



THE IMPACT OF MOTHERS' SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION HABITS ON CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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Abstract

Enhancing sensitivity to the climate crisis requires the early introduction of sustainable consumption habits within the family. This study examines the influence of mothers' sustainable consumption practices on children's environmental awareness. Data obtained through in-depth interviews were analyzed using the descriptive analysis. During the interview, mothers were asked questions regarding environmental awareness, non-essential purchasing, saving, reusability, and their children's sustainable consumption behaviors. The findings reveal that mothers act as role models in behaviors such as recycling, energy conservation, and water saving; however, they face challenges in fully practicing sustainable consumption due to economic constraints and a lack of information. While environmental activities organized in private schools are found to be supportive in raising awareness among children, the consumerist influence of popular culture and advertising weakens families' efforts. The study highlights the importance of economically accessible products, media literacy education, robust recycling infrastructure, and family-oriented environmental activities in promoting sustainable consumption. In conclusion, mothers' role modeling plays a key role in the dissemination of sustainability awareness within the family. This critical role of mothers contributes not only to the enhancement of environmental awareness but also to the upbringing of future generations who are more environmentally conscious.

Keywords : Sustainable Consumption; Environmental Awareness; Mothers as Role Models; Recycling Behavior.

Jel Classification : D12; D13; Q56.

ANNELERİN SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİR TÜKETİM ALIŞKANLIKLARININ ÇOCUKLARIN ÇEVRE BİLİNCİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

Öz

İklim krizine karşı duyarlılığın artırılmasında sürdürülebilir tüketim alışkanlıklarının aile içinde erken yaşta kazandırılması büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma, annelerin sürdürülebilir tüketim alışkanlıklarının çocukların çevre bilinci üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Derinlemesine görüşmelerden elde edilen veriler betimsel analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiştir. Görüşme sırasında annelere, çevre duyarlılığı, ihtiyaç dışarı satın

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alma davranışları, tasarruf, yeniden kullanılabilirlik ve çocukların sürdürülebilir tüketim davranışlarına ilişkin sorular yöneltilmiştir. Bulgular, annelerin geri dönüşüm, enerji ve su tasarrufu gibi davranışlarda rol model olduklarını, ancak ekonomik kısıtlar ve bilgi eksiklikleri nedeniyle sürdürülebilir tüketimi tam olarak uygulamakta güçlük yaşadıklarını göstermektedir. Özel okullarda düzenlenen çevre etkinlikleri çocukların farkındalık yaratmada destekleyici bulunurken, popüler kültür ve reklamların tüketimi teşvik eden etkileri ailelerin çabalarını zayıflatmaktadır. Araştırma, sürdürülebilir tüketimin yaygınlaştırılması için ekonomik olarak erişilebilir ürünler, medya okuryazarlığı eğitimleri, güçlü geri dönüşüm altyapısı ve aile odaklı çevre etkinliklerinin önemine işaret etmektedir. Sonuç olarak, annelerin çocuklarına rol model olması, sürdürülebilirlik bilincinin aile içinde yaygınlaşmasında kilit bir rol oynamaktadır. Annelerin bu kritik rolü, yalnızca çevresel farkındalığın artmasına değil, aynı zamanda gelecekte daha duyarlı nesiller yetişmesine katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Sürdürülebilir Tüketim; Çevresel Farkındalık; Rol Model Olarak Anneler; Geri Dönüşüm Davranışı.

Jel Sınıflandırılması : D12; D13; Q56.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability gained international prominence with the publication of the Brundtland Report Our Common Future (1987), prepared in cooperation with the United Nations and the World Commission on Environment and Development. In this report, sustainability was defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” thereby outlining the concept in a holistic and systematic manner. In this context, sustainability does not merely denote continuity and permanence; it also emphasizes the necessity of addressing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions together to ensure the long-term viability of societies (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). However, rapid population growth and increasing levels of consumption have led to the rapid depletion of resources and environmental degradation, posing a serious risk that threatens quality of life in the future. Therefore, sustainability in consumption has become an increasingly critical field of research.

Among the United Nations’ post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “Responsible Consumption and Production” (SDG 12) explicitly underscores the importance of promoting sustainable consumption behaviors. Accordingly, the development of sustainable consumption habits emerges not only as an individual preference but also as a social imperative. At this point, households emerge as a critical role as the fundamental actors in the transition to sustainable living. Household practices are decisive in areas that are the focus of daily consumption—namely food, energy, and water use. In particular, women and mothers have a significant impact on the adoption of sustainable consumption behaviors and their transmission to children. By serving as role models in environmentally friendly behaviors such as recycling, and energy and water conservation, mothers support children in acquiring environmental awareness at an early age and in adopting a sustainable lifestyle in later years. However, studies that directly address the impact of mothers’ consumption habits on children’s sustainability awareness are quite limited in the literature. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining, within the Turkish context, how mothers’ sustainable consumption habits influence their children’s environmental awareness. The study is based on a descriptive analysis of data obtained from in-depth interviews conducted with mothers.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the framework of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, the “responsible consumption and production goal” is one of the key targets that directly contributes to the environmental dimension of sustainable development. This goal aims to ensure the efficient use of resources in production and consumption processes, reduce waste generation, and promote the widespread adoption of environmentally friendly consumption habits (United Nations, 2015). While sustainable production targets the efficient use of natural resources and the minimization of environmental impacts, sustainable consumption envisages the conscious, responsible, and needs-oriented use of products arising from these production processes.

