


Parental Emotional Availability: A Conceptual Review

Ebeveynin Duygusal Erişilebilirliği: Kavramsal Bir Derleme

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ABSTRACT

Parents play the most critical role in processes ranging from children's physical survival to their socio-emotional development and mental health. Mothers and fathers do not only provide basic care but also teach their children essential life skills such as recognizing, expressing, and regulating emotions. In this context, the concept of "parental emotional availability" (emotional availability), which reflects the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship, has gained increasing importance in the literature in recent years. Emotional availability is a multidimensional construct that refers to the existence of a reciprocal, warm, authentic, and sensitive emotional interaction between parent and child. A review of the literature reveals that emotional availability is positively associated with children's emotion regulation skills, self-esteem, social competence, prosocial behaviors, psychological resilience, and well-being, whereas it is negatively related to internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, aggression, anxiety, loneliness, and tendencies toward addiction. Neuroscientific studies demonstrate that high emotional availability supports the development of the prefrontal cortex, reduces the release of the stress hormone cortisol, and strengthens connectivity between brain regions. In collectivist cultures like Türkiye, where emotional and psychological bonds remain strong across generations, emotionally available parenting carries particular importance. The present study comprehensively and critically examines the definition, historical background, dimensions, measurement, theoretical foundations, effects on child development and mental health, neurobiological correlates, findings from the pandemic period, limitations of parental emotional availability, and potential risks associated with its excessive forms.

Keywords: Emotional availability, parental emotional availability, review

ÖZ

Çocukların fiziksel hayatta kalmasından sosyal-duygusal gelişimine ve ruh sağlığına kadar uzanan süreçte ebeveynler en önemli rolü üstlenmektedir. Anne ve babalar, yalnızca temel bakım sağlamakla yetinmeyip çocuklarına duyguları tanıma, ifade etme ve düzenleme gibi kritik yaşam becerilerini de öğretmektedir. Bu bağlamda, ebeveyn-çocuk ilişkisinin duygusal niteliğini yansıtan "ebeveynin duygusal erişilebilirliği" (emotional availability) kavramı son yıllarda alanyazında giderek daha fazla önem kazanmıştır. Duygusal erişilebilirlik; ebeveyn ile çocuk arasında karşılıklı, sıcak, otantik ve duyarlı bir duygusal etkileşimin varlığını ifade eden çok boyutlu bir yapıdır. Literatür taraması sonucunda duygusal erişilebilirliğin, çocukların duygu düzenleme becerileri, benlik saygısı, sosyal yeterlik, prososyal davranışlar, psikolojik sağlamlık ve iyi oluş düzeyi ile pozitif; içe/dışa dönük sorun davranışlar, saldırganlık, kaygı, yalnızlık ve bağımlılık eğilimleri ile negatif yönde ilişkili olduğu ortaya konmuştur. Nörobilimsel çalışmalar ise yüksek duygusal erişilebilirliğin prefrontal korteks gelişimini desteklediğini, stres hormonu kortizol salınımını azalttığını ve beyin bölgeleri arasındaki bağlantıyı güçlendirdiğini göstermektedir. Türkiye gibi duygusal ve psikolojik bağlılığın nesiller boyu güçlü şekilde devam ettiği toplulukçu kültürlerde duygusal erişilebilir ebeveynlik ayrı bir önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma, ebeveynin duygusal erişilebilirliğinin tanımı, tarihçesi, boyutları, ölçümü, kuramsal temelleri, çocuk gelişimi ve ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkileri, nörobilimsel yansımaları, pandemi dönemi bulguları ile sınırlılıklarını ve aşırı biçimlerinin olası risklerini kapsamlı ve eleştirel bir biçimde ele almaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Duygusal erişilebilirlik, ebeveynin duygusal erişilebilirliği, derleme

Introduction

Parents are undoubtedly the most significant architects in the life journey of an individual born and raised in a family. Parenting and parental roles have attracted the attention of philosophers, religious leaders, and society since ancient times (Abidin 1992). Generally referring to the mother and father, parenting is considered both a biological and a social phenomenon. From a biological perspective, it is seen as a natural consequence of reproduction; in a social context, it refers to assuming responsibilities related to the care of a child (Alwin 2004). Parenting formally begins before pregnancy and continues throughout life (Bornstein 2001), constituting a significant transition in the lives of most individuals (Abidin 1992). The survival, education, and socialization of a baby, who is dependent on its parents at birth, entail crucial responsibilities for the parents (Bornstein 2016). Parents prepare their children for life through various universal roles such as providing care, guidance, and physical, social, and economic security (Bornstein 2001, 2012).

Children learn emotions, the expression of emotions, and emotion regulation strategies through their interactions with their parents (Foroughe et al. 2019). Parents' attitudes and responses toward their children's emotions are highly influential in teaching social and emotional skills. While some parents perceive their children's emotions as harmful and destructive, others view every emotion, both positive and negative, as an opportunity to talk with their child and to understand what the child is feeling (Gottman et al. 1997). Parents who recognize their children's emotions and respond supportively are able to talk with their children about emotions and teach them how to express their feelings (Havighurst et al. 2009). Moreover, they tend to approach their children more warmly, criticize emotions less, and encourage their children in expressing their emotions (Havighurst et al. 2020).

Parents' emotional responses to their children, the type of relationship they establish with them, and the parenting behaviors they exhibit affect children's mental health in various ways (Popov and Ilesanmi 2015). Mental health is a holistic state of well-being that encompasses the absence of mental disorders, the realization of an individual's potential, the ability to cope with stress, and the capacity to form satisfying relationships (WHO 2001). The quality of an individual's mental health depends on multiple factors, including genetic, environmental, and psychosocial influences (Rutter 2005). Among these factors are the family environment and parental figures (Osofsky and Thompson 2000). Parents who are attentive to their children's emotions, who understand their feelings, who form close relationships with them, and who demonstrate empathy act as protective factors for children's mental health. In contrast, parents who ignore emotions, approach their children harshly and critically, or engage in neglectful and abusive behaviors are considered risk factors (DeVore and Ginsburg 2005). Therefore, it is possible to state that emotion-focused and responsive parenting may serve as a protective factor for children's mental health.

