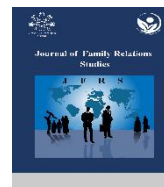




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Research Paper

The Role of Maternal Variables in Predicting Maternal Gatekeeping Performance in Mothers of Iranian Children Aged 2 to 5 Years



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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study investigates maternal gatekeeping behaviors and their relationship with demographic and psychosocial factors among Iranian mothers with children aged 2-5 years. Despite the importance of maternal gatekeeping in child development, comprehensive research on maternal gatekeeping within the Iranian cultural context is lacking. This descriptive-correlational study aimed to identify the predominant type of maternal gatekeeping and examine its relationship with marital satisfaction, employment status, age, and education level.

Methods: A sample of 386 mothers, recruited through social media platforms, completed the Maternal Gatekeeping Questionnaire (MGK-P) and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and one-way ANOVA.

Results: Results revealed that the dominant type of maternal gatekeeping in Iran was "Traditional gate blockers." Marital satisfaction showed significant correlations with all gatekeeping dimensions: positive with encouragement ($r=0.517$, $p<0.01$) and negative with discouragement ($r=-0.341$, $p<0.01$) and control ($r=-0.168$, $p<0.01$). Maternal age correlated positively only with the discouragement dimension ($r=0.114$, $p<0.05$). Child gender significantly influenced the control dimension ($p=0.007$), with mothers exerting more control over sons. Employment status and education level showed no significant relationships with gatekeeping dimensions.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that marital satisfaction is the strongest predictor of maternal gatekeeping behaviors in Iranian mothers. The prevalence of the "Traditional gate blocker" pattern highlights the influence of cultural factors and gender expectations on maternal roles in Iranian society. This study contributes to understanding maternal gatekeeping dynamics in Iran and informs the development of culturally sensitive family interventions.

1. Introduction

Although mothers are still primarily viewed as the primary caregivers of children within family structures, societal changes over the past four decades have led to an increased role of fathers in child-rearing. Research has shown that active paternal involvement contributes to positive child development (Nafisah et al., 2023; Hajkhodadadi et al., 2024; Lamb, 1981; Macdonald,

2009; Tu et al., 2014). This research suggests that children whose fathers are actively involved in child-rearing are more likely to develop secure attachments with their fathers, have more positive peer relationships, experience greater life satisfaction, and exhibit fewer behavioral problems (Cimino et al., 2024; Caldera, 2004; Dubowitz et al., 2001; Kennedy et al., 2015; Quan, He, & Li, 2023).

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However, research has also shown that maternal behaviors play a significant role in shaping father-child interactions. These effects are evident both in fathers' individual parenting and in the co-parenting process (Coley & Morris, 2002; Paulson et al., 2011). Co-parenting is defined as the shared responsibility between parents in the upbringing and socialization of children (McHale et al., 2019). This multifaceted process is influenced by various contexts that each parent brings to their relationship with the child (Feinberg, 2003). Although co-parenting is a complex and reciprocal process, studies indicate that mothers, due to their historical position in the family, often have a greater influence on father-child interactions (Doherty et al., 1998). This influential role of mothers in shaping father-child interactions led researchers to explore the concept of maternal gatekeeping.

The concept of maternal gatekeeping has evolved significantly since its introduction. Initially defined by De Luccie (1995) as mothers' role in mediating father-child relationships, and later expanded by Allen and Hawkins (1999) to include behaviors that influence father involvement, gatekeeping has emerged as a crucial factor in family dynamics. While early research primarily focused on restrictive behaviors (Fagan & Barnett, 2003), subsequent studies revealed that mothers can also facilitate father-child interactions (Roy & Dyson, 2005; Sano et al., 2008).

A significant advancement came with Puhlman and Pasley's (2013) three-dimensional model, which defines maternal gatekeeping as 'a set of parental interactions in which mothers continuously influence fathers' involvement through controlling, facilitating, and limiting behaviors.' This model identifies three key dimensions: control (mothers' influence as family decision-makers), encouragement (support for father involvement through positive feedback), and discouragement (behaviors that portray fathers' involvement as ineffective or unwanted). In summary, Puhlman and Pasley (2013), by presenting this three-dimensional model, demonstrate that fathers' involvement in parenting is influenced by a wide range of complex interactions with mothers. This model, by focusing on the dimensions of control, encouragement, and discouragement, offers a deeper insight into the factors that affect parental dynamics and each parent's contribution to child-rearing.

