

## Attachment Styles of Preschool Children to Their Parents: Attachment Styles of Married and Single Mothers to Their Own Parents

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between the attachment styles of 3- to 6-year-old children to their married or single mothers and the attachment styles of these children's mothers to their own parents. The study was conducted through a relational screening model, which is a quantitative research method. The population of the study consisted of a total of 80 children all attending public kindergartens in Ankara and their mothers, 40 of whom were married and 40 of whom were single. The data were analyzed through descriptive, correlative, and comparative tests conducted via SPSS. According to the results of the study, 48% of the children of married mothers had a secure attachment style and 52% of them had an insecure attachment style, while 70% of the children of single mothers had a secure attachment style and 30% of them had an insecure attachment style. There was a significant correlation between the marital status of the mother and the attachment styles of the children. A moderately significant negative relationship was found between the secure attachment of married mothers and their own mother's care/control. On the other hand, a moderately significant positive relationship was found between the secure attachment of single mothers and their own mother's care/control.

**Keywords:** Attachment, Single parent, Parental attachment, Secure attachment, Insecure attachment

### Introduction

Attachment is an emotional bond that develops between the child and the caregiver, usually the mother, during the child's first years of life. This bond is important for the child to develop a basic sense of trust and plays a major role in social emotional development (Bowlby, 1988). According to attachment theory, the quality of the emotional bond between the child and the caregiver in the child's first years of life has a lifelong effect on the child's mental, emotional, and behavioral development

(Bowlby, 1982; Main, 1995). Parents play an important role in the healthy emotional development of children, especially in the early years of their development (Cooke et al., 2019; Şahin, 2010; Thompson, 2006; Trawick Smith, 2014). Children internalize experiences of interaction and communication with their parents. This internalization forms the foundations of both their personality and emotional development. Therefore, the quality of the relationship between children and parents has an especially great impact on children's healthy emotional development in their early years (Bowlby, 1969; Kandır & Alpan, 2008; Tezel-Şahin & Cevher, 2007; Yağmurlu & Kodalak, 2010).

Children who receive sufficient attention and love from their mothers (caregivers) and whose needs are met in the early years of life develop a sense of security and become firmly attached to their mothers (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). It has been reported that children who feel valued and loved by their mothers are happier, more competent, and more self-confident individuals who can communicate more positively with their environment (Denham, 1994; Kandır & Alpan, 2008; Main, 1995; Meadows, 2010; Williams & Fromberg, 1992). These children, who have positive feelings about themselves and their environment, gain the necessary self-confidence, while also maintaining their own psychological health (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Sümer & Şendağ, 2009; Thompson, 1999). The warm, loving, and trustful bond that children establish with their mothers has positive mental and emotional effects on them (Bowlby, 1982; Şahin, 2010; Yavuzer, 1992). Children who do not receive attention and love from their mothers (caregivers) and whose needs are not met in a timely manner in the early years of their life feel worthless and experience trust problems (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 2012). These children experience problems such as low self-esteem, difficulty establishing social relationships, inability to concentrate, emotional distance, and problems in understanding others (Cori, 2019; Collins & Read, 1990; Solmuş, 2010; Trawick-Smith, 2013). The quality of attachment that forms between the child and the mother in the early years of life affects the child's entire future life and serves as a model for the relationships that the child will establish in adulthood (Bowlby, 2012; Waters & Beauchain, 2003). According to attachment theorists, a person's childhood attachment style is similar to their adulthood attachment style and is transferred across generations (Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby, 1973; Benoit & Parker, 1994; Cozolino, 2014; Lieberman, 1979; Main, 1995; Ruppert, 2011). Bowlby (1973) argues that parents transmit the style of early life attachment they formed with their own parents to their children. There are various discussions in the literature on how maternal attachment styles are transmitted across generations. Many attachment researchers state that there is similarity between the attachment styles of mothers and those of their children (Cozolino, 2014; Ruppert, 2011). In their meta-analysis examining the intergenerational transmission of attachment, Van Ijzendoorn (1995) found that 75% of parents transmit their attachment styles to their children. In studies conducted in Türkiye, İlaslan (2009) and Yıldız (2016) found a relationship between the attachment styles of mothers and those of their children, while Uluç (2005), Güner (2011), Görgü (2015), and Algan and Şendil (2013) found no relationship between the attachment styles of mothers and those of their children. Ainsworth (1989) highlighted that an individual should have a secure

attachment style in order to be a good parent or spouse. Prior studies in the literature suggest that parents with secure attachment styles exhibit warmer, more intimate, and more positive behaviors towards their children (Ahmadova & Yavuz, 2019; Bolattekin, 2014; Cowan, Cowan & Pearson, 1992; Soysal, 1999, Orhan, 2010; Zeanah et al., 1993). This suggests that the quality of a mother's relationship with her child is directly related to the said mother's attachment with her own mother.