Emotion-focused parenting practices not only enhance the child's emotional competence and development but also strengthen the emotional bond between parent and child (Havighurst et al. 2020). In the literature, understanding the child's emotions, responding positively, modeling behavior, and providing emotional coaching have been associated with the development of emotional competence in children (Eisenberg et al. 1998). Similarly, emotion-focused parenting practices have shown positive effects on the child's well-being, adaptation to life, and self-perception (Emde and Easterbrooks 1985, Ziv et al. 2018). Moreover, attending to children's emotions increases parents' emotional awareness and emotion regulation skills (Shaffer et al. 2019), while also facilitating stress management (Havighurst et al. 2022). Therefore, it seems possible to indicate that emotion-focused parenting positively influences both parents and children in numerous ways.

In order to engage in emotion-focused parenting, the parent must be emotionally accessible to the child (Bornstein et al. 2012). Emotional availability, which most broadly reflects the quality of the emotional relationship between parent and child (Lum and Phares 2005), establishes an emotional bond between the child and the parent (Emde 2012). With the increasing number of studies on emotions and the growing view of emotions as adaptive rather than destructive, the concept of emotional availability has gained prominence (Emde 2000). As the importance of attachment and emotional communication between

caregiver and infant has become more widely recognized, researchers have started to focus on parental emotional availability (Biringen et al. 2014).

Emotional availability, which is considered highly important for healthy parenting and the parent-child relationship (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012), occupies a central place in the child's social-emotional development (Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000). Especially in the early years, emotional availability is regarded as a "relational language" between the parent and the infant (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). During stages in which language development is not yet complete, infants are known to communicate nonverbally through emotions, while parents interpret these emotions by following nonverbal cues in stressful situations (Biringen 2000). In this way, infants gradually learn to use effective emotion regulation strategies in later years (Saunders et al. 2015). Moreover, literature suggests that emotional availability is negatively associated with the development of psychopathology in children (Oppenheim 2012) and positively associated with well-being (Ziv et al. 2018). From a cultural perspective, Türkiye has a "Family Model of Emotional/Psychological Interdependence." According to this model, while children's economic dependence on their parents decreases over time, their emotional and psychological dependence continues for many years (Kağıtçıbaşı 2017). Therefore, emotionally available parenting is thought to be important across all stages of life, particularly in countries such as Türkiye.

This study aims to provide the reader with a general overview of the concept of parental emotional availability, which has been frequently addressed in both international and national literature in recent years. It also seeks to examine the relationship of this concept with child development, mental health, neuroscientific indicators, the COVID-19 pandemic, and parenting. Additionally, by addressing the limitations of the concept, the study aims to offer the reader a critical depth regarding emotional availability. Notably, there is no review study on this concept in the national literature, and so this study is believed to make a significant contribution to future research on the topic.

In the present study, we conducted a literature review on the concept of parental emotional availability using a purposeful literature search strategy. The primary aim of the study is to provide the reader with a general, comprehensive, and critical framework regarding parental emotional availability. Accordingly, during the literature search, we used the keywords "parental emotional availability," "parent emotional availability," "emotionally available parenting," "mother's emotional availability," and "father's emotional availability." We searched all the keywords both in Turkish and English. We conducted the literature review between January and February 2025 through national and international academic databases, including "Web of Science," "EBSCO," "PubMed," "Google Scholar," and "ULAKBİM." As a conceptual review study, we did not follow a specific systematic protocol; rather, we used theoretical and empirical sources relevant to the topic content-wise in line with the study's purpose. We included recent studies offering conceptual, theoretical, relational, and neuroscientific explanations regarding parental emotional availability in the review. We excluded the articles that did not provide information on the definition, content, theoretical framework, or related factors of the concept, were outdated, or were not written in English or Turkish. In accordance with the study's objective, the next section addresses the definition and content of the concept.

Definition and Historical Background

The concept of emotional availability was first introduced by Biringen and Robinson (1991) and refers to the degree to which two individuals mutually share a healthy emotional relationship and derive satisfaction from this relationship (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). Therefore, it reflects the emotional climate, nature, and quality of the relationship between the two parties (Saunders et al. 2015). Although emotional availability is regarded as a relational construct, research has primarily focused on parental emotional availability (Easterbrooks et al. 2000).

Parental emotional availability was first used by Mahler et al. (1975) to describe the mother's supportive presence and attitude toward the infant who has begun to walk and explore their environment. At this stage, the mother silently supports her infant by providing "emotional refueling" facilitating exploration, and being emotionally accessible to the infant (Biringen 2000). The infant knows that upon returning to the

mother, they will be welcomed and accepted pleasantly. Therefore, the infant's movement away from and back to the mother in the parent-child relationship is regarded as a secure base and is considered an indicator of emotional availability (Biringen and Robinson 1991). In the structure of emotional availability, not only the physical presence but also the emotional availability of the parent is taken into account (Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000).

An emotionally accessible parent sensitively attends to and interprets the infant's emotional cues, accurately understanding the meanings of emotions and providing appropriate emotional responses to the infant (Easterbrooks et al. 2000). For example, the parent perceives the infant's signs of discomfort (e.g., crying, bodily movements) correctly and responds with suitable emotional and behavioral reactions (e.g., smiling, holding) (Bornstein et al. 2012). When a parent is aware of and reflects the child's emotional responses, the child is able to read the emotional signals from the parent and respond accordingly (Biringen et al. 2005). Therefore, under any circumstances, there is a warm, intimate, and emotionally appropriate interaction between the parent and the infant (Biringen et al. 2014). Consequently, emotional availability is considered one of the most important indicators of a healthy and quality parent-child relationship (Emde 2000) and lies at the center of social-emotional development (Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000). The absence of emotional interaction between parent and infant is referred to as interaction deficiency or emotional unavailability. Such a parent neglects the infant's emotional cues (e.g., avoiding close contact when the infant wants to play with the parent) and avoids all forms of interaction with the infant (Bornstein et al. 2012). Furthermore, even if the parent meets the infant's physical needs, they display emotionally unresponsive, detached, and rejecting behavior (Biringen and Robinson 1991).

Since emotional availability is a reciprocal relational construct, not only the parent but also the infant must be emotionally accessible to the parent (Biringen and Robinson 1991). In this way, the infant communicates their needs, appreciation, and enjoyment of time spent with the parent (Biringen et al. 2014). The mutual nature of the emotional interaction between the dyad confirms that the parent's attention and affection reach the child, providing rewarding feedback for the parent (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). In other words, how the parent and child affect and are emotionally influenced by each other is taken into account (Biringen et al. 2014). When the parent approaches the infant with acceptance, respect, and unconditional love, the infant enjoys interacting with the parent and invites further interaction by responding to the parent's cues (Bornstein et al. 2012). On the other hand, emotional availability varies according to the child's responses. For example, when a mother reaches out to her twin children, the child who responds is perceived as emotionally accessible to the mother, whereas the child who withdraws their hand may not be regarded as accessible. Similarly, a child with a chronic illness who responds more quietly than usual may not be perceived as emotionally accessible (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). In another example, parents who cannot receive clear emotional signals from their children (e.g., those with children with autism or Down syndrome) may not be regarded as emotionally accessible within this construct (Biringen 2000). Furthermore, perceptions of parental emotional availability differ according to the child's developmental stage and needs. For instance, a preschool-aged child may expect relatively warm and play-focused parenting, whereas a school-aged child may anticipate autonomy-supportive and less intrusive parenting (Biringen and Robinson 1991). Based on this, emotional availability within the dyad may vary according to mutual needs, expectations, and the exchange of emotional signals.