Based on the combination of different scores in each dimension, mothers are categorized into two groups: polarized and ambivalent mothers. Polarized mothers: These mothers clearly express their preferences regarding father involvement. They either exhibit high encouragement with low discouragement or vice versa. These mothers fall into four distinct patterns: Traditional gate blockers, Passive gate snubbers, Facilitative gate openers, and Passive gate welcomers.

Ambivalent mothers: These mothers lack clear priorities regarding father involvement and often send mixed messages about it. They may simultaneously welcome and resist fathers' presence. These mothers are also categorized into four groups: Confused gate managers, Apathetic gate managers, Opinionated gate watchers, and Invisible gate ignorers. Once it was established that mothers strongly influence fathers' level of involvement in parenting, researchers began investigating the factors that affect these interactions to determine what variables are associated with and impact fathers' participation.

Research on the predictors of maternal gatekeeping has identified several key psychological factors. In a seminal study, Gaunt (2008) found that mothers who engaged in more gatekeeping behaviors typically showed lower self-confidence, stronger feminine gender orientation, and more prominent maternal identity. Building on this work, Kulik and Tsoref (2010) demonstrated that parenting self-efficacy and marital satisfaction significantly predicted gatekeeping behaviors, with mothers who felt more competent in their parenting role and reported higher marital satisfaction showing greater inclination to involve fathers in childrearing (Mikaeili et al., 2025).

A review of various backgrounds showed that mothers who have higher perfectionistic expectations of fathers in parenting experience more psychological problems, have a less stable romantic relationship, and report lower marital satisfaction. These mothers also display higher levels of gatekeeping (Camisasca et al., 2019; Feinberg, 2003; McHale et al., 2019; Tu et al., 2014).

Marital satisfaction is a complex psychological construct that reflects spouses' subjective evaluation of their marital relationship across multiple dimensions, including communication, conflict resolution, and emotional intimacy (Ashayeri et al., 2024). Research has consistently shown that marital satisfaction significantly influences parenting behaviors and family dynamics (Camisasca et al., 2019). In the context of maternal gatekeeping, marital satisfaction plays a particularly crucial role as it shapes mothers' willingness to include fathers in childcare activities. Studies have demonstrated that mothers with higher marital satisfaction tend to exhibit more facilitative gatekeeping behaviors, actively encouraging father involvement in childcare (McHale et al., 2019). This positive association may be attributed to greater trust and cooperation between spouses, as well as more positive perceptions of paternal competence. Conversely, mothers experiencing lower marital satisfaction often display more restrictive gatekeeping behaviors, potentially using their role as primary caregivers to limit father-child interactions (Kaneko et al., 2020). This relationship between marital satisfaction and maternal gatekeeping has important implications for both child development and family

functioning, as it influences the quality and quantity of father involvement in child-rearing. These findings highlight the importance of considering individual and relational factors in reducing gatekeeping behaviors and improving parental interactions.

Understanding the cultural context of maternal gatekeeping is crucial, as Puhlman and Pasley (2013), along with Allen and Hawkins (1999), emphasize that this model should be applied across different societies and cultures, with careful consideration of demographic variables that vary within societies (Puhlman, Daniel, Pasley, & Kay, 2017). Cross-cultural research has revealed significant variations in gatekeeping patterns. For instance, studies in East Asia show contrasting results: Wang Yee and colleagues (2016) found that gatekeeping was more prevalent among Chinese mothers compared to Korean mothers (Yee et al., 2016; Yee & Han, 2018). Similarly, Aktaş & Aydın (2020) found that facilitative gatekeeping was most common among Turkish mothers (Aktaş & Aydın, 2020). However, Wang Yee and colleagues (2020) reported that restrictive gatekeeping was predominant among both Chinese and Korean mothers.

The relationship between demographic factors and gatekeeping also varies culturally. Aktaş & Aydın (2020) found no significant relationship between parental age, length of marriage, encouragement, and the level of maternal control with mothers' education level in Turkey. In contrast, Tu, Yi-Chan (2014) observed a significant negative relationship between mothers' education level, their employment activity, and gatekeeping behaviors in Taiwan (Tu et al., 2014).