A child's most basic need for healthy development is a happy, peaceful, and secure family environment (Bowlby, 1988). A disturbed family environment and constant conflicts between parents affect children's emotions deeply. These conflicts between parents lead to family breakdown or divorce (Öngider, 2013). Divorces have a negative impact on children as well as parents. Children may have problems in adapting to their new life and their sense of trust towards their parents may be damaged due to divorces (Yörükoğlu, 2007). Children affected by divorce may think that they are not loved by their parents and start to lose their self-confidence (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Cüceloğlu, 1998; Gander & Gandiner, 2015; Türkaslan, 2007). Especially divorces that occur in the early years (0-3 years) of a child's development when attachments form and the separation of the child from the attachment figure (mostly the mother) prevent the establishment of a secure attachment between the parent and the child. This compulsory separation in the early years of a child's development makes it harder for the child to develop a secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969). Prior studies have shown that children whose parents are divorced have less secure attachments and develop more insecure attachments compared to children whose parents are not divorced (Nair & Murray, 2005; Sardoğan et al., 2007). The quality of attachment that develops in the early years of a child's development affects the child's future personality, mental health, and all of their relations with their social circles (Bowlby, 1969). The findings of prior studies that suggest attachment develops in the early years of development, is transmitted from generation to generation, and has effects throughout life highlight the importance of studies on this subject. Attachment theorists argue that a person's childhood attachment styles persist to adulthood unless there is a significant change in the child's family structure due to divorce, death, etc. (Bowlby, 2012). Divorce is a difficult and stressful process for both parents and children. Divorce deeply affects children emotionally and undermines their sense of trust towards their parents. According to Bowlby, a child's attachment quality plays an important role in whether the child can cope with the stress experienced after divorce or not (Bowlby, 1969). Therefore, the attachment style (secure or insecure) formed in early childhood plays a role in the child's ability to cope with the problems that occur after divorce (Bowlby, 1969). There are various studies in the literature on the attachment styles of children with divorced parents (Canatan, 2018; Cebeci, 2009; Gloger-Tippelt & Köniğ, 2007; Kotan, 2016; Monin & Feeney, 2008; Öztürk, 2019; Ünlü, 2015; Yıldız, 2016). However, most of these studies include older children, adolescents, and adults. Examination of the literature also reveals studies showing that the intergenerational transmission of attachment and a mother's attachment style with her own mother being secure or insecure affect the mother's attachment with her child (Brook et al., 2012; Crandel, Fitzgerald & Whipple, 1997; Gloger-Tippelt et al., 2002; Fonagy, Steele & Steele, 1991; Kahya, 2021; Obegi,

Shaver & Morison, 2004). In Türkiye, there have been many studies examining the relationship between the attachment styles of preschool children and variables such as their social skills (Öztürk, 2019; Ozana, Güven et al., 2015; Seven, 2006), emotional regulation skills (Şahin, 2015; Tulpar, 2019), self-perception (Geniş & Kahraman, 2017), behavioral problems (Yiğit, 2015), and anxiety (Cebeci, 2009). However, studies examining the relationship between the attachment styles of preschool children with either married or single parents and the attachment styles of their mothers are limited in number. It is thought that the present study will spearhead further studies on the subject. The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between the attachment styles of 3- to 6-year-old children to their married or single mothers and the attachment styles of these children's mothers to their own parents.

## Method

A relational screening model, a quantitative research method, was used to investigate the relationship between the attachment styles of 3- to 6-year-old children to their married or single mothers and the attachment styles of these children's mothers to their own parents. The relational screening model is used to measure the level of relationships between two or more variables and the causes and the results of these relationships through correlation coefficients (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Karasar, 2000).

## Participants

The sample of the study consisted of a total of 80 children all attending public kindergartens in Ankara in the 2018-2019 academic year, and their mothers, 40 of whom were married and 40 of whom were single. Twenty-five female and 15 male children whose mothers were single and 16 female and 24 male children whose mothers were married were included in the study. Thirty-three of the children were 3-4 years old and 47 of them were 5-6 years old. Of the children who participated in the study, 38 were cared for by their mothers, 26 by their maternal grandmothers, and 16 by their paternal grandmothers, sitters, etc. Participants were selected using criterion sampling, which is a purposeful sampling method. This method is used to select certain participants, events, or situations in accordance with some predetermined criteria. These criteria can be determined by the researcher or can be taken from other sources (Creswell & Clark, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The inclusion criteria for the current study were as follows:

1. Voluntary participation,
2. Children must be between the ages of 3 and 6 years,
3. Children must be attending kindergarten,
4. The parents may be separated or together,
5. Children whose parents are divorced must live with their mother, and
6. Both the child and the mother must participate in the research.