Emotional availability, which addresses the mutual interaction between parent and child, comprises six dimensions that include emotional characteristics belonging to both the parent and the child (Biringen et al. 2000a). To evaluate these dimensions, Biringen and Robinson (1991) developed the "Emotional Availability Scales." These scales assess various aspects of the dyadic relationship from the perspectives of both parties (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012).

Dimensions

The emotional availability of the parent consists of four dimensions on the parent's side and two on the child's side, reflecting the multidimensional nature of the dyadic relationship (Oppenheim 2012). On the parent's side, these dimensions include parental sensitivity, parental structuring, nonintrusiveness, and

nonhostility; on the child's side, they encompass the child's responsiveness and the child's involvement of the parent (Biringen et al. 2022). Each of these dimensions is evaluated within an emotional framework (Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000). The dimensions on both the parent and child sides mutually influence one another, with a bidirectional relationship existing between them (Biringen et al. 2014). These dimensions are comprehensively explained below.

1. Parental Sensitivity

Parental sensitivity refers to the parent's ability to accurately and clearly perceive their infant's emotional signals and respond to them promptly, appropriately, and effectively (Biringen and Robinson 1991, Biringen et al. 2014). This concept aligns with Ainsworth's notion of sensitivity (Biringen et al. 2000a). Sensitive parents are aware of their child's emotional cues and set aside their own needs and biases while interpreting these signals (Biringen and Robinson 1991). They approach their child with positivity, warmth, genuineness, flexibility, creativity, and acceptance (Biringen et al. 2014). They establish appropriate eye contact with their infant, use a soothing and calm tone of voice, and offer warm smiles accompanied by physical closeness. The parent's facial expressions and tone are pleasant and their emotional responses are consistent (Biringen et al. 2000a). They diversify play in creative and joyful ways, attune to the child's rhythm, and both parent and child enjoy the interaction (Biringen et al. 2000a, Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000). Even when briefly apart from the environment, the parent maintains emotional presence by tracking the infant with their gaze and calling them by name (Biringen et al. 2000a). They are able to effectively manage arising conflicts, soothe the infant quickly, and regulate emotions (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012, Biringen and Robinson 1991; Biringen et al. 2000b, Easterbrooks et al. 2005). The parent's verbal and nonverbal emotional expressions are consistent (Biringen et al. 2014). Otherwise, "apparent sensitivity" may occur (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012), whereby a parent may smile at the infant but maintain a neutral facial expression and a cold tone of voice. Similarly, a parent might offer a bottle to a hungry infant but respond with impatience and a blank expression (Biringen et al. 2014). Insensitive parents exhibit harsh, angry, dismissive, critical, indifferent, or reluctant behaviors toward the infant, or avoid interaction altogether (Biringen et al. 2000a). Since emotional availability is a dyadic construct, the child must also be responsive and engaged for the parent to be perceived as sensitive. If the child exhibits shy, passive, or avoidant responses, parental sensitivity may be negatively affected (Biringen et al. 2014). On the other hand, a parent who is always warm, sensitive, and attentive may still not be sensitive if their behaviors do not align with the child's needs and expectations (Biringen et al. 2022). Taken together, sensitivity can be summarized as the parent's emotional presence (Saunders et al. 2017).

2. Parental Structuring

Parental structuring refers to setting rules, regulations, and boundaries in a way that supports the child's exploration and autonomy (Biringen 2000). The parent guides the infant, assists and directs during play, and offers suggestions without restricting the child's independence (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). Parents are not strict in rule-setting and often take preventive measures (Biringen et al. 2000a). They maintain a balance between the child's exploration, leadership, and rules, acting as mediators (Biringen et al. 2000b). Through verbal and nonverbal messages, they support the child's learning while encouraging independent actions (Saunders et al. 2015). They reinforce compliant behaviors and provide alternative options for non-compliant behaviors (Biringen et al. 2014). Additionally, parents express their expectations, suggestions, and requirements consistently and moderately (Biringen 2000). On the other hand, a parent who actively participates in the child's play but does not set any rules may be perceived as apparently sensitive (Biringen et al. 2000a). Both overly strict rule-setting and the absence of boundaries are considered unhealthy structuring (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). In the former, the child's autonomy is compromised, whereas in the latter, the interaction is directed by the child with the parent adopting a passive role (Biringen et al. 2000a). Since interaction is reciprocal, the child's perception of structuring is also important. For example, excessive guidance may feel overwhelming to a typically developing child but may meet the expectations of a child with disabilities (Biringen et al. 2005).

3. Parental Nonintrusiveness

Nonintrusiveness refers to the parent being available without excessive guidance, stimulation, overwhelming control, or overprotection (Biringen et al. 2000a). Rather than unnecessary interference, the parent is emotionally available when the infant needs support (Biringen 2000). The parent does not limit the child's physical autonomy, refrains from interrupting while the child is speaking, and supports age-appropriate independence (Saunders et al. 2015). By taking certain precautions, the parent allows the child to manage their own play, avoids intervening except in emergencies, does not disrupt the interaction, and offers flexible opportunities for exploration and self-directed progress (Biringen et al. 2000a). In infancy, nonintrusiveness encompasses the parent's physical and emotional presence, whereas in later years, it evolves towards listening to the child, asking for their opinions, and supporting autonomous decision-making (Biringen 2000). Conversely, an intrusive parent treats the child as younger than their age, hinders their independence, excessively directs, and expects obedience (Biringen et al. 2014). Such a parent is controlling, disregards the child's wishes, and may resort to punishment when necessary (Biringen et al. 2000a).