Sustainable behavior is defined as a set of coordinated activities carried out with the aim of protecting the environment and conserving resources, with the goal of safeguarding the well-being of future generations (Verdugo, 2012). The necessity of consumption for human survival naturally confers a “consumer identity.” Consumption refers to the process of searching for, purchasing, using, or disposing of a product or service with the aim of meeting needs (Odabaşı, 2006; Altunışık et al., 2014). Sustainable consumption, in turn, encompasses individuals’ minimization of their environmental impacts through the adoption of environmentally friendly behaviors such as preferring green products, engaging in recycling practices, and conserving energy and water (Gronow & Warde, 2001). In this regard, Wang et al. (2014) define sustainable consumption as a form of consumption that seeks to meet basic needs while reducing the use of natural resources, limiting harmful substances, and minimizing waste and pollution so as to protect the needs of future generations. According to Black and Cherrier (2010), sustainable consumption is not confined to the purchase of green products but also includes counter-consumption practices such as refusing, reducing, and reusing.

In recent years, energy use and emissions resulting from household consumption have become an increasingly serious concern. A study conducted in China revealed that household consumption contributes significantly to energy use and carbon emissions (Wang & Yang, 2016). Similarly, in the Norwegian context, Hoyer and Holden (2001) demonstrate that private households—including automobile transportation—constitute the largest share of land-based energy consumption nationwide, surpassing even the combined total of agriculture, fisheries, and industry. These findings reveal that in developed countries the environmental burden is largely shaped through households and underscore the necessity of disseminating sustainable lifestyles. Consequently, the adoption of low-cost, climate-friendly behaviors by individuals and households constitutes an important step in reducing their environmental impacts. Such behaviors can be summarized as using environmentally friendly transportation alternatives instead of private vehicles, considering the carbon footprint in food and transportation choices, reducing the consumption of single-use products, decreasing the amount of waste generated, and separating waste for recycling (Ivanova et al., 2020; Dubois et al., 2019).

The family, as the smallest unit of society, also stands out as the most important consumption unit. In this context, the family is not only a living unit but also one of the fundamental spheres where consumption decisions are made and implemented and where the social culture of consumption is shaped. This central position of the family also plays a decisive role in the adoption of sustainable lifestyles. Accordingly, a sustainable lifestyle constitutes a fundamental condition for protecting human living environments for future generations. For children—who will be the adults of the future—to understand and practice this lifestyle is an indispensable requirement for building a sustainable world. Research indicates that family bonds play a critical role in this process. In particular, a positive relationship has been established between parents’ environmental attitudes and children’s environmentally friendly behaviors (Wallenborn & Wilhite, 2014).

Children tend to adopt their parents’ values through imitation and reflect these values in their own behaviors. By promoting lifelong learning and sustainable values within the family, parents support the development of children’s environmental awareness (Adewunmi, 2025). Especially in the early stages of life, individuals can create positive changes in the environmental behaviors of those around them, which in turn leads to intergenerational learning flowing from children to parents (Peterson et al., 2019). Findings indicate that parental norms are strong determinants of sustainable consumption behaviors not only in childhood but also during young adulthood (Lučić & Uzelac, 2024). The research of Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2012) reveals that parents have a significant impact on shaping sustainable consumption habits among adolescents. The study emphasizes that the role-model effect of parents is particularly evident in the correct management of waste and the purchase of environmentally friendly products, whereas this effect remains limited in other areas such as energy consumption. Knibb and Taylor (2017) examine how sustainable consumption behaviors are integrated with parental identity in Western societies and state that mothers, in particular, consider this mode of consumption a moral obligation. The study shows that, through green consumption, mothers feel they are promoting their children’s well-being while also doing their part for the environment. The study by Birmingham and Venn (2025) shows that the responsibility of caring for young children still largely falls on women and that, for this reason, children more readily internalize their mothers’ environmentally friendly behaviors. In this context, a mother’s environmentally sensitive actions and attitudes significantly determine a child’s environmental

awareness and the formation of attitudes. The work of Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2009) on the process of ecological socialization shows that the affectionate emotional bond in mother-child relationships increase children's tendencies to identify with their mothers and to imitate their behaviors. Knafo and Schwartz (2012) demonstrate that this bond between mother and child is a determining factor in children's acquisition of sustainable consumption habits.