## Data Collection Tools

*Demographic Information Form:* The demographic information form consists of questions aimed at acquiring data such as the age and gender of the child, who took care of the child for the first two years, the age and marital status of the mother, the duration of her marriage, and time elapsed since her divorce.

*Doll Family Story Completion Test-TR (DFSCT-TR):* This instrument was developed by Granot and Mayseless (2001) based on Cassidy's (1988) "Doll Family" test to assess preschool children's secure environment scenarios. This instrument is used to determine the attachment styles of children based on story completion developed by Bretherton, Ridgeway, and Cassidy (1990). In his study in Türkiye, Uluç (2005) adapted the scale into Turkish and used it to assess the attachment styles of preschool children. The DFSCT, which is used to determine children's attachment styles, consists of five unfinished stories. The test is administered by asking the child to complete the unfinished stories told by the researcher. The instrument includes a practice story for the child to get used to the test and to prevent variation in the process. The practice story is not used for assessment. The contents of the five stories told are aimed at identifying the attachment style of the child. The story themes represent different attachment scenarios: (1) the child accidentally spills juice at the dinner table; (2) the child falls from a rock in the park and gets injured; (3) the child gets scared in their room while getting ready to sleep; (4) the parents leave home for a few days for a trip and the child stays with their grandmother; (5) the parents return from the trip. While completing the stories, the children are asked to act out the stories by playing with the dolls given to them in areas created with toys that are compatible with the themes of the stories. Four measures are used to evaluate the stories: (1) the explicit expression of emotions, (2) the quality of the parent-child relationship, (3) the positive resolution of the conflict in the story, and (4) the child's completion of the story being consistent with the theme of the story. Each story completion is scored using a 5-point Likert-type scale to determine the child's attachment level. The maximum score for each story is five and the minimum score is one. The maximum score for all stories is 25 and the minimum score for all stories is five. Children who complete three or more stories with statements related to insecure attachment are categorized as having insecure attachments, while those who complete three or more stories with statements related to secure attachment are categorized as having secure attachments (Uluç, 2005).

*Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ):* This questionnaire, developed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), was adapted into Turkish by Sümer and Güngör (1999). It consists of 30 items and the items are scored using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=not at all like me; 7=very much like me). It is aimed at adults and has 4 subdimensions, namely secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment. Reliability coefficients between the subdimensions ranged between .41 and .71, and the internal consistency coefficients (alpha) of the subdimensions ranged between .27 and .61. In the present study, the RSQ was used to determine the attachment styles of the participating children's mothers. However, despite the low internal consistencies, it has been determined that the sub-scales of the Relationship Scales



Questionnaire (RSQ) have an acceptable level of test-retest reliability (intra-class correlation coefficients of .53 for females and .49 for males) (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). In addition, Sümer and Güngör (1999) found reliability coefficients ranging from .54 to .78 for all dimensions of the RSQ using the test-retest method. Griffin and Bartholomew argued that the low internal consistency coefficients of the RSQ sub-scales are not due to the scales consisting of a small number of items or the inadequate psychometric quality of the scales, but rather due to the inclusion of both self and other models of attachment within the sub-scales (Sümer & Güngör, 1999). In this study, the RSQ was utilized to determine maternal attachment styles.

*Parental Bonding Instrument:* The Parental Bonding Instrument was developed by Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979). It is based on Bowlby's attachment theory and retrospectively evaluates the way individuals perceive their relationship with their parents. It is a 4-point Likert-type scale. During administration of the scale, the participant is asked to evaluate each question separately in relation to their mother and father by reflecting back on the first 16 years of the participant's life. It consists of 25 items in total and has two subdimensions: care and control/overprotection. The scale is scored separately in relation to the participant's mother and father. Each item is scored from 3 to 0, with choices varying from "very like" to "very unlike". Items 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, and 24 are reverse scored. The mother and father forms of the scale are evaluated separately in terms of the total score obtained from each form. A higher score indicates positive attachment and a lower score indicates negative attachment. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Kapçı and Küçüker (2006). In the validity study conducted for the Turkish adaptation of the scale, some changes were made to the original form of the scale; the items related to control, which were originally included in the control/overprotection dimension, were included in the care dimension. With this change, the subdimensions of the scale became "overprotection" and "care/control". As a result of Cronbach's alpha internal consistency analysis, the reliability coefficient of the mother form was calculated as 0.87 and the reliability coefficient of the father form as 0.89. In the present study, this scale was used to determine the attachment styles of the participating children's mothers to their own parents.