These cross-cultural comparisons illustrate how social norms and values influence maternal gatekeeping behaviors. While Turkish mothers tend to lean more towards facilitative gatekeeping, Chinese and Korean mothers are more inclined toward restrictive gatekeeping behaviors. Additionally, while education level in Turkey appears to have no relation to gatekeeping behaviors, in other regions like Taiwan, it seems to have a significant effect.

In Iran's cultural context, mothers traditionally play a central role in managing the household and raising children, yet recent social and economic changes have introduced new expectations and responsibilities. Research shows that regardless of their children's age, parents see themselves as responsible for their well-being and care (Fallahi et al., 2020). Recent social and cultural changes, including the rise in women's education levels, shifts in employment patterns, and changes in attitudes toward marital relationships, have significantly impacted how mothers interact with their children and spouses. These changes have profoundly transformed the role of mothers in the family and society.

Despite the significant role of maternal gatekeeping in

family dynamics, comprehensive research examining this phenomenon within the Iranian cultural context remains limited. This study aims to address this gap by first identifying the predominant type of maternal gatekeeping among Iranian mothers, and then investigating how maternal variables such as marital satisfaction, employment status, age, and education level influence these gatekeeping behaviors among mothers of children aged 2-5 years. This developmental period is particularly critical as parental behaviors during early childhood can have lasting effects on children's outcomes. The findings could inform family specialists, psychologists, and social policymakers in developing culturally-sensitive interventions to enhance co-parenting relationships and support healthy child development in Iranian families (Fallahi et al., 2020).

General Purpose:

This study aims to investigate maternal gatekeeping behaviors and their relationship with maternal variables among Iranian mothers with children aged 2-5 years.

Specific Objectives:

1. Identify the predominant type of maternal gatekeeping among Iranian mothers.
2. Examine the relationship between maternal variables (marital satisfaction, employment status, age, and education) and maternal gatekeeping behaviors.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the relationship between co-parenting strategies and maternal self-efficacy. The statistical population included all Iranian mothers with children aged 2 to 5 years in 2022, who had access to social media platforms (Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.). This age group was selected due to the importance of developing co-parenting strategies and their impact on the socio-emotional development of children during early childhood.

A convenience sampling method was used, and Cochran's formula was applied to determine the sample size, resulting in a final sample of 386 participants. The participants were recruited through targeted advertisements on social media platforms and via connections with parent-related groups. This formula was chosen for its high precision in estimating the sample size for large populations, ensuring sufficient statistical power for correlation analyses. Social media was selected as a tool for participant recruitment due to its accessibility, although this method might limit the sample to tech-savvy mothers, potentially reducing sample diversity. However, efforts were made to maintain demographic diversity by accessing various parenting groups.

Inclusion criteria for the study required mothers to have children between the ages of 2 and 5, with biological fathers living in the same household and actively involved in co-parenting. This criterion was set to minimize the

effects of differing family structures. Additionally, mothers who failed to answer at least 90% of the questions on each questionnaire were excluded to ensure data quality and coherence. Moreover, participants who provided invalid or duplicate data were also removed from the final analysis.

Instruments

Demographic Information Questionnaire: This section includes questions about the duration of marriage, number of children, age of the child, educational level of the mother and her spouse, the age of the mother, employment status, and working hours of the mother.