Another important issue is the pioneering role of women in sustainable consumption behaviors. Research shows that, compared to men, women are more sensitive to environmental and health-related issues and take a more active role in sustainable behaviors such as recycling and energy and water conservation (OECD, 2021). Kelan (2008) states that women have traditionally formed a stronger connection with sustainable consumption behaviors and determine 80% of household consumption. According to a study conducted in Japan by the Sumitomo Life Research Institute (1996), women assume a more active role in environmentally conscious consumption behaviors than men. Women more frequently engage in actions aimed at saving energy and resources in their daily lives (for example, turning off unnecessary lights, keeping air-conditioner temperatures at moderate levels, avoiding the use of paper towels, and preferring public transportation over private vehicles). The report also notes that, acting with a sense of environmental responsibility in their everyday consumer choices, women avoid purchasing beverages in non-returnable bottles, prefer products with refillable packaging, use products made from recycled materials, and choose organic and natural products more than synthetic ones (Grover et al., 1999). Similarly, the findings of Torgler et al. (2008), obtained from research conducted in Western and Eastern European countries, show that women attach greater importance to environmental responsibility and are more willing to contribute to environmental protection. This points to the potential of women to deliver environmental benefits through sustainable consumption behaviors at both the individual and societal levels.

Studies conducted in Türkiye present similar findings. Bulut et al. (2017) state that sustainable consumption awareness in Türkiye differs by gender and generation and that women act with a sense of environmental responsibility particularly in household consumption decisions. The study's findings emphasize that women tend to reuse products such as glass, tin, and paper or to rent instead of purchasing. Similarly, research conducted by Öztop and Güven (2006) reveals that women are among the key actors in sustainable consumption behaviors through their knowledge and practices aimed at ensuring energy efficiency in homes. The study emphasizes that women possess knowledge about energy-saving practices in daily life—such as lighting, heating, and the use of household electrical appliances—and that this knowledge plays a decisive role in the development of sustainable consumption habits within the household. A comprehensive study conducted by Adıgüzel and Güven (2024) demonstrates that environmentally friendly behaviors practiced by family members in their daily lives—such as saving energy, using recyclable products, and avoiding unnecessary purchases—play a determining role in the establishment of sustainable consumption habits. Findings from research conducted by Şahin (2024) also show that environmental sensitivity is higher among women than men.

The literature reviewed indicates that parents -especially mothers- hold a central position in sustainable consumption behaviors and in shaping children's environmental awareness. However, the limited number of studies that examine the role of mothers in this process in the Turkish context makes it necessary to investigate this issue more closely.

II. RESEARCH PURPOSE and QUESTIONS

This study aims to contribute to the promotion of sustainable consumption behaviors at the family level by examining mothers' sustainable consumption habits. Mothers are often the primary decision-makers in household consumption. Decisions regarding essential household needs, children's nutrition, and clothing are largely shaped by mothers' preferences and habits. Children, in turn, observe and imitate the behaviors of their parents, particularly their mothers. A mother with strong sustainability awareness can significantly influence children's adoption of environmentally friendly practices such as consuming environmentally friendly products, supporting recycling, saving energy, and choosing nature-friendly goods, thereby contributing to the reduction of the household carbon footprint. In this context, the aim of the study is to analyze mothers' sustainable consumption habits and to develop practical solutions for encouraging families to adopt low-carbon and environmentally friendly consumption behaviors.

In line with this aim, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are mothers' sustainable consumption habits, and how do these habits influence children's awareness of climate change and their environmentally friendly behaviors?
2. What kinds of solutions can be developed to promote mothers' sustainable consumption habits, thereby helping families reduce their carbon footprint and enhance environmental awareness.

III. METHODOLOGY

In collecting the research data, the in-depth interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was employed, and a semi-structured technique was applied in which the questions to be asked to the participants were prepared in advance. The preference for a qualitative method stemmed from its ability to capture subjective data such as individuals' feelings and thoughts, to investigate phenomena in their natural contexts, and to seek explanations for them (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2017). The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is a method in which the collected data are summarized and interpreted according to predetermined themes. In this method, frequent use is made of direct quotations from participants to effectively reflect their perspectives, and the findings are interpreted within a cause-and-effect framework (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The interview questions were prepared based on dimensions such as environmental sensitivity, non-essential purchasing, saving, and reusability from the sustainable consumption scale developed by Doğan et. al. (2015). In addition, participants were asked questions related to their children's sustainable consumption behaviors. The semi-structured interview form was submitted to two faculty members in the field of communication sciences for evaluation in order to ensure the validity of the study. Based on their feedback, the form was reviewed for clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensibility, and necessary revisions were made before finalization. During the interviews, participants' responses were repeated by the researcher to secure confirmation, and any potential misunderstandings were corrected. To enhance reliability, a voice recorder was used to prevent data loss. Furthermore, detailed descriptions and direct quotations from participants were included, and the consistency of the responses was evaluated by both the student and the advisor.