## Data Collection

The necessary permissions were obtained from Ethics Commission and Ministry of National Education. Kindergarten administrators, teachers, and participating mothers were informed about the study and related processes. Teachers working in kindergartens who wanted to participate were given the aforementioned measurement tools to share with the mothers of the participating children. The mothers filled out the measurement tools and submitted them to the kindergarten teachers within two days. The researcher organized the environments (classroom, hall, etc.) used for collecting data from the children appropriately. The researcher administered the DFSCCT to the children in this environment to collect data. On average, it took the children 15-20 minutes to complete the test. The data collection process conducted with the children was recorded on video.

## Statistical Analysis

The video recordings were transcribed verbatim onto a computer. The children's responses to the DFSCT were coded as secure and insecure. If the child's responses to three or more of the five stories were coded as insecure, their attachment style was considered to be insecure, while if the child's responses to three or more of the five stories were coded as secure, their attachment style was considered to be secure (Uluç & Öktem, 2009). Twenty percent of the data of the 80 children were coded independently by the two researchers. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula [ $\text{Reliability} = [\text{Agreement} / (\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement})] \times 100$ ], which yielded a reliability level of 0.85. This result is considered as sufficiently reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The data obtained from the Parental Bonding Instrument and RSQ were analyzed using SPSS 23.0. The participants' RSQ and Parental Bonding Instrument scores, which were used to determine the attachment styles of the mothers, were analyzed descriptively. Descriptive analyses, graphical methods, and the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is used for hypothesis testing, were used to determine whether the data were normally distributed. The descriptive analyses were evaluated for data distribution using criteria such as the closeness of the arithmetic mean, mode, and median; the skewness and kurtosis coefficients being within the limits of  $\pm 1$  and close to zero; and the relative coefficient of variation, which is the percentage of the standard deviation to the arithmetic mean, being in the range of 20 to 25, which shows normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2015). Accordingly, the relationships between normally distributed data were analyzed using Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient and the relationships between nonnormally distributed data were analyzed using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient. Since the hypothesis test results were not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ) for this data pair, suggesting that the data were normally distributed, the relationship between the attachment styles of the children and time elapsed since the divorce of the mother were analyzed using the t test. However, the hypothesis test results were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the data pair of attachment styles of the children and the duration of the marriage of the mothers and so the Mann–Whitney U test was used to analyze the relationship between these factors.

## Results

The findings obtained from the DFSCT applied to determine children's attachment styles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Children's Attachment Styles According to Doll Family Story Completion Test Results

	Attachment Styles	f	%
Children Whose Parents Were Married	Secure Attachment	19	48
	Insecure Attachment	21	52
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>
Children Whose Parents Were Single	Secure Attachment	28	70
	Insecure Attachment	12	30

Total	40	100
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As seen in Table 1, 19 (48%) of the 40 children whose parents were married had a secure attachment style and 21 (53%) of them had an insecure attachment style. Of the 40 children with single parents, 28 (70%) had a secure attachment style and 12 (30%) had an insecure attachment style. Among the children whose parents were married, the number of children with secure attachment styles (n=19) was lower than the number of those with insecure attachment styles (n=21). In addition, among the children whose parents were single, the number of children with secure attachment styles (n=28) was higher than the number of those with insecure attachment styles (n=12). Moreover, of the 80 children who participated in the study, 47 (59%) had secure attachment styles, while 33 (41%) had insecure attachment styles.

A chi-squared test was conducted to determine whether the attachment styles of the children with married and single parents differed according to gender, age, and caregiver (Table 2).

Table 2. Chi-Squared Test Results Regarding the Attachment Styles of Children with Married and Single Parents According to the Variables of Gender, Age, and Caregiver

			The Attachment Style of the Child					
			Secure		Insecure			
Children Whose Parents Were Married			N	%	N	%	$\chi^2$	p
	Gender	Female	8	42.1	8	38.1	0.067	0.796
		Male	11	57.9	13	61.9		
	Age	3-4	5	26.3	15	71.4	8.12	0.004*
		5-6	14	73.7	6	28.6		
	Caregiver	Mother	10	52.6	10	47.6	0.100	0.752
Other		9	47.4	11	52.4			
			The Attachment Style of the Child					
			Secure		Secure			
Children Whose Parents Were Single			N	%	N	%	$\chi^2$	p
	Gender	Female	18	64.3	7	58.3	0.127	0.736
		Male	10	35.7	5	41.7		
	Age	3-4	9	32.1	4	33.3	0.005	1.00
		5-6	19	67.9	8	66.7		
	Caregiver	Mother	13	46.4	3	25.00	1.607	0.297
Other		15	53.6	9	75.00			

