification) (Neff & Faso, 2015). The Self-Compassion Scale, developed by Neff, was used in this study.

While there are various factors such as emotional intelligence (Di Fabio and Soflakske, 2021), life satisfaction (Yang, Zhang and Kou, 2016), gender (Yarnel et al., 2015) and age (Bluth et al., 2017) in the development of

individuals' self-compassion, mother's attitude is also crucial (Burns and Maritz, 2015; Yılmaz, 2009). Studies carried out with mothers and fathers indicate that depression, anxiety, stress management and awareness of parents improve as their self-compassions develop (Jefferson, Shires and McAloon, 2020). Self-compassion of the mother indirectly affects the child's life quality (Moreira et al., 2015). A mother with high self-compassion supports her own emotional health and also reflects this compassionate approach to her relationship with her children. Children observe their mothers' emotional reactions against challenging situations and develop their own emotion regulation strategies based on these reactions. The emotional education the child receives directly from the mother or indirectly by observing will have an impact on his/her emotional health (Mutlu, 2020; Sille, 2016; Şepitci Sarıbaş and Tezel Şahin, 2021). Teaching parents to be self-compassionate can facilitate a more compassionate approach towards parenting. Also, it can help parents accept their imperfections, accept that feeling overwhelmed is normal and that negative experiences are universal (Pollack, 2019). New mothers who receive self-compassion training observe improvements in their birth and breastfeeding difficulties and their general mental health (Lennard, Mitchell and Whittingham, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2018). Mothers with high self-compassion are emotionally resilient, stable, able to protect themselves and are more understanding towards themselves, thus, these characteristics may be reflected in their children (Neff, 2011; Petersen, 2014). Development of self-compassion promotes relational and emotional well-being (Lathren et al., 2021). In a research conducted by Psychogiou et al. (2016), it was determined that parents with high levels of self-compassion are more likely to attribute their children's behaviours to external factors than parents with low self-compassion levels. Also, these parents were less critical of their children and had less distressing responses when coping with their children's emotions. Thus, various emotional difficulties may occur in children who fail to develop self-compassion. One of the emotional difficulties encountered during childhood is loneliness.

Loneliness is a painfully, complex emotional experience resulting from deficiencies in the quality and quantity of social relationships that involve interpersonal, systemic and emotional components (Hymel et al., 1999; Weeks and Asher, 2012). Loneliness occurs when an individual becomes aware that his/her interpersonal relationships are inadequate or unjust (Evans et al., 2023). Although children's loneliness experiences are relatively common and temporary during their development periods, persistent (chronic) loneliness has been associated with psychological consequences that have negative effects on development (Qualter et al., 2010). Research shows that childhood loneliness is associated with emotional problems such as shyness, aggression, destructive behaviour and adult psychological problems (Qualter and Munn, 2002; Xerxa et al., 2023). In addition, childhood loneliness affects peer relationships and accordingly the child's emotional well-being (Asher and Paquette, 2003). The feeling of loneliness can be caused by many factors such as social rejection, peer bullying or lack of domestic emotional support. It is believed that receiving adequate emotional support may have a protective effect for children experiencing loneliness. For this reason, studies on self-compassion, which affects the mother's emotional support capacity, and the child's loneliness have been investigated; the effect of the mother on the child has not been found in the literature, but in researches examining loneliness along with self-compassion in adults, these two concepts have been observed to be related (Akın, 2010; Borawski and Nowak, 2022). The majority of the researches have been carried out with adolescents (San Şentürk, 2010), adults (DiTommaso et al., 2003) and elders (Pinquart and Sorensen, 2001); studies on young children remain inadequate. However, no study has been found in Türkiye examining the relationship between mothers' self-compassion levels and preschool children's loneliness. In addition, Cheung, Li and Ho (2022) underline that little research has been conducted to understand the role of self-compassion in the family context. Psychogiou et al. (2016) state that there is a gap in the literature concerning parents' self-compassion and that more studies should be conducted. Based on the literature review, because it is important to examine self-compassion in the context of family and preschool period children's development, this study is considered to contribute to both national and also international literature. The findings can guide future studies on both parental self-compassion and child loneliness variables. Addressing the loneliness of young children in terms of parental variables will also be important with respect to experimental studies that can be conducted on the subject. Considering the speed of development during early years of life, the need to diversify research on preschool children becomes evident. Since mothers and fathers have great importance in the life of children, examining development with respect to parental variables can make it easier to recognize children. With this respect, the predictive effect of self-compassion levels of preschool period children's mothers over children's loneliness levels has been investigated. Thus, answers for the following questions were sought:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between self-compassion levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness?
2. Do self-compassion levels of the mothers of preschool period children significantly predict loneliness of the children?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between self-kindness levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness?