The research population consisted of mothers residing in Niğde, Türkiye. Mothers were selected as the focus group due to their central role in household consumption decisions and their influence on shaping family consumption practices. The sample was determined using purposive sampling, which is commonly employed in qualitative research to obtain in-depth information from participants who are most relevant to the research objectives (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2017). When selecting participants, diversity in terms of age, education level, and occupation was deliberately considered in order to capture a range of perspectives on sustainable consumption practices. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 55, and they represented different educational backgrounds and occupational groups, including homemakers, public-sector employees, and private-sector workers. A total of 20 one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted. In line with the principles of qualitative research, the sample size was not predetermined based on statistical representativeness but was guided by the concept of theoretical saturation. Data collection continued until no new themes or insights emerged, at which point theoretical saturation was considered to have been reached and the interview process was terminated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the primary aim of this qualitative study was to achieve a contextual and in-depth understanding rather than statistical generalization, the findings should be interpreted within the framework of transferability.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, the process, confidentiality policies, and the use of the data. They were informed that the interviews would last approximately 45–50 minutes, and that the recordings would be used solely for analytical purposes. Participants were assured that their personal information would remain confidential, and that pseudonyms such as "K1, K2, K3..." would be used in the report instead of their real names. They were also informed that the recordings would be securely destroyed after the completion of the research and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without providing any justification.

To ensure the credibility of the study, the participant-checking method proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was employed. The initial findings were shared with the participants to verify whether they wished to make any changes. The interview recordings were first transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data were then analyzed using NVivo 12 software. During the open coding phase, meaningful units of data were identified and coded. Similar codes were subsequently grouped to form sub-themes, which

were then integrated into broader main themes in line with the research questions. Throughout the coding process, the data were repeatedly reviewed to ensure consistency across themes. To minimize researcher bias, the coding process remained closely grounded in participants' expressions, and personal assumptions were consciously avoided. In addition, member checking was conducted by sharing the findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. The findings were interpreted within the framework of descriptive analysis and presented in narrative form, supported by direct quotations from participants to illustrate the main themes and to provide in-depth insights into mothers' sustainable consumption practices.

IV. FINDINGS

The demographic information of the participants interviewed within the scope of the study is presented in Table 1. Each participant was assigned a code (K1, K2, K3, ...). The participants were between 27 and 52 years of age, with an average age of 41. Their education level was predominantly undergraduate and above (65%), and their professions were distributed across a wide range of fields. The majority were mothers of two children (60%), and their children's school types were almost evenly distributed between public (55%) and private (45%) schools. This diversity allowed for the reflection of perceptions of sustainability and environmental awareness across different socio-demographic groups.

Table 1.: Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Age	Educational Level	Occupation	Number of Children	Type of Children's School
K1	45	PhD	Academic	1	Private
K2	52	Bachelor's	Engineer	2	Private
K3	39	Associate Degree	Security Guard	3	Public
K4	48	High School	Housewife	3	Public
K5	36	Bachelor's	Teacher	2	Public
K6	29	High School	Cleaner	2	Public
K7	35	Bachelor's	Teacher	2	Public
K8	43	Master's	Teacher	2	Private
K9	42	Bachelor's	Teacher	2	Public
K10	48	PhD	Engineer	2	Private
K11	47	PhD	Academic	1	Private
K12	27	High School	Cashier	1	Public
K13	48	Master's	Nurse	3	Private
K14	41	Bachelor's	Doctor	2	Private
K15	36	High School	Housewife	3	Public
K16	45	Bachelor's	Banker	2	Private
K17	34	Bachelor's	Doctor	1	Private
K18	43	High School	Housewife	2	Public
K19	44	Master's	Biologist	2	Public
K20	33	High School	Hairdresser	2	Public

The data obtained from the interviews were categorized into main themes through NVivo analysis, in line with the research questions and participants' common expressions. These themes were then further classified and analyzed under subcategories. The main themes identified in the study are: "environmental sensitivity," "non-essential purchasing," "saving," "reusability," and "efforts to instill sustainable habits in children." These themes, along with sample sub-codes for each, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.: Main Themes and Sample Sub-Codes