Maternal Gatekeeping Questionnaire (MGK-P): This 15-item questionnaire, developed by Puhlman and Pasley (2017), measures three dimensions: control, encouragement, and discouragement. Responses are rated on a seven-point Likert scale (0 = never to 6 = always). The mean score of each dimension is calculated, with higher scores indicating the dominant maternal gatekeeping tactic. According to the authors, the convergent validity of this questionnaire with Feinberg's co-parenting scale (2003) showed significant correlations. However, in their research on divergent validity, they found no significant correlations between the control dimension of this scale and the subscale of Allen and Hawkins' questionnaire ($r = 0.29, p < 0.001$). Overall, there was no significant relationship between this study and the scales developed by Allen and Hawkins (1999) and Schoppe-Sullivan (2008). The internal consistency reliability coefficients for the control, encouragement, and discouragement dimensions were 0.73, 0.76, and 0.80, respectively. In the present study, the initial validity and reliability of this tool were established for the first time. The validation analysis demonstrated adequate psychometric properties through multiple approaches. The confirmatory factor analysis showed acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.72$, RMSEA = 0.06, CFI = 0.91), while convergent validity was supported by significant correlations with marital satisfaction. Discriminant validity was confirmed through HTMT ratios (0.21-0.53), and reliability coefficients ($\alpha = 0.73$ -0.80) indicated satisfactory internal consistency across all dimensions, which aligns well with the original psychometric properties reported by Puhlman and Pasley (2017) in their initial validation study. The internal consistency reliability coefficients ranged from 0.73 to 0.80, with composite reliability ranging from 0.72 to 0.81, indicating appropriate psychometric properties for use in the Iranian population. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three dimensions were 0.71-0.79.

Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (ENRICH): The 47-item ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was developed by Olson (1998) and includes 12 subscales: Idealistic Distortion, Marital Satisfaction, Personality Issues, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Relationship, Marriage and Children, Family and Friends, Egalitarian Roles, and Religious Orientation. This tool uses a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree), with scores ranging from one to five for each item. The original questionnaire demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Olson, Fournier, and Druckman (1998) reporting Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.68 to 0.90 for the subscales. For the Persian version, Soleymanian (1994) conducted a validation study that demonstrated concurrent validity ($r = 0.92, p < .001$) and internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$) (Asoodeh et al., 2011). In the current study, the internal consistency reliability was excellent ($\alpha = 0.851$).

Procedure:

Initially, the study questionnaires were designed using specialized software and distributed through social media platforms (Instagram pages, Telegram, and WhatsApp groups). An online announcement invited mothers with children aged 2-5 to voluntarily complete the questionnaires. After collecting the data, the analysis was conducted using SPSS-26 software. To address the research questions and hypotheses, both descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage for qualitative variables, and measures of central tendency and dispersion for quantitative variables) and inferential statistics (normality tests, Pearson or Spearman correlation coefficients, and one-way ANOVA) were employed using SPSS-26.

In this study, we employed a classification method for maternal gatekeeping behaviors similar to that used by Puhlman and Pasley (2013) (Table 1). This approach involves the intersection of three sub-dimensions of maternal gatekeeping: control, encouragement, and discouragement. By cross-tabulating these dimensions, we derived eight distinct subtypes of maternal gatekeeping behaviors. Each participant's responses were analyzed and categorized into one of these eight subtypes based on their scores across the three sub-dimensions. Following this classification, we calculated the frequency values for each subtype to determine their prevalence within our sample. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of the various manifestations of maternal gatekeeping.

Table 1. Types of Gatekeeping

Types of gatekeeping	Types of gatekeeping	Dimension of gatekeeping		
		Control	Discouragement	Encouragement
Polarized gatekeepers	Traditional gate blockers	low	high	high
	Passive gate snubbers	low	high	low
	Facilitative gate openers	high	low	high
Ambivalent gatekeepers	Passive gate welcomer	high	low	low
	Confused gate manager	high	high	high
	Apathetic gate managers	low	low	high
	Opinionated gate watchers	high	high	low
	Invisible gate ignorers	low	low	low

3. Results

The participants consisted of 386 mothers with a mean age of 34.5 years ($SD = 5.08$, range = 21-50 years). Regarding employment status, 251 (65%) were homemakers, 88 (22.8%) were employed full-time, and 47 (12.2%) worked part-time. In terms of education, 91 (23.50%) had a diploma or lower education, 199 (51.55%) held a bachelor's degree, and 96 (24.88%) had a master's degree or higher. The mean age of their children was 3.6 years ($SD = 1.4$). The sample included 194 (50.26%) boys and 192 (49.74%) girls.