4. Do self-kindness levels of the mothers of preschool period children significantly predict loneliness of the children?
5. Is there a statistically significant relationship between self-judgement levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness?
6. Do self-judgement levels of the mothers of preschool period children significantly predict loneliness of the children?
7. Is there a statistically significant relationship between common humanity levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness?
8. Do common humanity levels of the mothers of preschool period children significantly predict loneliness of the children?
9. Is there a statistically significant relationship between isolation levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness?
10. Do isolation levels of the mothers of preschool period children significantly predict loneliness of the children?
11. Is there a statistically significant relationship between over-identification levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness?
12. Do over-identification levels of the mothers of preschool period children significantly predict loneliness of the children?

Method

Research Design

The relational screening method was used in the research. The relational screening method is an approach used for understanding the relationships between research variables (Karasar, 2005).

Study Group

In the research, the study group was determined through the convenience sampling method. The research was conducted with 196 children, between the ages of 60-72 months and who are attending preschool education in a metropolis in the South-eastern Anatolia Region, and their mothers. Since the research required individual application on the children, children attending preschool education and their mothers were preferred. In addition, 196 mothers and their children were reached after obtaining their consent to participate in the research. Demographic information related to the participants is given on Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

	Variables	f	%
Child's gender	Boy	97	49.5
	Girl	99	50.5
Mother's educational status	Illiterate	21	10.7
	Literate	18	9.2
	Primary school graduate	79	40.3
	Secondary school graduate	52	26.5
	High school graduate	21	10.7
	University graduate	5	2.6
Father's educational status	Illiterate	6	3.1
	Literate	12	6.1
	Primary school graduate	63	32.1
	Secondary school graduate	66	33.7
	High school graduate	37	18.9
	University graduate	12	6.1
Mother's age	20-30	93	47.4
	31-40	91	46.4
	41 years old and over	12	6.1
Father's age	20-30	43	21.9
	31-40	132	67.3
	41 years old and over	21	10.7
School type	Kindergarten affiliated with a primary school	162	82.7
	Kindergarten affiliated with a secondary school	34	17.3

97 (49.5%) of the children participating in the research are girls and 99 (50.5%) are boys. 21 (10.7%) of the mothers participating in the research are illiterate, 18 (9.2%) are literate, 79 (40.3%) are primary school graduate, 52 (26.5%) are secondary school graduate, 21 (10.7%) are high school graduate and 5 (2.6%) are university graduate. 6 (3.1%) of the fathers participating in the research are illiterate, 12 (6.1%) are literate, 63 (32.1%) are primary school graduate, 66 (33.7%) are secondary school graduate, 37 (18.9%) are high school graduate and 12 (6.1%) are university graduate. 93 (47.4%) of the mothers participating in the research are between 20-30 years old, 91 (46.4%) are between 31-40 years old and 12 (6.1%) are 41 years and older. 43 (21.9%) of the fathers participating in the research are between 20-30 years old, 132 (67.3%) are between 31-40 years old and 21 (10.7%) are 41 years and older. 162 (82.7%) of the participant children attend a kindergarten affiliated with a primary school, 34 (17.3%) attend a kindergarten affiliated with a secondary school.

