

## GENERATIONAL CONTINUITY: A STUDY ON EARLY MALADAPTIVE SCHEMAS PASSED FROM MOTHERS TO ADULT CHILDREN

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the potential similarity between the early maladaptive schemas of mothers and their adult children and explore whether such similarity varies based on defense mechanisms and personality traits. To achieve these objectives, defense mechanisms (Mature Defense, Neurotic Defense, Immature Defense) and personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability or neuroticism, and openness to experience) were examined, with each sub-dimension categorized into three levels: low, moderate, and high. A total of 318 participants, comprising 159 mothers ( $M = 48,58$ ,  $SD = 5,74$ ) and 159 children ( $M = 22,67$ ,  $SD = 3,92$ ) voluntarily participated in the study. Participants completed the Young Schema Questionnaire, Short Form 3 (YSQ-SF3), The Big Five-50 Personality Questionnaire (B5KT-50-Tr), Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40), and a Demographic Data Form. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 26. The Dependent Sample t-Test, considering the normal distribution of the difference series, was employed to assess the similarity between the schema scores of mothers and adult children. The results reveal a significant similarity in the domains of early maladaptive schemas between mothers and adult children ( $p < 0.05$ ). Additionally, certain schema domains showed differences in response to adult children's low level mature defense, moderate-level mature defense, moderate-level neurotic defense, high-level neurotic defense, moderate-level immature defense, high-level immature defense ( $p < .05$ ). Regarding personality traits, statistical differences were identified in various schema domains for extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experience at each level. Notably, moderate agreeableness trait was associated with impaired boundaries and other-directedness; low conscientiousness trait with impaired autonomy and hypervigilance; and moderate conscientiousness trait with impaired boundaries and hypervigilance, all exhibiting statistical differences in schema domains ( $p < .05$ ).

**Keywords:** *Early maladaptive schema, defense mechanisms, five factor personality, schema transmission.*

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### 1. Introduction

Schemas are mental frameworks that are constantly used to perceive, interpretate and response to stimuli in the environment (Piaget, 1964; Beck, 1967; Young, 1999). Although schemas are a structure that positively supports a person's cognitive and emotional development, it is known that early maladaptive schemas significantly damage their functionality. Young et al. (2003) have made the most extensive explanation of the early maladaptive schemas. They defined early maladaptive schemas as 'repetitive, rigid mental patterns that start with childhood and continue to develop after, negatively affecting a person's cognition, emotions and memories in his relationship with himself and the other'. Adverse childhood experiences, unmet core emotional needs and emotional temperament constitute the origin of early maladaptive schemas (Young, 1999). As a result of examining these origins, it can be seen that parents have a significant influence on early maladaptive schemas of children. Moreover, it has suggested by some studies that thinking patterns of mothers and children are positively related to each other (Stark et al., 1996; Seligman, & Peterson, 1986). Thus, there are studies in the literature that show the relationship between the early maladaptive schema areas of parents and adult children (Macik et al., 2016; Sundag et al., 2018). In addition, different mechanisms such as adverse childhood experiences (Zeynel, & Uzer, 2020), defense mechanisms (Karaarslan et al., 2021) and parenting styles (Gibson, & Francis, 2019) were also indicated that explain the schema transmission. There are studies that examine the relationship between the big five personality traits, defense mechanisms and the early maladaptive schema domains (Sava, 2009; Thimm, 2010; Muris, 2006; Ekři et al., 2020; Walburg, & Chiaramello, 2015; Bashiri Nejadian et al., 2017; Price, 2007).

The aim of this study is to evaluate of the similarity relationship between the early maladaptive schemas of mother and adult children. In addition, it is aimed to examine the effect of children's defense mechanisms and personality traits in this similarity relationship.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The research sample was selected by the purposeful sampling method. Although there were 160 mother and adult child pairs participating in the survey, as a result of the outlier analysis, 1 mother and adult child pair was excluded. Thus, 159 adult children (age ranged between 19 and 40 years;  $M = 22,67$ ,  $SD = 3,92$ ) and 159 mothers (age ranged between 38 and 66 years;  $M = 48,58$ ,  $SD = 5,74$ ) were evaluated.

