

WCES 2012

A study on the relationship between the social-emotional adaptation and behavioral problems of 60-72 month old preschoolers

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to define the relation between social-emotional adaptation and behavior problems of 60-72 month old children. The data collection instruments ‘Preschool Behavior Problem’s Scanning Scale’ and ‘Marmara Social-Emotional Adaptation Scale for 60-72 Month Old Children’ were applied to 432 children who were attending public and private preschools in Istanbul. A statistically meaningful and negative relation was found between children’s total score of Preschool Behavior Problem’s Scanning Scale and Marmara Social-Emotional Adaptation Scale for 60-72 Month Old Children. As a function of decrease of children’s social-emotional adaptation level, their behavior problems increase.

Key Words: social-emotional adaptation, behavioral problems, 60-72 month old preschoolers

1. Introduction

The first few years of life are important in the multidimensional development of children and form the bases of all stages of human life. Childhood should be perceived not only as a stage of life that prepares for adulthood, but also as a stage that is important in its own right. From this perspective, education is beyond a mere preparation for the future. It is a process that happens in the present time as each stage of life involves tasks and responsibilities that must be met. It is crucial that people of all ages explore their own rights and wrongs by living them. Those experiences that have not been explored at the right stage in life are highly likely to emerge in future life as problems, at least as much as those experiences that have been explored. Children need to possess basic psychological traits such as fairness, hope, kindness, joy, and peace as much as adults do. Violence is the result of a life not lived, while guilt is the end result of a life not fulfilled. Thus, it is of paramount importance that the preschool stage should be lived to the full with appropriate experiences. The type and quality of the experiences that children in this stage are provided with are both important (Oktay, 1999).

Child development in this stage consists of three basic domains: physical, cognitive, and psychosocial. The physical domain involves the basic development and changes that occur in people’s body. These are external changes such as height and weight, and muscular changes. Motor skills are also included within this domain. Secondly, the cognitive domain covers mental processes related to thinking and problem solving. These include perception, memory, causality, creativity, and linguistic changes. Finally, the psychosocial domain covers personality and interpersonal development skills. It includes personal concepts and feelings such as social skills and behaviors, and children’s unique behaviors, feelings, and reactions to social conditions (Bayhan, 2004).

Social development and socialization is the internalization of a society's behavior patterns by an individual and the process of coming to belong to that society. Children are not born in a socialized state. Throughout the process of socialization, they learn to comply with the rules and values of the group and adopt this system of values. This process of learning lasts throughout a lifetime. The relations of children with others around them, as well as other environmental factors, affect children's social adaptation during this process (Başal, 2003). On the other hand, an individual that has not achieved the level of social development required by his age is oppressed by the society due to socially unapproved behavior problems and social rules. Social oppression can vary from despising an individual to his total exclusion from the society. A high level of social oppression may create unhappy and unadapted individuals. Lack of social adaptation underlies most behavioral problems among children (Gizir, 2002). When social development is not well-supported, it is likely that a child will experience adaptation and behavior problems. Walker, Cohin, and Ramsey (1995) found that children and adolescents who do not have adequate social skills are at risk of antisocial behaviors and aggression.

It is essential for the formation of a healthy generation and society that such problems are spotted and tackled in the preschool stage. In light of this information, this study aimed to investigate whether there is a relationship between the social-emotional adaptation and behavior problems of 60-72 month old children who were attending preschool.

2. Methods

As this study investigated the relationship between the social-emotional adaptation levels and behavior problems of 60-72 month old preschoolers at public and private preschools with respect to several variables and an effort was made to display the existing situation as it was, the relational survey method was preferred.

2.1. Sample

The sample of the study included 432 children aged between 60-72 months who were attending 12 public and private preschools located in 8 different districts of Istanbul.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments

Child Personal Information Form was developed by the researchers in order to obtain information about the demographics of the children (children's date of birth, gender, number of siblings, order of birth, time spent at a preschool) in the sample.

The Marmara Social-Emotional Adaptation Scale (MSEAS) was developed by Önder et al. in 2004 in order to measure elementary first grade children's social-emotional adaptation level. This scale was revised for 60-72 month old children by Baran in 2006. Having a total of 19 items, the scale has four subscales: "Acting in Compliance with the Requirements of Social Life", "Reacting in Compliance with Social Life", "Interaction with Peers" and "Treating the Social Environment Positively". The scale is completed by teachers.