Parents often possess an instinct to overprotect their child (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). However, nonintrusive parents do not attempt to rescue their children when they face a challenging situation; instead, they calmly and patiently teach them ways to cope with the problem (Biringen 2000). Like other dimensions, this aspect varies according to the child's developmental level and feedback. For example, withholding permission for a typically developing child to feed themselves is considered intrusive, whereas the same behavior may not be viewed as intrusive for a younger child or one with a disability (Biringen et al. 2014). Similarly, not allowing a normally developing, ambulatory child to climb down stairs is regarded as intrusive, but for a younger child or one with impairments, this behavior is not classified as intrusive (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). Moreover, a single behavior may be perceived differently in various parent-child interactions (e.g., mother-daughter vs. mother-son); a behavior viewed as intrusive for one child may not be so for another (Biringen et al. 2005). Parental structuring and nonintrusiveness are often confused in the literature. While structuring relates to guiding the child, nonintrusiveness involves refraining from physical interference and intervention (Biringen et al. 2014).

4. Parental Nonhostility

Nonhostility is defined as behaving toward the child in a calm, patient, cooperative, and pleasant manner (Biringen 2000). The parent shows no overt or covert hostility toward the child, and the emotional climate between them is generally positive (Biringen et al. 2000a). Parents are able to regulate their emotions and control their anger in challenging situations (Saunders et al. 2015). Even during stressful early years, such as when infants have sleep problems, they remain calm and patient. Later on, instead of expressing anger aggressively, they discuss the issue with their children. Thus, nonhostile parents' emotion regulation strategies are considered appropriate to the circumstances (Biringen 2000). Failure to regulate emotions results in signs of overt or covert hostility (Saunders et al. 2015). Subtle signs of hostility include slightly raising one's voice toward the child, displaying dissatisfaction and boredom, or vague expressions of anger (Biringen et al. 2014). A parent may roll their eyes at the infant or faintly express feelings of discomfort, frustration, or annoyance. In other words, hostile feelings are not openly displayed but emerge in a covert manner (Biringen et al. 2000a). Conversely, hostile parents clearly and explicitly display negative emotions and behaviors through verbal and nonverbal cues (Biringen et al. 2014). Such parents may humiliate, frighten, threaten, embarrass, ridicule, behave aggressively, or reject their child. Additionally, they may occasionally use physical or emotional punishments (Biringen et al. 2000a). Although nonhostility is generally regarded as an entirely positive characteristic, these parents can appropriately and effectively express their anger and control aggressive impulses (Biringen 2000). Furthermore, hostility does not have to be directed solely at the infant (Biringen et al. 2014). Negative feelings the parent has toward others (e.g., spouse or other children) also influence hostility within the parent-child relationship (Saunders et al. 2017).

5. Child Responsiveness

The dimension of child's responses focuses on the child's emotional and social presence toward the parent (Biringen et al. 2014). While exploring their environment independently, the child remains emotionally accessible to the parent. In other words, the child forms an emotional bond by showing consistent proximity to the parent (Biringen 2000). The child responds willingly and attentively when the parent invites interaction without obligation, urgency, or anxiety (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). The child desires connection and close contact, enjoys conversations, and engages in play with the parent (Biringen 2000). The child takes pleasure in the interaction, smiles, laughs, and responds sensitively to the parent's questions, suggestions, and conversations (Biringen et al. 2000a). For example, when the mother extends her hand, the child joyfully reaches out to her as well (Biringen et al. 2014). In younger children, this manifests as a happy demeanor, whereas older children engage their parents in play to interact (Biringen 2000). They also maintain a delicate balance between autonomy and closeness to the parent (Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000). However, not every child who behaviorally responds to the parent's invitation for interaction is considered emotionally sensitive. A child may respond behaviorally but have weak emotional engagement and may not enjoy the interaction. For instance, a child may interact negatively by whining, crying, complaining, or misbehaving (Biringen et al. 2014). Similarly, a child may establish closeness by smiling to seek approval or please the parent (Biringen et al. 2000a). A child who is not emotionally accessible to the parent avoids interaction, ignores the parent, does not respond to cues, and behaves tensely and reluctantly (Biringen et al. 2000a, Biringen et al. 2014). This dimension reflects the child's counterpart to parental sensitivity and plays an important role in regulating the social relationship between parent and child (Biringen and Robinson 1991).

6. Child Involvement of the Parent

Child involvement is broadly defined as the child inviting the parent to all kinds of interactions (Biringen et al. 2014). The child establishes eye contact with the parent willingly, flexibly, and comfortably, asking questions, speaking, requesting suggestions, telling stories, and showing materials in their hands (Biringen 2000). The child includes the parent as a participant or observer in their play (Biringen et al. 2000a). Moreover, there is a consistent balance between the child's autonomous behaviors and inclusion of the parent (Biringen et al. 2014). During infancy, the child includes the parent through nonverbal visual, emotional, and behavioral cues; in later stages, the child may assign a role in play or remain silent to encourage the parent to speak (Lum and Phares 2005). It is important that the child invites the parent to interact without displaying negative reactions such as crying, seeking attention, crisis behaviors, or distress responses (Biringen 2000). On the negative side, the child may prefer doing things alone and being by themselves rather than interacting with the parent. Additionally, excessive and exaggerated inclusion of the parent such as clinging to the parent while ignoring autonomy, insisting on the parent's participation in play, or continuously seeking physical contact is also considered unhealthy (Biringen et al. 2000a). While the dimension of child responsiveness is about the child's reaction to the parent's invitation, the dimension of child involvement primarily involves the child initiating the invitation for interaction with the parent.

Defining Theories

Parental emotional availability is explained in the literature within the frameworks of Attachment, Separation-Individuation, and Family Systems theories (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). This section addresses the concept's relationships and distinctions with the relevant theories.

1. Attachment Theory

Parental emotional availability is noted to be largely inspired by and consistent with attachment theory (Biringen et al. 2014, Emde 2012). However, emotional availability broadens and enriches the framework of attachment theory in certain respects (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012; Biringen et al. 2014). Attachment is defined as the emotional structure involving the close relationship an infant establishes with the

caregiver during the early years (Bowlby 1982). According to this theory, since an infant can only survive with the support of a caregiver, the infant maintains emotional proximity to the caregiver (Hazan and Shaver 1994). On the other hand, Bowlby (1982) asserts that the attachment system cannot be explained solely as the closeness established with the caregiver and considers the presence of an emotionally available parent essential for attachment. Similarly, the perception and interpretation of the infant's emotional signals in the early years are seen as influential in the development of attachment bonds that emerge in later interactions (Emde and Easterbrooks 1985). Although emotional availability is closely related to attachment, it differentiates itself from the theory in certain respects (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012).