### 2.2. Materials

In the study Young Schema Questionnaire, Short Form 3 (YSQ-SF3), The Big Five-50 Personality Questionnaire (B5KT-50-Tr), Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40), and a Demographic Data Form were used.

### 2.3. Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 26 (statistical package for social science), including frequency analysis for demographic data and the calculation of descriptive statistics. The Paired Sample t-Test, considering the normal distribution of the difference series, was employed to assess the similarity between the schema scores of mothers and adult children. The significance value was accepted as  $p < ,05$ .

## 3. Results

As a result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis, it was founded that Young Schema Total Difference score, Impaired Limits Difference sub dimension showed a normal distribution. Since the result of analysis is not normally distributed in Disconnection and Rejection Difference, Impaired Autonomy and Performance Difference, Other-directedness Difference, Overvigilance and Inhibition Difference sub dimension scores, they were assumed to be normally distributed based on the analysis of Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients.

*Table 1. Mother and Adult Child Young Scheme Total and Scheme Sub-Dimensions Difference Normality Test.*

Total scale	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Skew.	S	Kurt.	S
	Statistics	sd	p				
Young Schema Total Difference	0,044	159	0,200	-0,81	0,192	0,495	0,383
Disconnection and Rejection Difference	0,076	159	0,024	0,246	0,192	2,120	0,383
Impaired Autonomy Difference	0,074	159	0,034	0,265	0,192	0,785	0,383
Impaired Limits Difference	0,056	159	0,200	-0,309	0,192	3,150	0,383
Other-Directedness Difference	0,073	159	0,035	-0,354	0,192	0,002	0,383
Overvigilance and Inhibition Difference	0,075	159	0,030	0,452	0,192	0,452	0,383

In the study the Paired Sample t-Test was used for defense mechanisms and personality traits, due to the normal distribution of the difference series of the schema sub-dimensions.

The Paired Sample t-Test results showed that for adult children who have the low level of Mature Defense; Impaired Autonomy scores of mothers and adult children are statistically different ( $t(19) = -3.772$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ); Disconnection and Rejection ( $t(19) = -0.526$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -0.884$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = -0.985$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) and Other-directedness ( $t(19) = -0.463$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) it was observed that there is no statistically significant difference. As a result of

the analyses conducted for children with moderate Mature Defense level, it was found that Impaired Autonomy ( $t_{(19)} = -1,742$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Other- Directedness ( $t_{(19)} = 4,202$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ) scores are statistically different; there was no difference in Disconnection and Rejection ( $t(19) = 0,582$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ), Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -2,339$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = -0,260$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ). In addition, analyzing for adult children with a high level of Mature Defense, no differences was observed in all schema sub-dimensions

The Paired Sample t-Test results showed that for adult children who have the low level of Neurotic Defense; there was no significant difference in all schema sub-dimensions of mothers and children. As a result of the analysis, adult children with a moderate Neurotic Defense level Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -2,871$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ) and Other- directedness ( $t(19) = 0,387$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ) scores were found statistically different, while in Disconnection and Rejection ( $t(19) = 1,275$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ), Impaired Autonomy ( $t(19) = -1,544$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ) and Other- directedness ( $t(19) = -0,490$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ) schema sub-dimensions there was no significant difference.

The Paired Sample t-Test results showed that for adult children who have the low and moderate Immature Defense; there was no difference in all sub-dimensions except the Other- directedness ( $t(19) = -3,514$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ) for moderate immature defense. On the other hand, while in the high level of immature defense), Impaired Autonomy ( $t(19) = -3,132$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -3,087$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) scores were found statistically different, Disconnection and Rejection ( $t(19) = -1,264$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = -1,068$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ) Other- directedness ( $t(19) = 0,879$ ;  $p > 0,05$ ) was observed that there is no statistical difference.