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form

The personal information form was developed by the researchers so as to gather demographic information about the children and their families. The form consists of information about the children's school, gender, age, mother's educational status, father's educational status, mother's age, father's age, mother's profession, father's profession, number of siblings and sibling's gender.

Self-Compassion Scale

The scale was originally developed by Neff (2003) and adapted into Turkish by Akın, Akın and Abacı (2007). The Turkish form consists of 26 items, as does the original form of the scale. The scale includes 6 sub-dimensions; self-kindness, self-judgement, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification. High scores obtained by the individual from each sub-scale indicate that the individual has the characteristics evaluated by the relevant sub-scale. Scoring of the scale is done separately for each sub-dimension. The scale also provides a total self-compassion score. The internal consistency coefficients of the scale were observed to be .77 for the self-kindness sub-scale, .72 for self-judgement, .72 for common humanity, .80 for isolation, .74 for mindfulness and .74 for over-identification (Akın, Akın and Abacı, 2007). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients of this study were observed to be .71 for self-kindness, .77 for self-judgement, .75 for common humanity, .74 for isolation, .65 for mindfulness, .74 for over-identification and .93 for total self-compassion.

Children's Loneliness and Dissatisfaction Scale

The Turkish adaptation of the Children's Loneliness and Dissatisfaction Scale, created originally by Cassidy and Asher (1992), was carried out by Yazıcı, Duyan and Gelbal (2013). The scale is used to measure loneliness and dissatisfaction levels of preschool period children. There are a total of 23 items in the Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale. The scale has one dimension. High scores obtained from the scale refer to a high loneliness and social dissatisfaction level; low scores refer to a low loneliness and social dissatisfaction level. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .759 and the reliability coefficient measured through the test-retest method is .85 (Yazıcı, Duyan and Gelbal, 2013). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of this study was observed to be .86.

Data Collection

Ethics committee permission was received from the Board of Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (decision numbered 2023-67, date 24.02.2023). Information about the data collection tools and process was given to teachers and mothers prior the data collection process. For the research, the Personal Information Form was filled in by preschool teachers and the Self-Compassion Scale was filled in by mothers of the children. The Loneliness Scale was conducted by one of the researchers through individual interviews. The interviews, which were held in a room outside the classroom environment with appropriate conditions in terms of sound, temperature and light, lasted between 15-20 minutes. The data collection process took almost 4 months.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out by using SPSS 20.0 statistical package program. Before data analysis, whether or not the variables have normal distribution was determined based on the kurtosis and skewness values. Because the mindfulness sub-dimension of the Self-Compassion Scale had an internal consistency coefficient under .70 (.65), it wasn't included in the research. At this point, the kurtosis value of the Self-Kindness sub-dimension of the Self-Compassion Scale ranged between 1.477 and .346, the skewness value ranged between -1.143 and .174; the kurtosis value of the self-judgement sub-dimension ranged between .787 and .346, the skewness value ranged between .918 and .174; the kurtosis value of the common humanity sub-dimension ranged between .407 and .346, the skewness value ranged between -.587 and .174; the kurtosis value of the isolation sub-dimension ranged between .862 and .346, the skewness value ranged between 1.130 and .174; the kurtosis value of the over-identification sub-dimension ranged between 1.500 and .346, the skewness value ranged between 1.253 and .174; the kurtosis value of total self-compassion ranged between 1.489 and .346, the skewness value ranged between -1.313 and .174; the kurtosis value of total loneliness ranged between .940 and .346, the skewness value ranged between .772 and .174. As a result of the normality test, it was observed that the study data were normally distributed and parametric tests were applied. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Simple Linear Regression Analyses were applied during the data analysis process. The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. If there are strong linear relationships between the variables the correlation coefficient is 1 or close to -1. A result of 0 indicates that there is no linear relationship (Deprez and Robinson, 2022). Simple linear regression is used to model the relationship between two continuous variables. The purpose here is to predict the value of an output variable (or response) based on the value of an input (or predictive) variable (Statistical Discovery, 2025).