While attachment theory primarily emphasizes the role of the caregiver in the parent-child relationship, parental emotional availability highlights the reciprocal nature of the interaction, indicating that the child must also be emotionally available to the parent (Easterbrooks and Biringen 2000). Secondly, attachment theory often focuses on the caregiver's role during stressful and challenging times, such as the infant's separation experiences; in contrast, emotional availability assesses parent-child interactions not only in stressful situations but also during happy and playful moments (Biringen et al. 2000a). Furthermore, attachment behaviors are typically observed in laboratory settings, whereas parental emotional availability can be observed in natural or semi-structured environments such as playgrounds, homes, and bathrooms in addition to laboratory settings (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). Lastly, while attachment theory mainly addresses the parent-child relationship, emotional availability is also important in relationships involving siblings, teachers, therapists, and others (Saunders et al. 2015). Although emotional availability shares many commonalities with attachment theory, it broadens the emotional spectrum within the parent-child relationship. According to Biringen and Easterbrooks (2012), in a possible Venn diagram, attachment can be viewed as a component within the broader construct of emotional availability.

2. Separation-Individuation Theory

Emotional availability was first introduced within the framework of Mahler et al. (1975) Separation-Individuation Theory and defined as the mother's supportive and encouraging attitude during the infant's autonomous explorations (Biringen et al. 2014). The Separation-Individuation Theory posits that the biological and psychological births of the infant are distinct events that do not occur simultaneously (Mahler 1967). According to this view, biological birth refers to the infant's physical emergence from the mother's womb, while psychological birth is understood as a more internal process involving the child's separation from the caregiver and the development of individuation (Mahler et al. 1975). Thus, whereas biological birth is easily observable, psychological birth is regarded as a slowly unfolding cognitive process (Mahler 1967). According to the theory, a newborn must experience the separation process from the mother during the first 6 to 36 months of life in order to develop healthy individuation (Mahler et al. 1975).

According to Mahler et al. (1975), during the separation-individuation process, the mother's "silent supportiveness" encourages the infant, facilitates exploration of the environment, and motivates the infant to return for emotional refueling. In this process, the mother's emotional availability provides a secure base for the infant, who knows that upon exploring the surroundings and returning to the mother, they will be met with acceptance (Biringen 2000). An emotionally available mother shares the infant's feelings during exploration, responds to their play in an adventurous manner, and supports all internal and external processes (Mahler 1974). In cases where the mother is not emotionally available, the toddler experiences separation anxiety and fear of losing the mother due to lack of support (Mahler 1967). Moreover, the child exhausts developmental energy by persistently and desperately trying to regain the mother's attention and affection (Mahler 1972). For this reason, the mother's emotional availability is considered a prerequisite for the infant's autonomy and independence, and it is also regarded as important in terms of reality testing, cognitive capacity, and coping skills during the toddler years (Mahler 1963).

3. Family Systems Theory

According to family systems theory, the family system consists of a set of individuals who are connected

through relationships, which are formed and maintained as a result of communication among the members (Bavelas and Segal 1982). Family members share a common history, culture, and emotional bond (Sabatelli and Bartle 1995). Each individual in the system mutually influences and is influenced by the others (Prest and Protinsky 1993). A change occurring in one member leads to changes in the behaviors of other members, as well (Hill 1971). While each individual exists independently within the family, they are holistically interconnected with the family as a whole. Moreover, the foundation of this connection relates to the emotional nature of both the individuals and the system, with the emotional system constituting the core life force that guides the family and social relationships (Prest and Protinsky 1993).

In alignment with family systems theory, emotional availability also emphasizes that the emotional responses and behaviors of one family member deeply influence those of another, with each member regarded as part of the whole (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). The system focuses less on individual assessment and more on how the dyad emotionally affects and is affected by each other (Biringen et al. 2014). Emotional availability, as a reciprocal construct, provides feedback to both the parent and the child, considering both the individual and relational dimensions of the system (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012). The dimensions of emotional availability do not pertain solely to a characteristic of the parent or the child but rather reflect the quality of the relationship between them (Biringen et al. 2005). For instance, if a parent approaches the infant's emotional responses with respect and openness to interaction, the infant reciprocates similarly and may enjoy engaging with the parent (Bornstein et al. 2012). Similarly, for the parent's emotional responses to reach the child, the child must also be open and willing to interact with the parent (Biringen et al. 2014). For all these reasons, emotional availability is one of the most important indicators of forming a healthy emotional bond reciprocally (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012).

Related Factors

Although the factors related to whether a parent is emotionally accessible or not are not fully clear, the literature mentions several issues that may jeopardize emotional availability. In this context, studies have primarily focused on the nature of caregiving environments and maternal depression. A mother experiencing depression can negatively affect the emotional climate the child is exposed to and the quality of interaction (Easterbrooks et al. 2000). It seems unlikely that a depressed mother can respond to her child's emotional needs as sensitively and attentively as a healthy mother (Smith 2010). Similarly, an obsessive-compulsive parent may intervene in the child's behaviors in a controlling manner, while a narcissistic parent may act intrusively by having excessively high expectations of the child. A parent with borderline tendencies may limit the child's autonomy behaviors due to fear of being alone (Biringen et al. 2000a).

Additionally, parental stress as well as anxiety and stress experienced during pregnancy can adversely affect emotional availability and compassionate caregiving (Emde 2012). Other factors that may influence emotional availability include maternal brain activity, whether the mother has experienced abuse at any point in life, education level, intelligence, and child-rearing experience (Bornstein et al. 2012).

Since emotional availability is a dyadic construct involving the reciprocal relationship and behaviors of both parent and child, factors related to the child's emotional availability are also important. For instance, a child with a developmental disorder or any form of disability may not be emotionally accessible. However, the parent can still reveal the child's emotional availability by carefully reading the child's emotional cues (Biringen et al. 2005). Similarly, children's prenatal conditions and genetic capacities can affect their emotional availability and hinder their ability to respond sensitively to the parent (Oppenheim 2012). Therefore, various factors related to both the parent and child sides are associated with emotional availability, and further research on the subject is needed (Bornstein et al. 2012).

Recent studies have shown that parents' perceived relationship satisfaction significantly influences their emotional availability (Salo et al. 2021). Another study found a significant negative relationship between mothers' adverse childhood experiences and their emotional availability (Harris et al. 2021). In a study by Frigerio et al. (2019), mothers diagnosed with depression and substance use disorders scored lower on emotional availability compared to non-diagnosed samples. Similarly, Mielke et al. (2020) reported that

psychologically vulnerable mothers had lower emotional availability scores than psychologically healthy mothers. Research by Rea-Sandin et al. (2020) also found a significant positive correlation between parents' positive personality traits and their emotional availability. These findings indicate that various social and psychological factors are associated with parental emotional availability, and these results are consistent with the existing literature.