The mean marital satisfaction score in the studied sample was 3.35, with a standard deviation of 0.81, indicating a relatively moderate to high level of marital satisfaction. The participants' mean age was 34.45 years, with a

standard deviation of 5.08. Among the dimensions of maternal gatekeeping, the encouragement and support dimension had the highest mean score at 4.32 (standard deviation of 1.09), suggesting that this aspect plays the most significant role in gatekeeping behaviors among couples. Following that, the control dimension had a mean score of 2.11 (standard deviation of 1.16), and the discouragement dimension had the lowest mean at 2.01 (standard deviation of 1.06). Skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within the acceptable range (between -2 and +2), indicating a normal distribution of the data. These findings suggest that supportive and encouraging behaviors are predominant in the gatekeeping practices of the couples in the sample, while controlling and discouraging behaviors are less prevalent.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the research variables, including marital satisfaction, age, and dimensions of maternal gatekeeping (mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis)

Variable	Subscale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Marital Satisfaction		35.3	0.81	-0.149	-0.966
Age		34.45	5.08	-0.150	0.115
Gatekeeping Dimensions	Control	2.11	1.16	0.407	-0.226
	Encouragement and Support	4.32	1.09	-0.639	-0.008
	Discouragement	2.01	1.06	0.599	0.208

To understand the distribution patterns of maternal gatekeeping behaviors in the sample, participants were classified into different types based on their scores across

the three gatekeeping dimensions (control, encouragement, and discouragement). The frequency distribution of these gatekeeping types is presented in Table3.

Table 3. The frequency distribution and percentage of different types of gatekeeping behaviors in the studied sample

Types of gatekeeping	Frequency	Percent
Traditional gate blockers	78	20.2
Passive gate snubbers	51	13.2
Facilitative gate openers	33	8.5
Passive gate welcomer	76	19.7
Confused gate manager	42	10.9
Apathetic gate managers	30	7.8
Opinionated gate watchers	17	4.4
Invisible gate ignorers	59	15.3
Total	386	100.0

Analysis of the gatekeeping patterns revealed that traditional gate blockers (20.2%) and passive gate welcomers (19.7%) were the most prevalent types, indicating a split between mothers who either actively or passively control father involvement. In contrast, apathetic gate managers (7.8%) and opinionated gate watchers

(4.4%) were the least common types.

Examining the relationship between employment status and gatekeeping dimensions, in all cases, the significance level (p-value) is greater than 0.05. This result indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances for all variables across different groups (various educational

levels and employment statuses) holds. In other words, there is no significant difference between the variances of different groups, allowing for the use of parametric tests like ANOVA to compare means. The statistical test results showed no significant difference in the dimensions of gatekeeping (control: $F=1.773$, $p=0.171$, encouragement: $F=0.732$, $p=0.481$, discouragement: $F=1.180$, $p=0.308$) based on the employment status of mothers.

Regarding educational level, the statistical test results

showed that there is no significant difference in the dimensions of gatekeeping (control: $F=0.060$, $p=0.941$, encouragement: $F=0.312$, $p=0.732$, discouragement: $F=1.136$, $p=0.322$) based on the educational level of mothers. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the employment status and educational level of mothers have no significant relationship with the dimensions of gatekeeping (control, encouragement, and discouragement).

Table 4. Analysis of Variance Results for Maternal Gatekeeping Dimensions Based on Demographics and Child Gender

Variables	Groups	Mean	F/t*	p	Levene's Test	Sig.Level
Education Level						
Control	Diploma	3.27	0.060	0.941	1.310	0.264
	Bachelor's	3.31				
	Master's+	3.29				
Encouragement	Diploma	4.28	0.312	0.732	0.950	0.430
	Bachelor's	4.35				
	Master's+	4.33				
Discouragement	Diploma	2.11	1.136	0.322	0.876	0.478
	Bachelor's	1.98				
	Master's+	1.94				
Employment Status						
Control	Full-time	3.41	1.773	0.171	0.930	0.447
	Part-time	3.25				
	Homemaker	3.22				
Encouragement	Full-time	4.28	0.732	0.481	0.328	0.859
	Part-time	4.35				
	Homemaker	4.33				
Discouragement	Full-time	2.08	1.180	0.308	0.633	0.640
	Part-time	1.95				
	Homemaker	2.00				
Child Gender						
Control	Girls	3.27	7.24	0.007	-	-
	Boys	3.95				
Encouragement	Girls	4.32	0.014	0.906	-	-
	Boys	4.33				
Discouragement	Girls	2.06	0.622	0.431	-	-
	Boys	1.97				

Analysis of age-related effects on gatekeeping dimensions revealed a complex pattern. The statistical analysis indicated a positive and significant correlation between discouragement and mothers' age ($r=0.114$, $p<0.05$), suggesting that as mothers age, their level of discouragement in gatekeeping increases. However, mothers' age showed no significant relationship with levels of encouragement ($r=0.006$, $p>0.05$) or control ($r=0.088$, $p>0.05$).