Ethics approval notification

All data collection and storage procedures were approved by the Board of Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (decision numbered 2023-67, date 24.02.2023)

Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the statistics concerning the relationship between total self-compassion levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness.

Table 2. Relationship between Preschool Period Children's Mothers' Total Self-Compassion Levels and Children's Loneliness

Variables	N	\bar{X}	sd	r
Mothers' self-compassion levels	196	3.56	0.81	-
Children's loneliness levels	196	25.98	5.29	-.799*

* $p < .001$

According to Table 2, there is a negative, high level and significant relationship between total self-compassion levels of mothers and loneliness levels of children ($r = -.799$; $p < .001$). According to this result, children's loneliness decreases as total self-compassion levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness increases as total self-compassion levels of mothers decrease.

Table 3 presents total self-compassion levels of preschool period children's mothers and findings concerning whether they significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 3. Regression on Total Self-Compassion Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers Predicting Children's Loneliness

Variables	B	Std. error	β	t	p
Self-Compassion	-.122	.007	-.799	-18.502	.000*
Loneliness					
$R = .799$, $R^2 = .638$, $F(1,194) = 342.337$					

* $p < .001$

With respect to the data on the table, it is evident that total self-compassion levels of the mothers of preschool period children ($\beta = -.799$, $p < .001$) significantly predict children's loneliness.

Table 4 presents statistics concerning the relationship between self-kindness levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness.

Table 4. Relationship between Self-Kindness Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers and Children's Loneliness

Variables	N	\bar{X}	sd	r
Mothers' self-kindness levels	196	3.48	.83	-
Children's loneliness levels	196	25.98	5.29	-.751*

*p<.001

According to Table 4, there is a negative, high level and significant relationship between self-kindness levels of mothers and loneliness levels of children ($r=-.751$; $p<.001$). According to this result, children's loneliness decreases as self-kindness levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness increases as self-kindness levels of mothers decrease.

Table 5 presents self-kindness levels of preschool period children's mothers and findings concerning whether they significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 5. Regression on Self-Kindness Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers Predicting Children's Loneliness

Variables	B	Std. error	β	t	p
Self-Kindness	-.119	.007	-.751	-15.862	.000*
Loneliness					
$R=.751$, $R^2=.565$, $F(1,194)=251.607$					

*p<.001

When data on the table are considered, it is evident that self-kindness levels of the mothers of preschool period children ($\beta=-.751$, $p<.001$) significantly predict children's loneliness.

Table 6 presents statistics concerning the relationship between self-judgement levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness.

Table 6. Relationship between Self-Judgement Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers and Children's Loneliness

Variables	N	\bar{X}	sd	r
Mothers' self-judgement levels	196	2.57	0.82	-
Children's loneliness levels	196	25.98	5.29	.723*

*p<.001

According to Table 6, there is a positive, high level and significant relationship between self-judgement levels of mothers and loneliness of children ($r=.723$; $p<.001$). According to this result, children's loneliness increases as self-judgement levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness decreases as self-judgement levels of mothers decrease.

Table 7 presents self-judgement levels of preschool period children's mothers and findings on whether they significantly predict children's loneliness.

Table 7. Regression on Self-Judgement Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers Predicting Children's Loneliness

Variables	B	Std. error	β	t	p
Self-judgement	.113	.008	.723	14.591	.000*
Loneliness					
$R=.723$, $R^2=.523$, $F(1,194)=212.884$					

*p<.001

It is evident on Table 7 that self-judgement levels ($\beta=.723$, $p<.001$) of preschool period children's mothers significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 8 presents the statistics concerning the relationship between common humanity levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness.