Emotional availability is regarded as a universal aspect of the parent-child relationship (Bornstein et al. 2012); however, it can vary across cultures (Oppenheim 2012). For example, in some cultures, expressing sadness to the parent is encouraged and accepted, whereas expressing anger is viewed as unacceptable (Eisenberg et al. 1998). Similarly, while eye contact is valued and encouraged in Western cultures, in other cultures, eye contact between a child and an adult may be interpreted as disrespectful (Oppenheim 2012). Moreover, in individualistic societies/cultures, independence gains increasing importance over time, whereas in collectivist cultures, intergenerational emotional bonds are maintained and relationality is prioritized (Kağıtçıbaşı 2017). As observed, perspectives on emotions as well as the expression and sharing of emotions, differ according to culture. Emotional availability encompasses both the parent and child dimensions and allows for the observation and measurement of the concept in any culture (Saunders et al. 2015). However, further research is needed to understand what emotional availability signifies in different cultures, the similarities and differences, and the cross-cultural applicability of the system (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012, Oppenheim 2012).

Assessment

In the literature, there are both observational and self-report measurement tools designed to assess parental emotional availability. One of the most widely used scales is the Emotional Availability Scales, Fourth Edition (Biringen 2008), which is based on coding video-recorded play sessions and is used to evaluate the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship. These scales consist of four parent dimensions (adult sensitivity, adult structuring, adult nonintrusiveness, adult nonhostility) and two child dimensions (child responsiveness to the adult, child involvement of the adult). Each dimension is coded on a scale ranging from 1 (inappropriate/nonoptimal) to 7 (appropriate/optimal) (Biringen 2008). There are two versions of the coding system: one for infancy/early childhood and another for middle childhood/adolescence (Biringen et al. 2014). Moreover, the scales have been validated for children and adolescents aged 0 to 14 years (Biringen and Easterbrooks 2012).

Another frequently used tool for measuring emotional availability is the Emotional Attachment Zones (EA-Z), which primarily focuses on attachment-related characteristics and behaviors. This tool is also based on the Emotional Availability Scales and provides both a categorical emotional style zone classification as well as continuous scoring. The attachment styles included in the measure align with attachment literature and are defined as four styles: emotionally available (secure), complex (insecure-anxious/ambivalent), detached (insecure-avoidant), and problematic/traumatized (insecure-disorganized) (Biringen et al. 2022).

The Lum Emotional Availability of Parents Measure (LEAP), which measures parental emotional availability through self-report, was developed by Lum and Phares in 2005. The scale consists of two separate forms in which participants are asked to evaluate their mother and father individually in terms of emotional availability. It is a unidimensional measure with 15 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always). Higher scores on the scale indicate higher emotional availability of the assessed parent. Initially, the scale was applied to adolescents and young adults, and later it was also used with younger age groups in both clinical and non-clinical samples (Lum and Phares 2005). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Gökçe and Yılmaz (2018) as part of a master's thesis with individuals aged 16 to 25. Factor analyses revealed that the measure retained its original unidimensional structure. Additionally, validity and reliability analyses confirmed that the scale's results are valid and reliable (Gökçe and Yılmaz 2018).

Relationship with Child Development, Psychological Well-Being, Psychopathology, and Neuroscientific Indicators

Parents play a crucial role in shaping children's physical, social, and emotional development, with developmental outcomes in early childhood particularly associated with sensitive and emotionally available parenting (Smith 2010). The literature indicates that children with emotionally available parents tend to grow and develop more healthily. Indeed, emotional availability is often described as the key to healthy development and an effective parent-child relationship (Oppenheim 2012). Similarly, it is suggested that a highly emotionally available parent, given favorable conditions, will raise a child with a high level of emotional competence (Biringen et al. 2005).

When parents are insensitive to their children's emotions and respond negatively, children may develop negative emotions and exhibit low social competence (Eisenberg et al. 1998). Additionally, children who lack emotionally available parents tend to experience difficulties in self-efficacy, self-differentiation, and emotion regulation processes (Easterbrooks et al. 2000). Conversely, children with emotionally available parents typically show healthy development in self-esteem, emotion regulation skills, well-being, and autonomy (Biringen 2000, Biringen and Robinson 1991, Saunders et al. 2015). Oppenheim (2012) emphasizes that the absence of an emotionally available parent and problems in the emotional quality of the parent-child relationship can constitute a risk factor for psychopathology. For all these reasons, parental emotional availability is considered crucial firstly for the infant's survival and subsequently for their development, success, and the full realization of their potential (Bornstein et al. 2012).

Recent studies have found that preschool children with emotionally available parents exhibit higher levels of social behavior (Sofri et al. 2025, Ziv et al. 2018). Another study with early childhood participants showed that as parents' emotional availability increased, children's prosocial behavior levels also increased (Söldner and Paulus 2025). A different study collecting data from parents of children aged 6 to 18 found that as mothers' emotional availability increased, children's emotional and behavioral problems decreased, while increased emotional availability of fathers was associated only with a decrease in children's behavioral problems (Clay et al. 2017). Similarly, a study involving twins aged 12 to 32 months found that as parents' emotional availability increased, infants' problematic behaviors decreased (Rea-Sandin et al. 2020). Research by Shilo and Serdtse (2022) with mothers and children averaging 2.9 years old also concluded that higher maternal emotional availability corresponded with reduced problematic behaviors in children.

Studies conducted with adolescent and young adult samples in addition to early childhood have similar results. A study by Özdoğan and Cenkseven-Önder (2018) with adolescents aged 14 to 19 found that as parents' emotional availability increased, adolescents' levels of reactive and proactive aggression decreased. Another study involving adolescents aged 13 to 19 revealed that higher parental emotional availability was associated with lower levels of anxiety sensitivity in adolescents (Kramer and Francis 2025). In research conducted by Babore et al. (2017) with adolescents aged 14 to 19, self-esteem was found to mediate the relationship between parental emotional availability and aggression; specifically, as parental emotional availability increased, adolescents' self-esteem increased and aggression levels decreased. Another study with adolescent samples found that difficulties in emotion regulation fully mediated the relationship between parental emotional availability and gaming addiction; as parental emotional availability increased, difficulties in emotion regulation and gaming addiction levels in youth decreased (Ülkümen and Aktan 2025). Finally, a study with students aged 14 to 19 determined that emotion regulation played a mediating role in the relationship between parental emotional availability and psychological resilience. While maternal emotional availability did not directly affect psychological resilience, paternal emotional availability was found to have a direct positive effect on psychological resilience (Özaydın and Soyyiğit 2024).