Survey for Preschool Behavioral Problems Scale (SPBPS) was developed by Behar in 1976 as the Preschool Behavior Questionnaire (PBQ) to identify preschool children's behavior problems and adapted into Turkish by Kanlıklıçer in 2005. Having a total of 30 items and measuring 3-6 year-old children's behavioral problems in the subscales of being "Argumentative-Aggressive", "Worried-Tearful" and "Hyperactive-Careless", this scale is completed by teachers (Kanlıklıçer, 2005).

3. Findings

As shown in Table 1, 25,3% of the sample were 60 month old, and 74,7% 72 month old. Concerning gender, 37,9% were girls and 62,1% were boys. Those with one sibling comprised 26,4% of the sample, those with two 57,2%, and those with three or more 16,4%. Of the children, 52,4% were first-borns, 35,2% were middle children, and 11,3% were the youngest. Regarding time spent at preschools, 75,5% had spent one year, 18,7% had spent two years, and 5,8% had spent three or more years at preschool.

Table 1. Percentage and Frequency Distributions of the Demographics of the Sample

Age	f	%
60 month old	109	25,3
72 month old	323	74,7
Total	432	100,0
Gender		
Girls	164	37,9
Boys	268	62,1
Total	432	100,0
Number of Siblings		
One	114	26,4
Two	247	57,2
Three	71	16,4
Total	432	100,0
Order of Birth		
First-born	227	52,4
Middle child	152	35,2
Youngest child	53	12,4
Total	432	100,0
Time Spent at Preschool		
One year	326	75,5
Two years	81	18,7
Three years	25	5,8
Total	432	100,0

Table 2. Independent Groups t Test Results Concerning Whether MSEAS Total Scores and Subscale Scores Varied with Respect to 60-72 Month Children's Gender

MSEAS and Subscales	Groups	N	SS	\bar{x}	Sh $_{\bar{x}}$	t test		
						t	Sd	p
Total	Girls	164	9,57	11,36	,747	9,792	432	,003
	Boys	268	11,87	12,34	,664			
Acting in Compliance with the Requirements of Social Life	Girls	164	3,27	2,79	,254	2,565	432	,130
	Boys	268	3,61	3,37	,221			
Reacting in Compliance with Social Life	Girls	164	1,91	1,80	,149	2,181	432	,144
	Boys	268	2,05	1,91	,125			
Interaction with Peers	Girls	164	2,27	2,40	,176	1,485	432	,230
	Boys	268	2,44	2,96	,151			
Treating the Social Environment Positively	Girls	164	2,18	2,39	,176	1,650	432	,221
	Boys	268	2,54	2,60	,151			

In Table 2, the independent groups t test showed a meaningful difference between The Marmara Social-Emotional Adaptation Scale (MSEAS) total score and gender in favor of girls at the level of .05.

Table 3. Independent Groups t Test Results Concerning Whether SPBPS Total Scores and Subscales Scores Varied with Respect to 60-72 Month Children's Gender

SPBPS and Subscales	Groups	N	SS	\bar{x}	Sh $_{\bar{x}}$	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Total	Girls	164	9,57	10,36	,747	9,792	432	,002
	Boys	268	10,87	12,34	,664			
Being Argumentative and Aggressive	Girls	164	3,25	2,79	,254	2,565	432	,110
	Boys	268	3,61	3,37	,221			
Being Worried and Tearful	Girls	164	1,91	1,80	,149	2,181	432	,140
	Boys	268	2,05	1,91	,125			
Being Hyperactive and Careless	Girls	164	2,25	2,40	,176	1,473	432	,226
	Boys	268	2,47	2,96	,151			

In Table 3, the independent groups t test showed a meaningful difference between Children's Survey for Preschool Behavioral Problems Scale (SPBPS) total scores and gender in favor of girls at the level of .05.