Table 8. Relationship between Common Humanity Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers and Children's Loneliness

Variables	N	\bar{X}	sd	r
Mothers' common humanity levels	196	3.42	0.83	-
Children's loneliness levels	196	25.98	5.29	-.704*

*p<.001

It is evident on Table 8 that there is a negative, high level and significant relationship between common humanity levels of mothers and loneliness levels of children ($r=-.704$; $p<.001$). According to this result, children's loneliness decreases as common humanity levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness increases as common humanity levels of mothers decrease.

Table 9 presents common humanity levels of preschool period children's mothers and findings on whether they significantly predict children's loneliness.

Table 9. Regression on Common Humanity Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers Predicting Children's Loneliness

Variables	B	Std. error	β	t	p
Common humanity	-.111	.008	-.704	-13.813	.000*
Loneliness					

$R=.704$, $R^2=.496$, $F(1,194)=190.795$

*p<.001

According to Table 9, it is evident that common humanity levels ($\beta=-.704$, $p<.001$) of preschool period children's mothers significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 10 presents statistics concerning the relationship between isolation levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness.

Table 10. Relationship between Isolation Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers and Children's Loneliness

Variables	N	\bar{X}	sd	r
Mothers' isolation levels	196	2.29	1.05	-
Children's loneliness levels	196	25.98	5.29	.710*

*p<.001

According to Table 10, there is a positive, high level and significant relationship between isolation levels of mothers and children's loneliness ($r=.710$; $p<.001$). This result shows that children's loneliness increases as isolation levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness decreases as isolation levels of mothers decrease.

Table 11 presents isolation levels of preschool period children's mothers and findings on whether they significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 11. Regression on Isolation Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers Predicting Children's Loneliness

Variables	B	Std. error	β	t	p
Isolation	.141	.010	.710	14.025	.000*
Loneliness					

$R=.710$, $R^2=.503$, $F(1,194)=196.707$

*p<.001

It is evident on Table 11 that isolation levels ($\beta=.710$, $p<.001$) of preschool period children's mothers significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 12 presents the statistics concerning the relationship between over-identification levels of preschool period children's mothers and children's loneliness.

Table 12. Relationship between Over-Identification Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers and Children's Loneliness

Variables	N	\bar{X}	sd	r
Mothers' over-identification levels	196	2.34	1.01	-
Children's loneliness levels	196	25.98	5.29	.770*

*p<.001

Table 12 suggests a positive, high level and significant relationship between over-identification levels of mothers and loneliness of children ($r=.770$; $p<.001$). This result shows that children's loneliness increases as over-

identification levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness decreases as over-identification levels of mothers decrease.

Table 13 presents over-identification levels of preschool period children's mothers and findings on whether they significantly predict loneliness of the children.

Table 13. Regression on Over-Identification Levels of Preschool Period Children's Mothers Predicting Children's Loneliness

Variables	B	Std. error	β	t	p
Over-Identification Loneliness	.148	.009	.770	16.824	.000*
R=.770, R ² =.593, F(1,194)=283.047					

*p<.001

It is evident on Table 13 that over-identification levels (β =.770, p <.001) of preschool period children's mothers significantly predict children's loneliness.

Discussion

The predictive effect of self-compassion levels of preschool period children's mothers over children's loneliness levels has been investigated in this research. Five among the six sub-dimensions of the Self-Compassion Scale, used for collecting data, were included in the study. Because the internal consistency coefficient the mindfulness sub-dimension was below .70, it wasn't included in the research. A relationship was found between all of the sub-dimensions included in the research and the mothers' total self-compassion and children's loneliness levels; all of the sub-dimensions were observed to have a predictive effect on children's loneliness levels.