\* $p < 0.05$

As Table 2 shows, there was no significant difference between the attachment styles of the children whose parents were married according to their gender ( $\chi^2$  (sd=1, n=40) = 0.067,  $p > 0.05$ ). There was also no significant difference between the attachment styles of the children whose parents were single according to their gender ( $\chi^2$  (sd=1, n=40) = 0.127,  $p > 0.05$ ). While there was a significant difference between the attachment styles of the children whose parents were married according to their ages ( $\chi^2$  (sd=1, n=40) = 8.12,  $p < 0.05$ ), there was no significant difference between the attachment styles of children whose parents were single according to this factor ( $\chi^2$  (sd=1, n=40) = 0.005,  $p > 0.05$ ). This finding varied



according to the relationship between the ages and attachment styles of the children whose parents were married. However, the attachment styles of children with married and single parents did not show a significant difference according to their caregiver (mother, maternal grandmother/paternal grandmother, maternal aunt/paternal aunt, or sitter) ( $p>0.05$ ).

Spearman's rho correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between the attachment styles of the children with married and single mothers and the attachment styles of these mothers to their own parents (Table 3).

Table 3. Spearman's Rho Correlation Results Regarding the Relationship between the Attachment Styles of Children with Married and Single Mothers and the Attachment Styles of the Mothers to Their Own Parents

				Parental Attachment Style			
				Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Married Mothers	Attachment with the Mother	Mother's	r	-0.470*	0.200	-0.103	-0.019
		Care/Control	p	0.002	0.527	0.908	0.215
		Mother's	r	-0.233	0.176	-0.220	0.076
		Overprotection	p	0.148	0.276	0.173	0.643
	Attachment with the Father	Father's	r	-0.220	-0.115	0.329*	0.395*
		Care/Control	p	0.173	0.479	0.038	0.012
		Father's	r	-0.268	0.239	-0.138	0.088
		Overprotection	p	0.094	0.137	0.396	0.589
				Parental Attachment Style			
				Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Single Mothers	Attachment with the Mother	Mother's	r	0.493*	-0.257	-0.204	-0.038
		Care/Control	p	0.001	0.110	0.207	0.817
		Mother's	r	0.394*	-0.324*	-0.085	0.106
		Overprotection	p	0.012	0.042	0.603	0.515
	Attachment with the Father	Father's	r	0.250	0.082	0.126	0.168
		Care/Control	p	0.120	0.615	0.440	0.299
		Father's	r	0.401*	-0.383*	-0.042	0.261
		Overprotection	p	0.010	0.015	0.796	0.104

\* $p<0.05$

In Table 3, a moderately significant negative relationship ( $rrho=-0.470$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) is seen between the secure attachment of married mothers and their perceptions of their mother's care/control. This suggests that as the care/control of a married mother's mother increases, the attachment of the married mother becomes less secure. There was also a moderately significant positive relationship ( $rrho= 0.493$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) between the secure attachment of married mothers and their perceptions of their mother's care/control, and a slightly significant positive relationship ( $rrho= 0.394$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) between the secure attachment of married mothers and their perceptions of their mother's overprotection. This suggests that as the care/control and overprotection of a single mother's mother increases, the attachment of the single mother becomes more secure. There was a slightly significant negative relationship ( $rrho=-0.324$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) between the fearful attachment of single mothers and their perceptions of their mother's overprotection. Accordingly, as the

overprotection of a single mother's mother increases, the attachment of the single mother becomes less fearful.

There was a slightly significant positive relationship ( $rrho = 0.329$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the preoccupied attachment of married mothers and their perceptions of their father's care/control. There was also a slightly significant positive relationship ( $rrho = 0.395$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the dismissing attachment of married mothers and their perceptions of their father's care/control. Accordingly, as the care/control of a single mother's father increases, the attachment of the single mother becomes more preoccupied and dismissing. There was a slightly significant positive relationship ( $rrho = 0.401$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the secure attachment of single mothers and their perceptions of their father's overprotection. Accordingly, as the overprotection of a single mother's father increases, the attachment of the single mother becomes more secure. It was also observed that there was a moderately significant negative relationship ( $rrho = -0.383$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the fearful attachment of single mothers and their perceptions of their father's overprotection. In other words, as the overprotection of a single mother's father increases, the attachment of the single mother becomes less fearful.

This shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between the secure ( $rrho = -0.233$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), fearful ( $rrho = 0.176$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), preoccupied ( $rrho = -0.220$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and dismissing ( $rrho = 0.076$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) attachment of married mothers and their mother's overprotection. Furthermore, there was no statistically significant relationship between the secure ( $rrho = -0.268$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), fearful ( $rrho = 0.239$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), preoccupied ( $rrho = -0.138$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and dismissing ( $rrho = 0.088$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) attachment of married mothers and their father's overprotection. There was also no statistically significant relationship between the secure ( $rrho = 0.250$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), fearful ( $rrho = 0.082$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), preoccupied ( $rrho = 0.126$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and dismissing ( $rrho = 0.168$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) attachment of single mothers and their father's care/control.