Examination of marital satisfaction's relationship with gatekeeping dimensions yielded significant results across

all dimensions. The analysis revealed a negative and significant correlation between discouragement and marital satisfaction ($r=-0.341$, $p<0.01$), while encouragement showed a positive and significant correlation ($r=0.517$, $p<0.01$). Control also demonstrated a negative and significant correlation with marital satisfaction ($r=-0.168$, $p<0.01$). These findings indicate that mothers with higher marital satisfaction report greater levels of encouragement in gatekeeping and lower levels of discouragement and control.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Coefficients between the Dimensions of Gatekeeping (Discouragement, Encouragement, and Control) with Age and Marital Satisfaction

Variable	Discouragement	Encouragement	Control
Age	0.114*	0.006	0.088
Marital Satisfaction	-0.341**	0.517**	-0.168**

One of the exploratory questions examined in this study was whether the scores of mothers' gatekeeping dimensions vary according to the gender of their children.

The results indicate that there is a significant difference in the control dimension, with mothers exerting more control over sons ($M=3.95$) than over daughters ($M=3.27$).

($p=0.007$). However, no significant differences were observed in the dimensions of encouragement ($p=0.906$) and discouragement ($p=0.431$), suggesting that, in these dimensions, the gender of the child does not have a significant impact on mothers' gatekeeping behaviors.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate maternal gatekeeping behaviors and their relationship with maternal variables among Iranian mothers with children aged 2-5 years. Using Puhlman and Pasley's (2013) three-dimensional model of control, encouragement, and discouragement, this research sought to understand how maternal gatekeeping manifests in Iranian society and its associations with key maternal variables, including marital satisfaction, employment status, age, and education level. The study was particularly focused on examining these relationships within the unique cultural context of Iranian families, where traditional values and gender roles significantly influence parenting practices. Our findings revealed that the "Traditional gate blocker" pattern, characterized by high control and low encouragement, emerged as the dominant type of maternal gatekeeping among Iranian mothers. This pattern appears to reflect deeply embedded cultural values and gender role expectations in Iranian family structures, where mothers traditionally play a central role in managing households and child-rearing responsibilities.

The most significant finding was the comprehensive relationship between marital satisfaction and maternal gatekeeping dimensions. Higher marital satisfaction showed positive correlations with encouragement behaviors while demonstrating negative correlations with both control and discouragement dimensions (Camisasca et al., 2019; Feinberg, 2003; McHale et al., 2019). This relationship appears to work through connected pathways, where mothers with higher marital satisfaction tend to view co-parenting more positively and actively encourage father involvement, likely because their satisfying relationships create an environment of trust and mutual support. These findings suggest that marital satisfaction serves as a crucial foundation for healthy co-parenting practices.

Regarding demographic variables, our analysis revealed that maternal age was significantly associated only with the discouragement dimension, with older mothers showing higher levels of discouraging behaviors. This finding aligns with previous research (Aktaş & Aydın, 2020; Kulik & Tsoref, 2010; Yee et al., 2016) and may be attributed to older mothers' more established parenting patterns and stronger internal locus of control (Camberis et al., 2016). Educational level showed no significant relationship with gatekeeping dimensions, consistent with some studies (Kaneko & Hamaguchi, 2020; Wang et al.,

2024) but contrasting with others (Tu et al., 2014), suggesting that educational attainment may have less influence on gatekeeping behaviors in the Iranian context than in some other cultures.

The influence of child gender emerged as a significant factor in maternal gatekeeping, particularly in the control dimension. Mothers exhibited more controlling behaviors with sons compared to daughters, while showing greater protective gatekeeping in father-daughter relationships. This gender-differentiated pattern aligns with findings from similar cultural contexts (Aktaş & Aydın, 2020) and reflects broader cultural patterns in Iranian society. In cultures where mothers are primarily viewed as caregivers, such as Iran and Turkey, mothers often seek to "protect" daughters from perceived harsh paternal influences and encourage their engagement in traditional feminine activities, thereby limiting fathers' involvement in these areas.