Another study conducted with university students found that difficulties in emotion regulation mediated the relationship between maternal emotional availability and well-being, while paternal emotional availability did not play a mediating role in the relationship with well-being. Additionally, as the emotional

availability of both parents increased, the students' levels of well-being also increased (Duman and Tuzgöl-Dost 2024). A study by Özdoğan (2020) with university students concluded that as parental emotional availability decreased, students' feelings of loneliness increased, and as loneliness increased, subjective and psychological well-being decreased. Similarly, Dadandı and Aydın (2024) found that perceiving parents as emotionally available reduced level of loneliness in university students. Another study with university students revealed that higher parental emotional availability was associated with increased interpersonal competence and self-worth among students (Yücel and Tuzcuoğlu 2021). Finally, Gökçe and Yılmaz (2018) worked with individuals aged 16-25 who still lived with their parents and found that as parental emotional availability increased, individuals' level of overall psychological health increased. When evaluating the relevant literature and research findings, it seems possible to indicate that having emotionally available parents is closely related to many aspects of psychological health across all stages of life. Furthermore, an optimal level of parental emotional availability can be considered a protective factor in maintaining and safeguarding children's mental health.

However, parental emotional availability is not limited only to children's developmental outcomes and psychological health; it is also associated with neurobiological indicators. Early caregiver-infant relationships can positively or negatively affect the child's brain development and nervous system (Copeland et al. 2022). Brain regions such as the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus are influenced by the caregiver's behaviors and emotional responses (Gunnar and Quevedo 2007). For example, the prefrontal cortex, which plays a role in social interaction capacity, empathy, and emotion regulation skills, is closely related to the parent's sensitivity to the child's emotional signals and their ability to respond appropriately (Swain et al. 2014). When a parent approaches the child's emotions sensitively, the prefrontal cortex is activated (Schneider-Hassloff et al. 2016). Additionally, parental emotional availability affects the functioning of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which regulates the body's response to stress (Gunnar and Quevedo 2007). When the parent is emotionally available to the child, cortisol levels, which typically increase in stressful situations, decrease (Philbrook et al. 2014). For this reason, parental emotional availability acts as a buffer against stress formation in the child (Grant et al. 2009). Research studies on the topic (e.g., Kertes et al. 2009, Philbrook et al. 2014, Rickmeyer et al. 2017) have found that children with more emotionally available mothers regulate stress better and secrete less cortisol compared to children with less emotionally available mothers. Based on these explanations and findings, emotional availability can be said to be a construct closely related to neurobiology and the nervous system. However, more research is needed to better understand the neurobiological aspects of this concept.

Relationship with COVID-19 Pandemic

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which first emerged in 2020, rapidly increased in severity and spread, leading to a global pandemic declaration in March 2020 (WHO 2020). To prevent further spread of the disease, measures such as stay-at-home orders, quarantines, and suspension of face-to-face education were implemented worldwide (Huebener et al. 2021). During this period, individuals faced challenges such as adapting to working from home, coping with the difficulties of quarantine, and balancing responsibilities related to both home and work (Spinelli et al. 2020). In addition to health concerns, economic hardships arose, and some individuals lost their jobs during this time (Huebener et al. 2021). For all these reasons, the impact of COVID-19 on human life has been more severe than other pandemics in the 20th and 21st centuries (Brown et al. 2020).

In addition to the effects mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic has also transformed parenting roles and family relationships (Feldman et al. 2023). With the closure of daycare centers and educational institutions, parents have had to meet their children's needs around the clock (Shakiba et al. 2023). Balancing childcare, personal life, work, and other responsibilities has become a necessity for parents (Spinelli et al. 2020). Parents struggling to simultaneously manage and balance these roles have faced negative emotions and stress (Feldman et al. 2023). The literature indicates that parents who took on childcare during the pandemic were significantly more likely to experience psychological problems and burnout compared to those who did not (Brown et al. 2020). Prime et al. (2020) suggested that parents facing emotional stress experience depletion of cognitive and emotional resources, which may hinder their ability to respond to

their children's emotional cues. For all these reasons, it has been considered that parental emotional availability could also be affected by stressful situations such as the pandemic (Dungan et al. 2023).

In a study conducted with Israeli mother-infant dyads (Shakiba et al. 2023), emotional availability before and during the COVID-19 pandemic was examined; no change was observed in mothers' emotional availability between the pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. The findings indicated that parental emotional availability was not negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Shakiba et al. 2023). In another study, the relationships between parents' emotional availability during the pandemic, their level of impact from the pandemic, and well-being were investigated. Results showed that mothers who were negatively affected by the pandemic experienced a decrease in emotional availability, whereas no relationship was found between fathers' emotional availability and their level of impact from the pandemic. On the other hand, a positive relationship was found between fathers' well-being during the pandemic and their emotional availability (Dungan et al. 2023). Another study conducted by Arikan et al. (2025) with mothers of preschool-aged children examined the relationships between depression and stress symptoms during COVID-19 and emotional availability. The findings revealed that mothers' depression and stress symptoms during the pandemic negatively predicted their emotional availability (Arikan et al. 2025). Based on these findings, it is possible to state that studies on this topic have produced varying results. Future research comparing emotional availability in stressful and non-stressful situations may help to better understand the relationship between these factors.

A Critical Approach to Concept

Parental emotional availability frequently emerges in the literature as a protective concept associated with positive child outcomes. As noted in previous sections, there are positive relationships between parental emotional availability and children's emotion regulation skills, self-esteem, and well-being (Biringen 2000, Saunders et al. 2015). However, focusing solely on the positive aspects and effects of this concept may idealize parenting and overlook possible limitations, potential risks, opposing views, and the excessive forms of emotional availability. Although studies directly addressing the excessiveness of parental emotional availability are limited, some conceptual and theoretical explanations exist. For example, within the dimension of parental structuring, it is emphasized that when structuring exceeds normal levels, the child's autonomy may be compromised (Biringen et al. 2000a). Regarding the dimension of intervention, it is stated that intervention behaviors should be shaped according to the child's developmental characteristics, needs, and desires (Biringen et al. 2014). Otherwise, the child may receive help from the parent even in age-appropriate activities that they can perform independently and may become dependent on the parent (Biringen 2000). According to the separation-individuation theory, excessive emotional intervention by the parent can negatively affect the child's process of separation and individuation from the parent (Mahler et al. 1975). Although not directly related to extreme forms of emotional availability, the concept of "helicopter parenting," defined as overparenting, is highlighted in the literature as potentially detrimental to children's developmental skills such as self-regulation, psychological resilience, and autonomy (Segrin et al. 2013). According to Fonagy and Target (2002), parents should not only be emotionally available and empathetic but also maintain an appropriately distant stance when necessary. Therefore, emotional availability in parenting should be evaluated not only in terms of level but also in dimensions such as timing, consistency, contextual/cultural appropriateness, and sensitivity to the child's needs. Considering the positive, limited, and risky aspects of the concept together can offer a critical perspective on the literature.