The results of the chi-squared test conducted to determine whether children's attachment styles differed according to the marital status of their mothers are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Chi-Squared Test Results Regarding the Relationship between Mothers' Marital Status and the Attachment Styles of Children

	Secure	Insecure		
Mother's Marital Status	f	f	$\chi^2$	p
Married	19	21	4.178*	0.041
Single	28	12		

\* $p < 0.05$

According to Table 4, there was a statistically significant difference between the attachment styles of children according to the marital status of their mothers ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that whether the mother of a child is married or single affects the child's attachment style.

The results of Spearman's rho correlation test conducted to analyze the relationship between the attachment styles of married and single mothers and the attachment styles of their children are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Spearman's Rho Correlation Test Results Regarding the Relationship between the Attachment Styles of Married and Single Mothers and the Attachment Styles of their Children

		The Attachment Style of Married Mother			
The Attachment Style of the Child	r	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
	p	-0.024	0.210	-0.178	0.191
		The Attachment Style of Single Mother			
	r	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
	p	0.137	0.082	0.159	0.083
		0.398	0.615	0.328	0.612

\* $p < 0.05$

In Table 5, it is seen that there was no statistically significant relationship between whether the married and single mothers had secure, fearful, preoccupied, or dismissing attachment styles and their children's attachment styles ( $p > 0.05$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, the relationship between the attachment styles of 3- to 6-year-old children to their married or single mothers and the attachment styles of these children's mothers to their own parents was examined. The results of the study showed that 48% of the children whose parents were married had secure attachment styles and 53% of them had insecure attachment styles, while 70% of the children whose parents were single had secure attachment styles and 30% of them had insecure attachment styles. Accordingly, it can be argued that children with single parents develop more secure attachments than children with married parents. Emery (2013) reported that whether children have secure or insecure attachments is determined in the early years of life and that children's style of attachment will not be affected by divorce if the children are not separated from the attachment figure during these early years. The results of the present study support the fact that attachment develops mainly between ages of 0 and 3 years and that children's attachment style is not affected by divorce if they are not separated from the attachment figure (mainly the mother). The persistence of the traditional extended family structure in Türkiye and the fact that the attention, love, and care needs of children are met by other members of the family when the parents are not present (Cebeci, 2009) may be the reason why the marital status of the parents does not have an effect on children's attachment styles. It is also thought that the sincere, supportive, and sensitive relationships that parents establish with their children after divorce play a critical role in attachment. It can also be argued that the quality of parent-child relationships is an important factor in children's emotional adjustment

and the security of their attachments after divorce. In addition, the child's access to the separated parent (mainly the father) and spending quality time with them after divorce may affect the security of the attachment between the parent and the child. Children who do not have access to the separated parent after divorce, usually the father, experience insecurity, loss of self-esteem, and feelings of abandonment more intensely (Öngider, 2013; Kuyucu, 2007; Yörükoğlu, 2000). Positive or negative relationships that children establish with their fathers after divorce are also a factor affecting the security of their attachments (Yıldız, 2016). Solomon et al. (1999) found that children who were securely attached to their mothers after divorce also had more secure attachments to their fathers when they temporarily stayed with their fathers. Lowenstein (2010) reported that parents' making positive statements about the separated parent (usually the father) after divorce had an effect on the ability of the child to establish a secure attachment with the separated parent (usually the father). In contrast, some studies in the literature showed that rates of secure attachment in children with single parents are lower than those of children with married parents (Heine & Düsselndorf, 2007; Nair & Murray, 2005; Solomon & George, 1999). Similarly, some studies conducted in Türkiye also reported that children whose parents were separated had less secure attachments and developed more insecure attachments compared to children whose parents were together (Hortaçsu, Cesur & Oral, 1993; Sardoğan et al., 2007). It is thought that the variance in the results in the literature may be related to the age of the children at the time of divorce and the quality of their relationships with the separated parent. It can be argued that whether children have secure or insecure attachments mainly being determined during infancy (0-3 years) and that children's style of attachment not being affected by divorce if children are not separated from the attachment figure during these early years (Emery, 2012) are the most important factors affecting this result.

In the present study, the attachment styles of both preschool children with single parents and preschool children with married parents did not differ according to gender. In line with the findings of the current study, Ainsworth (1989) and Nair and Murray (2005) also found that there was no significant difference between children's attachment styles according to their gender. Studies in the literature examining the relationship between gender and attachment styles in preschool children with single or married parents are limited in number. Some similar studies conducted with preschool children aged 4-6 years in Türkiye also found no significant difference between the children's attachment styles and their gender (Kaymak, 2015; Kurtuluş-Yıldırım, 2016; Seven, 2006; Türköz, 2007; Tulpar, 2019). Cebeci (2009), Kotan (2016), and Canatan (2018) obtained similar results in their studies conducted with different age groups. According to attachment theory, the most fundamental facet of secure attachment between a mother and her child is the mother's interest, love, and sensitivity towards her child (Bowlby, 2012). In addition, it can be suggested that mothers being accessible to their children and caring and fulfilling all needs of their children regardless of their gender shows that attachment styles do not differ according to gender.