Main Theme	Sub-Codes
Environmental Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preference for environmentally friendly cleaning products - Limiting effect of economic factors - Preference for clothing made from natural materials - Lack of trust in brands / lack of information - Impact of eco-friendly brands' social responsibility projects - Sensitivity to packaging and reduction of plastic use - Avoidance of environmentally harmful products and efforts to raise awareness
Non-essential Purchasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Functionality-based use of technological devices - Influence of fashion and promotions on clothing habits - Unplanned purchase of food/snacks during grocery shopping - Impact of social media and advertising on consumption behavior - Psychological aspects of non-essential shopping
Saving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preference for energy-efficient household appliances (A+, A++ etc.) - Saving on bills and environmental awareness - Lack of knowledge and influence of sales representatives - Use of energy-saving light bulbs (for family budget and environment) - Raising children's awareness of energy and water conservation
Reusability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recycling habits (cardboard, glass, plastic, etc.) - Municipal support for recycling and continuity problems - Book borrowing/renting (economic and environmental benefits) - Paper saving (double-sided use, creative use for children) - Concerns about hygiene/quality of second-hand products
Efforts to Instill Sustainable Habits in Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acting as a role model (recycling, energy and water saving) - Influence of school support and environmental activities (especially in private schools) - Raising environmental awareness through tales, videos, and books - Impact of social media and advertising on children's consumption behavior - Family strategies to prevent non-essential shopping (saving allowance, limiting product choices, raising awareness)

IV.I. Findings on Environmental Sensitivity

The participating mothers demonstrated varying levels of awareness and behaviors related to environmental sensitivity. The findings reveal that a considerable number of participants tend to prefer cleaning products that are less harmful to the environment. However, economic factors such as price and accessibility emerged as major constraints on these preferences. For instance, one participant (K3) stated, "When choosing cleaning products, I pay attention to those that do not harm the environment. The factor guiding this choice is the decreasing resources around us." Similarly, another participant (K7) noted, "Environmentally friendly products are more expensive. We pay attention to economical products."

Clothing made from natural materials was also perceived by participants as important for both health and environmental reasons. Nonetheless, high prices and difficulties in accessibility limited the preference for such products. One participant (K17) expressed, "Clothes made from natural materials are both healthier and safer for the environment; synthetic products do not decompose in nature and may harm our bodies." Yet, economic challenges were frequently emphasized. For example, K3 explained, "I try to prefer clothes made of natural materials, but economic factors keep me away from these choices," while K11 remarked, "I want to prefer natural clothes, but in Niğde we cannot access them easily. Also, these products are expensive."

Environmentally friendly brands also played a significant role in consumer preferences, though lack of information and trust in these brands negatively influenced participants' decisions. As K9 stated, "Brands say they are environmentally friendly, but we do not know how sensitive they really are. There should be more information provided on this issue." Conversely, some participants considered broader sustainability dimensions, such as labor conditions, energy use, and carbon footprint, in their brand choices. For instance, K14 noted, "I try to prefer cosmetic products that are not tested on animals. The less harm they cause to the environment, the more I prefer them," while K1 shared, "I was very impressed by Arçelik's projects on environmental sustainability, and I even shared this in my classes."

Packaging sensitivity also emerged as an important issue among participants. While they expressed positive attitudes toward biodegradable packaging, a lack of sufficient information on this matter was evident. For example, K3 highlighted, "I prefer products with packaging that can easily decompose in nature," and K17 said, "I do not use plastic bags when shopping; I bring my own bags from home." In contrast, K9 admitted, "I have never heard brands advertise that their packaging decomposes quickly in nature," pointing to a gap in awareness.

Finally, some participants reported efforts to raise awareness among people around them to avoid products harmful to the environment, though they emphasized the difficulties in changing established habits. As K10 explained, "Sometimes I feel the need to warn people not to harm the environment, especially when I see them throwing water bottles into median strips from their cars," and K5 remarked, "I try to convince my family and friends to stay away from products that harm the environment, but it is difficult to break their habits."

IV.II. Findings on Non-essential Purchasing

The findings regarding non-essential purchasing behaviors indicate that participants tend to prioritize functionality and necessity in their consumption preferences. In particular, with respect to technological devices, the majority of participants (18 out of 20) reported that they do not purchase new products unless the existing ones are broken or no longer functional. This suggests that mothers balance their interest in technology with functional consumption practices. For example, one participant (K1) stated, "I do not change my phone even if a new model is released; I use it until it breaks down," while another (K20) emphasized, "I would not consider buying a new phone; I only replace it if it cannot be repaired." Similarly, K16 remarked, "I only change phones and technological devices when their usage period is over or when they no longer work."

Clothing consumption habits varied among participants depending on necessity. Some mothers attempted to limit new clothing purchases, while others were more responsive to fashion trends and promotional campaigns. For instance, K17 explained, "I try to create new combinations with the clothes in my wardrobe; I do not like having too many items," reflecting a minimalist consumption orientation. In contrast, K14 admitted, "Even if I do not need it, I sometimes buy a product I see on sale," while K18 added, "Campaigns and the attractiveness of products can be tempting." Beyond necessity, clothing consumption was also linked to psychological motives; K8 expressed, "Wearing new things makes me feel happy psychologically."