According to the research there is a negative, high level and significant relationship between self-compassion, self-kindness and common humanity levels of mothers and loneliness levels of preschool period children. According to this result, children's loneliness decreases as self-compassion, self-kindness and common humanity levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness increases as self-compassion, self-kindness and common humanity levels of mothers decrease. In addition, it is evident that self-compassion, self-kindness and common humanity levels of mothers significantly predict loneliness of the children.

There is a positive, high level and significant relationship between self-judgement, isolation and over-identification levels of mothers and children's loneliness. This result shows that children's loneliness increases as self-judgement, isolation and over-identification levels of mothers increase; children's loneliness decreases as self-judgement, isolation and over-identification levels of mothers decrease. It was observed that self-judgement, isolation and over-identification levels of mothers significantly predict children's loneliness.

Research findings indicate that mothers' self-compassion is associated with and predicts loneliness levels of preschool period children. While total self-compassion level of mothers is the variable that mostly predicts loneliness levels of young children, common humanity level is the variable that least predicts them.

When research results are considered in general, children's loneliness can decrease as affection and compassion levels of mothers towards themselves are high. At this point, it can be stated that mothers' positive perceptions of themselves may support the positive perception of their children. Hence, self-compassion is regarded to be associated with parenting behaviours. For example, self-compassion can help parents recognize, allow and move away from negative thoughts; thus, they become more conscious and less reactive to negative thoughts. This may increase their ability to respond compassionately to their child's needs. For this reason, self-compassion can strengthen interpersonal relationships (Lathren et al., 2021). Self-compassion supports abandoning negative behaviours and undertaking necessary but difficult actions to increase overall well-being (Neff, 2003). Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1998) state that self-compassion enables parents to act on the basis of recognizing, understanding and avoiding reactive and negative thoughts. In light of the information in the literature, results of this study can be interpreted as the mother's self-compassion towards herself may reduce the child's level of loneliness by positively affecting her relationship with her child. In one of the findings that supports this statement, Psychogiou et al. (2016) underline that parents with high levels of self-compassion may be inclined to attribute the cause of their children's behaviour to external factors, be less critical of them and react in a less distressed manner when coping with their children's emotions. In addition, parental self-compassion has long been associated with children's introverting and extroverting problems. Findings considering that many characteristics of mothers affect the development of preschool period children's development can be diversified. For example, according to the study on 381 preschool aged children and their mothers conducted by Samangül (2023), there is a positive relationship between children's well-being and mothers' democratic attitudes and a negative relationship between their oppressive authoritarian attitudes. However, a negative relationship was observed between children's well-

being and mothers' emotion regulation difficulties. In a study conducted by Güler Kılıç and Çekiç (2022) on 250 children and their parents, a negative correlation was observed between mothers' child involvement and positive parenting behaviours; and a positive correlation was observed between poor parental monitoring, inconsistent discipline and punishment behaviour with beatings and children's behaviour problems. In a study conducted by Gürses, Aktan and Ülkümen (2024) on 659 mothers with 48-72 months-old children, it was determined that mothers' psychological resilience levels positively and significantly predict children's emotion regulation skills; mothers' supportive emotion socialization strategy levels positively and significantly predict children's emotion regulation skills; mothers' unsupportive emotion socialization strategy levels negatively and significantly predict children's emotion regulation skills.