In the present study it was also examined whether the attachment styles of preschool children with married or single parents differed according to age. As a result, it was observed that there was a significant difference between the attachment styles of children with married parents according to age. However, there was no significant difference between the attachment styles of children with single parents according to age. The secure attachment rates of the children in the age group of 5-6 years whose parents were married were higher and their insecure attachment rates were lower than those of the children in the age group of 3-4 years. It is thought that this result may have been due to the nature of the DFSCCT administered to determine children's attachment styles. This test relies on children's social, emotional, and language skills. Whether the children were emotionally ready to complete the unfinished stories included in the test and whether they had sufficient language development to express themselves at an adequate level to answer questions related to the stories are considered important factors that affected this result. Various other studies in the literature that included children of different age groups with single and married parents reported that children's attachment styles did not show a significant difference according to their age (Cebeci, 2009; Canatan, 2018). Children's development varies from society to society and from culture to culture, as well as among the families that constitute a society (Kulaksızoğlu, 2001). Hence, different demographic characteristics of children, such as social, cultural, and economic status, are thought to affect this result.

In the current study, there was no significant difference between the attachment styles of the children according to the person who took care of them (mother, maternal grandmother/paternal grandmother, maternal aunt/paternal aunt, or sitter). Cebeci (2009), İlaslan (2009), Görgü (2015), Geçin (2015), Kaymak (2015), Şahin (2019), and Tulpar (2019) reported similar results. According to attachment theory, the main factor in secure attachment is the intimacy, continuity, and satisfaction of the care rather than the person giving the care (Bowlby, 2012). In addition, it is thought that the attitudes and behaviors of the caregivers may also have affected the attachment styles of the children and led to this result. Further, the fact that the traditional extended family structure persists in Türkiye and that other family members have a say over the child and take responsibility for the child's care and needs (Cebeci, 2009) may also have an effect on children's attachment with family members other than the mother. In contrast to the results of the current study, Türköz (2007) and Seven (2006) found that rates of secure attachment in children who were cared for by sitters for the first year of their lives were lower than those of children whose were cared for by their own mothers. Attachment theory suggests that the security of children's attachment is directly related to the accessibility, consistency, and positive behavior of the caregiver (mother, grandmother, sitter, etc.).

In the current study, there was a significant negative relationship between the attachment styles of the married mothers and their mothers' attention/control, and a significant positive relationship between the attachment styles of the single mothers and their mothers' attention/control. Therefore, an unexpectedly negative result was obtained regarding married mothers, while a result consistent with attachment

theory was obtained regarding single mothers. In the literature, a significant positive relationship has been reported between secure attachment styles and perceived maternal care/control (Çamurlu- Keser, 2006; Görgü, 2015; Taşkıran-Tepe, 2018). Güngör (2000) found that mothers with secure attachment practiced acceptance/care to a high degree and strict supervision/control to a low degree. In other words, mothers who adopt acceptance/care behaviors do not attempt to excessively control the behavior of their children by restricting their freedom and autonomy. Children who grow up in this environment develop self-confidence and are more trustful towards those around them. These findings suggest that a mother's secure attachment may be related to receiving high attention and affection from her own mother. Similarly, Ainsworth (1963) argued that mothers can ensure their children's secure attachment by practicing high acceptance/care and low strict supervision/control. In addition to the mother's interest and love, her attitude towards the child is also thought to be correlated with attachment. There are various studies showing that attachment, which begins to develop in the early years of a child's life and continues to have an impact in the child's future life, and parental attitudes are affected by each other (Peris & Anderson, 2000; Neal & Horbury, 2001; Karavasilis, Doyle & Markiewicz, 2003; Caldera & Hart, 2004). Kochanska et al. (2004) suggested that mothers who adopt a parenting style with high acceptance/care provide their children with the attention, love, and compassion they need, enabling them to trust both themselves and those around them.