Food and snacks emerged as another significant area of non-essential purchasing. Several participants indicated a tendency to buy unplanned items during grocery shopping, often driven by spontaneous decisions or social needs. For example, K6 explained, "Sometimes I buy thinking that guests might come, sometimes I just want to have something in the fridge in case we feel like it," while K9 stated, "Sometimes I buy snacks to make my children happy."

The influence of social media and advertising on non-essential purchasing behaviors varied among participants. While some claimed to be unaffected (e.g., K6: “Advertisements do not affect me, and social media does not push me to shop”), others acknowledged that these factors significantly shaped their purchasing decisions. For example, K7 noted, “Product promotions that appear on my feed can encourage me to buy even when I do not need the item,” and K15 observed, “Social media and advertisements trigger the desire for non-essential purchases; they create the perception that I need something even when I do not.” Similarly, K17 argued, “Social media constantly presents you with products until you buy them; this is a result of living in a consumer society.” The impact of online accessibility was also highlighted; K16 stated, “I try to reduce online shopping because its easy accessibility increases non-essential consumption.”

IV.III. Findings on Saving

The findings indicate that the majority of participating mothers pay attention to energy efficiency when purchasing household appliances. Paying attention to energy classes such as A+ and A++ emerged as a common practice among participants. While the primary motivation behind choosing energy-efficient appliances was keeping household bills low, awareness of the finite nature of energy resources also influenced these preferences. For example, one participant (K3) explained, “I prefer products that provide high efficiency with low energy consumption. I pay attention to ensuring that the products I buy are in the A class.” Similarly, K8 remarked, “I want my bills to be lower financially, so appliances with high energy efficiency attract me,” highlighting the economic dimension of such decisions. Others emphasized broader concerns; K9 noted, “Energy saving affects not only the family but also the whole country,” while K14 stated, “We need to think about the national economy; we must use electricity resources efficiently.”

Nevertheless, some participants pointed to a lack of knowledge on this issue. K13 stated, “I cannot pay much attention to the energy consumption levels of appliances; I buy them according to the salesperson’s advice,” while K20 stressed the need for more institutional support, saying, “Companies should inform us better about energy-efficient appliances. We do not fully understand what these devices do.” These statements suggest that beyond individual efforts, institutional and governmental support is crucial for promoting energy conservation more effectively.

Another dimension of energy-saving practices concerned the use of energy-efficient light bulbs. Many participants reported preferring such bulbs due to their contribution to both the family budget and the environment. However, some mothers prioritized light quality or stated that their choices were made coincidentally rather than intentionally. For instance, K1 explained, “Some of the bulbs in my house are energy-saving, but I do not use them in areas where I want brighter lighting,” while K6 emphasized the economic benefit, “I think using energy-saving bulbs contributes a lot to the family budget.” In contrast, K15 admitted, “We use energy-saving bulbs at home, but not because it is important—just because we happened to buy them,” and K17 noted, “We use sensor lights in the corridors, which saves a significant amount of electricity,” reflecting a more systematic approach.

Participants also reported efforts to instill awareness of energy and water conservation in their children, though the degree of engagement varied. For example, K7 explained, “I warn my child to unplug electronic devices. I remind them that water may run out and persuade them to reduce consumption,” while K5 admitted, “Until now, I have never paid attention to energy consumption levels, but I think we should.”

IV.IV. Findings on Reusability

The participants’ responses indicate a general awareness of sustainable consumption and recycling, although the level of application varied considerably. The majority of participants emphasized the importance of recycling materials such as cardboard, glass, tin, and plastic. For instance, K13 stated, “I separate such materials for recycling when disposing of them,” while K20 explained, “I try to recycle cardboard, glass, and plastic materials, and I also enjoy creating new products from them.” These statements suggest that while social awareness regarding recycling exists, it often remains limited to individual efforts, highlighting the need for more comprehensive and systematic practices.

Some participants reported challenges in maintaining continuity in recycling behaviors. For example, K1 noted, “There was a municipal program for a while. When it ended, I stopped separating waste,”

illustrating how recycling practices are often dependent on institutional support. This underscores the importance of reinforcing individual efforts with local government or organizational initiatives.

Beyond recycling, participants also associated sustainable consumption with reusing and sharing practices. Borrowing or renting books was perceived as both economically and environmentally beneficial, as it prevents paper waste and reduces household clutter. For example, K9 remarked, “Second-hand books and libraries do not create clutter at home, and they are economical.” However, some mothers expressed reluctance toward borrowing or renting books due to personal habits or a preference for ownership. K7 stated, “A bookshelf is essential, both for a child and for us, so I never borrowed books,” while K15 added, “I prefer to have the books in my possession; I am not very comfortable with the idea of borrowing.” These findings suggest that promoting sustainable consumption requires alternative solutions tailored to personal preferences, such as book-sharing events.