Table 4. Correlation Coefficients between MSEAS and SPBPS Scores

Variables	N	R	p
A Total	432	- .669	,000
B Total	432	- .669	,000

Table 4 shows that the relationship between the total scores obtained from the The Marmara Social-Emotional Adaptation Scale (MSEAS) and Children's Survey for Preschool Behavioral Problems Scale (SPBPS) was statistically meaningful in the negative direction at the level of .01. This means that as children's MSEAS scores increase, their SPBPS scores decrease. In other words, as social adaptation levels increase, behavioral problems decrease.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines the relationship between the social-emotional adaptation levels and behavior problems of 60-72 month old preschoolers in respect to several variables.

No statistically significant difference was found either between the social-emotional adaptation level and age or between behavioral problems and age in the sample.

No statistically significant difference was found between the social-emotional adaptation levels and the number of siblings of the sample. Oktay et al. (2010) established that there is a decrease in children's social-emotional adaptation levels as the number of siblings increases. There is a statistically significant difference at the .01 level between only children and children with siblings in relation to their social-emotional adaptation levels in favor of only children. It is assumed that the difference between the two studies is related to the different demographic configuration.

No statistically significant difference was found between behavioral problems and the number of siblings. Also Özbey (2009) came to the conclusion that the number of siblings did not make any difference in children's overall Problem Behavior Scale scores as well as scores obtained from sub-dimensions. Berndt and Bulleit (1985) explored the behavior of 34 preschool children at home and school in terms of sibling relations. They found that small children with older siblings had more aggressive and unsocialized behavior compared to those without an older sibling.

Similarly, a statistically significant difference could not be found between the social-emotional adaptation levels of children and their birth order. Erbay (2008) explored the social skill levels of first graders who had attended preschool and those who had not, and concluded that the birth order did not have any effect on the social skill levels of the first graders. There is also no statistically significant difference between the two variables of the sample behavioral problems and birth order.

A statistically significant difference could not be established between social-emotional adaptation levels and behavioral problems of the 60-72 month old preschoolers, and the duration of time they spent at preschool. Özbey (2009) also studied the link between behavioral problems and the time spent attending a preschool, and found a statistically significant difference in favor of children who received more schooling. That no such a difference has been identified in our study may be attributed to the factor that 75 % of children in our study have attended school for only one year.

A statistically significant difference at .05 level has been established between social-emotional adaptation levels of children and their gender, in favor of girls. Similarly, Işık (2005) also found a significant difference in favor of girls in her study with 60-72 month old children. Oktay et al. (2010) have also established a statistically significant difference at .01 level between social-emotional adaptation levels of girls and boys in favor of girls.

A significant difference at .05 level between the behavioral problems and gender of the children, has been established in favor of girls. Berndt and Bulleit (1985) investigated the behaviors of 34 preschool children at home and at school and concluded that boys were more aggressive than girls. In another study, Özbey (2009) concluded that girls displayed fewer problem behaviors than boys. DiLalla and Mullineaux (2003) observed the same children when they were 5 and between the age of 10-13 years. When they were 5, the children were asked to spend 20 minutes in a laboratory play room with a child of the same gender and age unknown to them, and their behavior

was video recorded. Later, the videos were used to identify children's prosocial and aggressive behaviors. At the same time, parents were asked to answer some questions about their children. The results suggested that 5 year-old boys displayed more aggressive behaviors than 5 year-old girls. There is a resemblance between these results and our findings.

Exploring the relationship between social-emotional adaptation levels and behavioral problems of 60-72 month old preschoolers, a negative significant relation at the level of .05 has been found, suggesting that as children's social-emotional adaptation level increase there is a decrease in behavioral problems. In her study, Kanlıklıçer (2005) identified that children with behavioral problems did not have at all adequate social adaption skills. In a different study, Özbey (2009) observed a decrease in problem behaviors and an improvement in social skills of children who attended a training program that supported social skills and attempted to decrease problem behaviour. Riggio et al. (1990) also found parallel results to the present study in their investigation of the relationship between self respect and social skills. The study found a positive relationship between social skills and self respect, and a negative one between social anxiety, loneliness and social skills. Verduyn et al. (1990) implemented a social skills training program on second, third and fourth graders with behavioral problems and aged between 10 and 13. The results showed meaningful improvement in students' social activities and age- and gender-related self respect levels. Parish and Parish (1991) also studied the effects of social support systems within families on self concept and social skills throughout childhood.

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