In the current study, there was no significant relationship between the secure attachment of married mothers and parental overprotection, whereas there was a slightly significant positive relationship between the secure attachment of single mothers and parental overprotection. Similarly, single and securely attached mothers perceived their parents' overprotection as secure. This is thought to be due to the positive perception of the overprotective attitude of the parent by the child. Especially in traditional societies like Türkiye, acceptance/care and strict supervision/control may be perceived and interpreted differently. In her study that included Turkish and American adolescents, Kağıtçıbaşı (1970) found that Turkish adolescents perceived strict family supervision more than American young people did, but did not interpret this behavior as a lack of affection. This result shows that parenting styles are influenced by the cultural norms, values, and customs of the society and are interpreted differently. In Turkish culture, parental overprotection and control of the child's freedom is synonymous with parental affection and care (Güngör & Bornstein, 2010; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010). Contrary to the findings of the present study, some studies in the literature found that there was a significant negative relationship between the secure attachment of parents and the overprotective attitude they perceived from their own parents (Bolattekin, 2014; Çeçeli, 2018). Sümer and Güngör (1999) found that there was no significant relationship between the father's strict supervision and control and the child's secure attachment, while there was a significant negative relationship between the mother's strict supervision and control and the child's secure attachment. It is thought that differences in domestic and societal structure may cause individuals to perceive and interpret parental acceptance/care and strict supervision/control differently.



In the present study, the children's attachment styles differed significantly according to the marital status of their parents. In other words, whether the parents are married or single has an effect on children's attachment styles. Similarly, Sardoğan et al. (2007) concluded that there was a significant difference between children's attachment styles according to the marital status of their parents. Contrary to the results of the current study, some studies in the literature indicate that the marital status of the parents does not significantly affect whether children have secure or insecure attachment styles (Canatan, 2018; Cebeci, 2009; Kaymak, 2015). In a study that included university students whose parents were divorced or together, Kotan (2016) found that the marital status of the parents did not cause a significant difference in the attachment styles of the students. It is thought that the contradiction between these results may have been due to the age difference of the participants. Thus, it appears that the marital status of the parents does not affect the attachment of older individuals, while it does affect the attachment of younger children.

In the present study, no significant relationship was found between the attachment styles (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful) of married and single mothers and the attachment styles of their children. In other words, there was no relationship between the mother's own attachment and her child's attachment. In the literature, various other researchers (Roelofs, Meesters & Muris 2008; Volling, Notaro & Larsen 2009; Güner, 2011; Görgü, 2015) found similar results. Eiden (1992) also found that mothers' attachment styles were not correlated with their children's attachment styles. This result of the current study is not consistent with attachment theory. Moreover, various studies in the literature on this issue have found that there is indeed a relationship between mothers' attachment styles and their children's attachment styles, and that attachment styles are transmitted between generations. In their study intergenerationally examining the relationship between the attachment styles of three generations (children and their mothers and grandmothers), Benoit & Parker (1994) found that the mothers' attachment styles considerably influenced the formation of their children's attachment styles, while the grandmothers' attachment styles also affected the mothers' attachment styles. Similarly, Milkulincer & Florian (1999), who conducted their study with university students and their parents, and İlaslan (2009), who conducted their study with children between the ages of 2 and 5 and their mothers, both found that the attachment styles of the two generations were correlated. These studies show that mothers' sensitivity to their children has an effect on their children's secure attachment, and that this sensitivity exhibited by mothers stems from their own parental attachment style. In their study that included mothers and their infants, Fonagay, Steele & Steele (1991) found that 75% of the children who had mothers with secure attachment styles also had a secure attachment style, while 73% of the children who had mothers with insecure attachment styles also had an insecure attachment style. In contrast to these studies, the results of the present study suggest that there is no significant relationship between mothers' attachment styles and their children's attachment styles. It is thought that this result may have been due to the different demographic characteristics of the participants and the characteristics of

the scale used in our study. The insufficient number of insecurely attached children included in the study may have been another factor that led to this result.

The study group of our research was limited to children between the ages of 3 and 6 attending public kindergartens in Ankara and their married and single mothers. Further research is required to compare the findings of the present study with data obtained from larger samples of children of different age groups using different scales in order to overcome the limitations we encountered. It is recommended that the attachment of children to their fathers (married and single), who have as much influence on children's attachment style as mothers, should be explored. Since the studies in the literature examining the attachment styles of adults with their own parents are limited in number, it is also recommended that studies on the attachment of parents with their own parents as well as their attachment with their children be conducted. Further studies examining the relationship between the attachment of young children and the *marital status of parents* should be performed. It is further recommended that comparative studies on the intercultural relationship of attachment be conducted in different cultures.

Since parent-child attachments form in the early years of life and the quality of the newly forming attachment affects the child's future personality and psycho-emotional development, it is recommended to raise awareness among parents about parent-child attachment and to provide training and courses on this subject. Moreover, this training can be provided to prospective parents by health and family counseling centers before they have children. It is of great importance for parents to manage the divorce process appropriately in order for children to adapt and to minimize the emotional problems that may occur after divorce. Thus, it is recommended that parents prepare their children for the process of divorce and get professional support to manage this process.

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