The majority of participants also reported reusing paper as a widespread habit, often stemming from early childhood experiences and family influence. K12 explained, “This is a habit I developed in elementary school, starting with examples I saw from my family and teachers,” while K1 stated, “I make sure to use the back side of paper after the front is used, and I try to teach this to my son as well.” Furthermore, paper reuse was not limited to note-taking; participants also used it creatively for activities such as drawing or origami with their children (K1: “We make origami for my son from papers that can no longer be used”; K7: “My child uses used papers for drawing both at school and at home”). These examples highlight the role of education and family-based learning in promoting environmental sustainability awareness.

Finally, concerns regarding hygiene and quality standards were expressed in relation to second-hand products, which limited their use for some participants. This indicates the need to develop strategies to improve societal perceptions of second-hand goods and to promote their adoption as part of sustainable consumption practices.

IV.V. Findings on Efforts to Instill Sustainable Habits in Children

The findings indicate that mothers’ efforts to instill sustainable habits in their children vary according to their individual levels of awareness, socio-demographic characteristics, and environmental factors. The majority of participants emphasized that the most effective way to foster sustainability awareness in children is to serve as role models through their own behaviors. This is typically achieved through everyday practices such as energy and water conservation and recycling. For instance, K14 explained, “I try to demonstrate recycling to my children by practicing it. Since I separate the waste at home, they also pay attention to it,” while K11 noted, “I think I am a good role model for my child because we separate our waste. My son has observed this from an early age and now applies it himself. For example, he turns off the lights when leaving a room and does not leave the water running while brushing his teeth.”

The findings also suggest that mothers act as role models not only in pro-environmental behaviors but also in consumption practices. As K5 remarked, “To prevent my children from making unnecessary purchases, I first try to avoid buying unnecessary things myself. I tell them they should save their pocket money if they want to buy something.”

In addition to modeling, some mothers reported using supplementary resources such as books, stories, and environmentally themed videos to enhance their children’s understanding of sustainability. For example, K3 stated, “I use some videos and stories to explain the concept of sustainability to my children. This way, I try to teach them the importance of using resources properly.”

Another significant finding concerns the role of schools, particularly private institutions, in promoting sustainable habits among children. School-based programs and activities focusing on environmental awareness were found to play a crucial role in shaping environmentally friendly behaviors. For instance, K1 explained, “Our school organizes visits to recycling centers. My child says they learned how waste is separated and recycled at school and applies it without my guidance,” while K8 added, “The activities organized at school improved their awareness of recycling and energy conservation. The children even teach us these things.” Similarly, K17 and K14 emphasized that their children, through school activities, independently adopted recycling and conservation practices.

However, popular culture, social media, and advertising were identified as major external factors that hinder families' efforts to instill sustainable consumption habits in children by encouraging non-essential purchasing behaviors. As K3 noted, "Advertisements, social media, and discount campaigns create a culture where it seems like everyone has to buy everything. Children are exposed to this pressure, and as a family, we put a lot of effort into balancing it." This highlights the powerful role of digital platforms in shaping children's consumption tendencies. Promotional campaigns and discounts were seen to particularly trigger impulsive and unnecessary purchases (K2: "Promotions and campaigns in supermarkets are like a trap, not only for children but even for us adults. Children want to buy non-essential items in this environment, and managing it is really difficult.").

To counter these influences, some mothers developed strategies to discourage unnecessary consumption among their children. For instance, K5 explained, "I advise them to save their pocket money. This way, they do not buy unnecessary things and instead save up for something they really want," while K9 reported, "I allow them to choose one or two products during grocery shopping. This way, they are forced to prioritize the most necessary ones." K8 also described the difficulty of combating digital influence, stating, "I try to explain to my children that what they see on social media does not reflect reality and that not everything beautiful can be bought. But it is not easy."

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings of the study, although participants expressed a willingness to prefer environmentally friendly products and clothing made from natural materials, issues related to price and accessibility limit these preferences. Mothers reported that the high cost of environmentally friendly products and the difficulty in accessing them significantly hinder the integration of sustainability awareness into daily life. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that high prices are a limiting factor for the consumption of sustainable products (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018; Bianchi & Gonzales, 2021). The results further reveal that a lack of trust in environmentally friendly brands and insufficient information make it difficult for consumers to make informed choices. Similarly, findings from a study by Pereira et al. (2021) in the fashion sector emphasize that difficulties in accessing information and the lack of transparency constitute barriers to sustainable consumption behaviors.