It was found that there was a difference in Impaired Autonomy ( $t(19) = -2,482$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = -2,544$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Other- directedness ( $t(19) = 2,388$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) scores for low level of extraversion personality; in Other- directedness ( $t(19) = -2,482$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) scores for moderate extraversion personality; in Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = 0,368$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) score for high level extraversion personality.

As result of the analysis adult children with Agreeableness Personality, it was found that there was a difference in Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -2,799$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Other- directedness ( $t(19) = 3,776$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ) scores for moderate Agreeableness Personality.

As result of the analysis adult children with Conscientiousness Personality, it was found that there was a difference in Impaired Autonomy ( $t(19) = -2,453$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = 2,268$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) scores for low level of conscientiousness personality; Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -2,956$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = 2,745$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) scores for moderate level of conscientiousness personality.

As result of the analysis adult children with Neuroticism Personality, it was found that there was a difference in Impaired Autonomy ( $t(19) = -2,925$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) scores for low level of neuroticism personality; Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -2,496$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = -2,909$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ) scores for moderate level of neuroticism personality.

As result of the analysis adult children with Openness to Experience Personality, it was found that there was a difference in Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = 2,787$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ) scores for low level of for low level of neuroticism personality; Impaired Autonomy ( $t(19) = -2,226$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Impaired Limits ( $t(19) = -2,455$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) and Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = 3,602$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ) scores for moderate level of neuroticism personality; Disconnection and Rejection ( $t(19) = 0,023$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ), Overvigilance and Inhibition ( $t(19) = -0,600$ ;  $p < 0,01$ ) scores for high level of neuroticism personality.

#### 4. Discussion

It was known that the parent is in a decisive position in the development of the child's early maladaptive schemas (Young et al., 2003; Muris, 2006; Thimm, 2010). It was considered inevitable that the parent, who has such a fundamental role, will have a direct or indirect influence on the child's schema areas of his own schema areas. However, it has been understood in the relevant literature that there is an extremely limited number of studies on the relationship between the early maladaptive schema areas of parents and adult children (Macik et al., 2016; Sundag et al., 2018). Based on this, it was aimed to examine the possibility of similarity between the early maladaptive schema areas of mothers and adult children, and also this relationship was studied with the adult children's personality traits and defense mechanisms.

According to the first hypothesis of the study, it was examined whether there is a similarity between the early maladaptive schemes of mothers and adult children. As a result of the analysis, in accordance with the findings in the literature, it was found that mothers and adult children were similar between the early maladaptive schemes.

Moreover, the effect of the adult child's personality traits and defense styles on the similarity of the mothers' and adult children's early maladaptive schema was revealed for some specific schema areas. As indicated in the relevant findings, the adult child's personality traits and defense mechanisms in the form of a level has a significant impact on the similarity between some schema areas of the mother and the adult child.

Besides the fact that this study makes important contributions to the literature, it is thought that there are some limitations of the study. The first of these limitations is that the study cannot explain any causal relationship due to the fact that it is a cross-sectional study. The number of women in the adult child sample is more than the number of men (88,1% women, 12,9% men). The fact that the sample group does not have a balanced distribution affects the generalizability of the study. Finally, it is known that the role of the father in raising children, as well as the mother, is undeniably important. It has also been stated that the father's contribution is a protective factor in early maladaptive schema transitions (Zeynel, & Uzer, 2020). For this reason, in future studies, the father can also be re-examined by adding him to the sample group.

This research examined schema and psychodynamic theories as a whole and indicated the relationship between them. It was thought that making use of the interaction of different theories to contribute to each other in theoretical and clinical applications would prepare the ground for the formation of a holistic perspective for future studies.

In addition, making sense of the schema transition will also help to understand pathological questions. Therefore, curative intervention in the parent's schemes is a preventive measure against incompatible schemes that may occur in the child.

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