In this study, a relationship and predictive effect was observed between self-judgement, isolation and over-identification levels of mothers and children's loneliness. Findings reveal that positive characteristics related to mothers' self-compassion reduce children's loneliness, and negative characteristics increase loneliness. Findings are in line with the literature. That is, various difficulties experienced during parenting can affect both the health of the parent, the quality of parenting, and the health and well-being of children (McCue Horwitz, 2007). Parents' compassion to themselves can affect their children's development directly as well as indirectly. In their study with 214 children and their mothers, Larrucea-Iruretagoyena, Orue and Calvete (2024) emphasize that the mother's self-compassion has a mediating effect between children's emotion regulation difficulties and parents' depression. Similarly, it has been stated that children's emotional regulation difficulties may increase the risk of depression symptoms in parents, but parental self-compassion may moderate this relationship. In the study conducted by Zhu et al. (2023) on 2282 preschool aged Chinese children and their mothers, it was observed that mothers' self-compassion had a mediating effect, along with emotional dysregulation, between the child's behavioural problems and the mothers' negative childhood experiences. At this point, it is stated that mothers' self-compassion and emotional regulation play a crucial role between the mother's negative childhood experiences and the child's behavioural problems. Self-compassion is an important psychological resource that can help parents feel less stress in their relationships with their children and cope better with negative emotions. Also, self-compassion can encourage more attentive and compassionate parenting; and this is associated with more positive parenting behaviours and better adjustment of the child at various levels (Moreira, 2023).

Conclusion

It is evident that the impact of mothers on the development of preschool period children is also revealed via the concept of self-compassion. Gouveia et al. (2016) state that self-compassion in parents is vital to protect and maintain the psychological health of the family, and that parents' compassion towards themselves can help them better cope with conditions that lead to stress and uncertainty, both individually and as a family. Previous studies on the subject (Fernandes, Canavarro and Moreira, 2021; Potharst, Zeegers and Bögels, 2021; Psychogiou et al., 2016) have underlined that mothers' self-compassion is related to parenting attitudes, children's attachment style, introvert and extrovert behaviour problems and children's general adjustment. At this point, it can be stated that the research findings are consistent with the literature.

Recommendations

Although the findings of the research show consistency with the self-compassion literature, it is possible to offer various suggestions in line with the limitations and findings. First of all, findings reveal that mothers' self-compassion is an important element in the emotional and social development of preschool period children towards loneliness. As a result of a literature review, no directly overlapping studies were found on the subject both in Türkiye and internationally, and therefore, many sample studies could not be included in the discussion section. For this reason, it can be stated that research on the effects of mothers' self-compassion on the development of preschool period children should be widespread. In addition, it can be asserted that it is important to plan experimental research and develop programs for mothers-fathers in future studies on the subject. When the literature is taken into consideration, it is evident that when parenting interventions include self-compassion, it increases parents' self-compassion and awareness, and reduces depression, anxiety and stress (Jefferson, Shires and McAloon, 2020). In addition, it is suggested that self-compassion may help parents develop more accepting and tolerant responses to their children's behaviours and negative emotions (Neff and Faso, 2015). Research findings proved that findings related to the Mindfulness sub-dimension of the Self-Compassion Scale are unreliable, thus, this sub-dimension was not included in the study. It is considered that enriching studies on the subject in terms of samples and variables may provide additional validity and reliability findings in the evaluations of the sub-dimensions and total score of the scale. Measurement tools for parents' self-compassion can be developed with a sample of Türkiye. Mothers were included in this research, and it can be stated that including fathers as well as mothers in similar studies can diversify the findings. It can be emphasized that longitudinal studies may be beneficial in revealing the long-term effects of parents' self-compassion on their children's

development. Increasing studies on loneliness of preschool children may support revealing detailed information about the emotional and social development of young children. In line with the study limitations, it can be stated that studies conducted in different provinces and with larger sample groups can diversify the findings. In line with the findings obtained from this research, it can be asserted that intervention studies that will support self-compassion of mothers are necessary. Support programs can be planned for mothers-to-be and mothers about the subject. Preschool teacher candidates can be informed about the subject. Therefore, they will be able to provide guidance to families about the individual characteristics of mothers that can have an impact on the professional life of their children.

Author (s) Contribution Rate

Hülya Gülay Ogelman: Article writing, data analysis (40%).

İlkay Gökteş: Research planning, data analysis, article writing (40%).

Döne Kahveci: Data collection, data entry, article writing (20%).

Ethical Approval (only for necessary papers)

All data collection and storage procedures were approved by the Board of Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (decision numbered 2023-67, date 24.02.2023)

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