However, among the theoretical approaches explaining emotional availability, there are similarities, differences, and sometimes conflicts. Attachment theory defines emotional availability as a fundamental determinant of secure attachment between mother and infant (Bowlby 1982), while separation-individuation theory focuses on the supportive or inhibiting role of emotional availability in the separation and individuation process (Mahler et al. 1975). Family systems theory, on the other hand, can evaluate emotional availability in terms of maintaining family balance. Although each theory agrees that emotional availability should be consistent and predictable, they may conflict in some cases. For example, attachment theory considers the infant's emotional closeness to the parent as a basic need, whereas

separation-individuation theory emphasizes that excessive closeness may harm the individuation process (Mahler 1967). Therefore, while emotional availability is seen as a developmentally healing factor in attachment theory, it may be criticized as part of an indistinct relational form from the perspective of separation-individuation theory. Nonetheless, both attachment and separation-individuation theories emphasize the parent's emotional availability toward the infant in the parent-child relationship (Bowlby 1982, Mahler et al. 1975), whereas family systems theory, consistent with the theoretical structure of emotional availability, highlights the mutual emotional availability of both parent and child (Prest and Protinsky 1993). Although the concept of emotional availability is derived from attachment theory, it is argued that family systems theory better explains the reciprocal and cyclical nature of the parent-child relationship. On the other hand, the differing explanations of the concept by various theories may blur the boundaries of emotional availability and weaken inter-theoretical consistency.

While attachment and separation-individuation theories often focus on the mother as the primary caregiver, family systems theory can evaluate the emotional availability structure between the father and the child. Furthermore, this theory allows for discussion of emotional availability among other family members within the system, such as grandmother-child, grandfather-child, and sibling-sibling relationships. Therefore, family systems theory can address the structure of emotional availability from a broader perspective. Whereas attachment and separation-individuation theories consider emotional availability primarily during infancy, family systems theory evaluates emotional availability between parent and child across all stages of life. Additionally, most theories reflect characteristics of individualistic societies and do not sufficiently account for the influence of cultural context in explaining emotional availability. Since the meaning and expression of emotional availability vary across cultures (Oppenheim 2012), explanations independent of cultural context may limit the universality of the concept. For all these reasons, it seems possible to indicate that the mentioned theories hold both complementary and sometimes conflicting positions in explaining parental emotional availability. Each theory's perspective can be re-evaluated according to the context, culture, and developmental stages involved.

Conclusion

Parenting can be considered one of the most important factors affecting a child's development, behavior, and psychological health. The sensitive fulfillment of physical and emotional needs by parents strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child, supporting the child's healthy development (Havighurst et al. 2020). This study compiles various research to provide comprehensive information on the concept of parental emotional availability, which reflects the emotional quality of the reciprocal relationship between parent and child. In this line, the current study covers its definition, dimensions, assessment, effects on development and psychological health, related theoretical approaches, and factors influencing emotional availability. The collected studies (Gökçe and Yılmaz 2018, Duman and Tuzgöl-Dost 2024, Özaydın and Soyçiğit 2024) show a positive relationship between having an emotionally available parent and variables such as well-being, general psychological health, and psychological resilience. On the other hand, there is a negative relationship between having an emotionally available parent and variables such as loneliness, reactive-proactive aggression, and gaming addiction (Özdoğan and Cenkseven-Önder 2018, Dadandı and Aydın 2024, Ülkümen and Aktan 2025). Moreover, both parental and child emotional availability influence numerous psychological and social factors while also being affected by various factors themselves. Further research is needed to more clearly determine the factors affecting parental emotional availability and the concept's effects on psychological health, child development, and psychopathology.

The relatively fewer studies on parental emotional availability in Türkiye compared to the international literature indicates that the concept still retains its relevance. Including variables that have the potential to influence this concept in future research could provide insights into preventing negative outcomes before they occur and ways to strengthen emotional availability. Conducting studies on emotional availability across different cultures is important for understanding the cross-cultural validity of the concept. The literature emphasizes that emotionally available parenting may vary from culture to culture (Oppenheim 2012). In Türkiye, there is no culturally specific measurement tool developed for this concept. Therefore, future studies could focus on developing culturally adapted emotional availability scales for

parents as well as for children, adolescents, and adults. Longitudinal studies on this topic could provide detailed information about the emergence, changes over time, and triggering factors of emotional availability. Additionally, emotional availability can be used as a dependent, independent, mediating, or moderating variable in research to reveal its various roles. Profile analyses could determine emotional availability profiles of parents in Türkiye. Investigating parental emotional availability in both stressful and non-stressful situations or life events would allow for comparisons between findings. Future research might also focus on characteristics such as excessive emotional availability. Moreover, more studies examining the relationships between parental emotional availability and neuroscientific indicators would enhance the understanding of the interplay between these concepts.

Qualitative studies can be conducted to explore what parental emotional availability means in different cultures and in Türkiye, its characteristics, and culturally specific emotionally available attitudes, responses, and behaviors. Within this scope, a study could also reveal similarities and differences between mothers' and fathers' emotionally available behaviors. On the other hand, group psychological counseling, psychoeducation, and intervention programs aimed at parents can be designed to enhance emotional availability. Additionally, awareness-raising initiatives can be carried out for individuals who have not yet become parents as well as for parents, focusing on the definition, importance, psychological and neuroscientific effects of emotional availability, and ways to improve it. Policymakers, family counseling centers, educational institutions, and other relevant organizations can collaborate to design activities, both digital and non-digital, that strengthen emotional availability. Future studies on parental emotional availability will not only enhance the psychological well-being of parents and children but also contribute to the development of society as a whole.

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Authors Contributions: The author(s) have declared that they have made a significant scientific contribution to the study and have assisted in the preparation or revision of the manuscript

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Ethical Approval: This review study does not require ethical clearance.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared.

Financial Disclosure: No financial support was declared for this study..