This pattern of traditional maternal gatekeeping observed in Iranian society parallels findings from other cultural contexts. Puhlman and Pasley (2013) found similar patterns in rural and low-income communities in the United States, while studies in South Korea and China revealed comparable influences of traditional gender roles on gatekeeping behaviors (Yee & Han, 2018). In Iran, the role of mothers as primary caregivers is deeply rooted in cultural and religious values, which may explain their tendency toward greater control and limited father involvement in child-rearing. This cultural foundation is further supported by Jafary et al.'s (2022) finding of high maternal identity levels (3.8/5) among Iranian women, suggesting that gender identity and cultural values significantly shape gatekeeping behaviors.

Our findings regarding employment status revealed no significant differences in gatekeeping dimensions among mothers with different employment situations, aligning with studies from China (Yee, Kim, Cheping, & Han, 2016) and Japan (Kaneko & Hamaguchi, 2020), but contrasting with findings from Korea and Taiwan (Tu et al., 2014). This consistency across employment status suggests that in societies with strong traditional values, such as Iran and China, cultural factors may override the potential influence of employment on maternal gatekeeping behaviors. However, specific work conditions, such as non-standard working hours or research-related positions, might influence gatekeeping patterns differently, as noted in Japanese studies (Kaneko & Hamaguchi, 2020).

The role of maternal identity emerges as a crucial factor in understanding gatekeeping behaviors in the Iranian context. Gaunt's (2008) assertion that mothers' gender identity moderates the relationship between personality traits and gatekeeping behaviors is particularly relevant in Iranian society, where maternal identity levels are notably high (Jafary et al., 2022). This strong maternal identity,

combined with traditional cultural values, appears to override the potential effects of socioeconomic factors like education and employment on gatekeeping behaviors, suggesting that cultural and identity factors may be more influential than demographic variables in shaping maternal gatekeeping patterns.

Limitations: The study is limited by its focus on mothers with children aged 2-5 years, restrictions in data collection methods, and the inability to deeply examine cultural and personality factors in maternal gatekeeping behaviors.

Research Recommendations: Future research would benefit from employing mixed-method approaches to deepen our understanding of maternal gatekeeping in the Iranian context. This includes exploring the mechanisms through which marital satisfaction influences gatekeeping behaviors, investigating the role of personality factors and parenting styles in maternal gatekeeping, and examining how cultural values and maternal identity interact with gatekeeping behaviors. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in understanding how gatekeeping patterns evolve across children's developmental stages and how they might be influenced by changes in family dynamics over time. Such comprehensive research approaches would provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between cultural, personal, and relational factors in shaping maternal gatekeeping behaviors.

Practical Implications: The age-related increase in discouraging behaviors and gender-differentiated gatekeeping patterns highlight the need for targeted interventions that consider both parental age and child gender. These findings have important implications for family therapists and counselors working with Iranian families, suggesting the need for culturally sensitive approaches that acknowledge the role of traditional values while promoting healthy father involvement.

This study provides significant insights into maternal gatekeeping patterns in Iranian society. The predominance of the "traditional blocker" pattern, characterized by high control and low encouragement, reflects the strong influence of cultural values and gender expectations. While demographic factors such as education and employment status showed limited impact, marital satisfaction emerged as a crucial predictor of gatekeeping behaviors. This suggests that interventions aimed at improving co-parenting relationships should focus on enhancing marital satisfaction and communication between parents.

5. Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

In this study, both in-person and online participants were provided with a brief explanation of the research objectives and procedures to ensure that they could

voluntarily and willingly complete the questionnaires. No personal information, other than the data requested in the questionnaire, was collected either overtly or covertly. Since the questionnaires were distributed online via a link, and there was no direct interaction between the participants and the researcher, the researcher made all necessary efforts to follow up with participants through repeated phone calls, messages on social media, and in-person visits when needed.

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Authors' contributions

Ali Reza Pezhman is the sole author of this manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

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