Participants' clothing purchase habits were found to be need-oriented, and they tended to avoid unnecessary consumption. Although some participants showed sensitivity to fashion trends and promotional campaigns, most preferred to reuse existing clothes or make do with current combinations. This indicates that sustainable consumption habits have begun to take root. Participants also tended to make unplanned purchases of food and snacks, often driven by social needs or situations such as hosting guests. However, recognizing these impulsive purchasing behaviors presents an opportunity to develop sustainable consumption habits. Social media and advertisements were identified as key factors influencing non-essential purchasing behaviors. While some participants claimed to be unaffected by such influences, the majority reported that advertisements and social media content shape their consumption patterns. This highlights the necessity of fostering conscious media consumption and advertising literacy.

Most participants reported being attentive to using energy-efficient appliances and light bulbs; however, a lack of knowledge and ingrained habits limit the effectiveness of these efforts. Enhancing awareness of energy conservation requires not only individual consciousness but also institutional and public support. Participants were aware of the importance of recycling, yet infrastructural deficiencies and practical challenges hinder the continuity of such efforts. Although habits of reuse and sharing have been developed, concerns regarding hygiene and product quality restrict the widespread adoption of second-hand consumption.

Mothers serve as the primary guides and role models in instilling environmentally friendly habits in their children. Children learn by observing their mothers' behaviors—such as recycling, saving energy, and conserving water—and integrate these habits into their own lives. The consistency of mothers' actions is a key factor in fostering sustainability awareness among children. Such exemplary behaviors in mothers' daily lives contribute not only to children's environmental consciousness but also to the development of a broader sense of responsibility. However, the research findings indicate that consumption-oriented messages conveyed through advertisements and social media make it more difficult for mothers to sustain their sustainability efforts. It is well established that children are directly

influenced by advertising and have limited ability to critically evaluate such messages (Chan & McNeal, 2004). This finding is also consistent with the results of Balıkçioğlu and Volkan (2015), which demonstrate that social media and peer communication significantly influence young people's tendencies toward materialism and conspicuous consumption. In this context, children's requests for products encountered on social media may lead mothers to face unnecessary purchasing behaviors. To manage this situation, mothers strive to teach their children the distinction between needs and wants.

Spiteri's (2020) study demonstrates that children can influence their parents' behaviors by transferring the environmental knowledge they acquire through school-based activities to the family setting. Similarly, the findings of this research indicate that school activities play a significant role in fostering environmental awareness among children. According to the mothers' statements, recycling and environmental awareness projects organized particularly in private schools have successfully raised awareness among children. However, extending such activities to public schools would ensure that environmental awareness is imparted equally to all children. Furthermore, the development of pro-environmental behaviors in children appears to depend not on a single experience but on repeated practices across different settings, such as school and home. Indeed, the study conducted by Sihvonen et al. (2024) revealed that parents emphasized the importance of supporting their children's recycling skills both at home and at school as a critical factor in strengthening sustainable practices.

The findings of this study offer significant implications not only for public authorities but also for brands pursuing sustainability initiatives. From the perspective of public authorities, promoting sustainable consumption requires the expansion of recycling facilities, the regular provision of infrastructure services, and the support of family-oriented environmental education programs. Furthermore, integrating environmental awareness and media literacy into school curricula can strengthen the intergenerational transmission of sustainability consciousness. Local governments may also play a key role by organizing initiatives such as tree-planting activities, visits to organic production facilities, and family-based projects, which simultaneously enhance children's environmental awareness and reinforce family bonds.

For brands, the study highlights three critical areas for consideration within sustainability strategies. First, the provision of environmentally friendly products at more affordable prices could facilitate access for families—particularly mothers—and thus encourage the adoption of sustainable consumption practices within households. Second, addressing the issue of consumer trust requires transparent and evidence-based communication. By disclosing detailed information about production processes, raw materials, and corporate social responsibility initiatives, brands can empower consumers to make more informed and conscious choices. Third, the findings suggest that the consumption-driven nature of social media and advertising presents challenges to family efforts toward sustainability. Consequently, brands should frame their sustainability messages within a responsible communication approach, focusing less on stimulating consumption and more on encouraging environmentally responsible behaviors.

In sum, coordinated actions undertaken by both public authorities and brands hold the potential to foster the adoption of sustainable consumption practices within households and, in the longer term, contribute meaningfully to global efforts to mitigate climate change.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

In this study, only qualitative methods were employed; however, future research may incorporate quantitative methods (e.g., survey applications) alongside qualitative ones. For example, key themes identified through in-depth interviews with parents may be transformed into survey items and tested on larger samples. Such a sequential mixed-methods approach would allow findings to be generalized more effectively while supporting the validity of qualitative insights. Moreover, instead of focusing solely on mothers, future studies could also include fathers, thereby enabling an examination of how sustainability awareness is perceived by different family members.

Ethics Statement

The author declares that all ethical principles and rules were strictly observed throughout every stage of the preparation of this study. In case of any violation, OHÜİİBF Journal is under no responsibility, and all responsibility rests solely with the author(s).

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare. The author also certifies that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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