

EFFECTS OF PARENTS' MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SKILLS

Saide ÖZBEY

Preschool Education Department, Education Faculty,
Gazi University Beşevler, Ankara,
TURKEY.

saideozbey@gmail.com, sozbey@gazi.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in order to investigate the effects of parents' marital adjustments and social support systems on preschoolers' social skills. The universe of interest for this study included preschoolers, aged six, enrolled in public schools and their families in Ankara. The sample of this study consisted of 101 preschoolers, aged six, and 101 parents randomly selected from these districts, in total N=202 people. "Social Skills Scale section of Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scales (PKBS-2)", "Marital Adjustment Scale", and "Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support" were used as data collection tools and "Personal Information Form" was used to collect demographic data. The present study is a descriptive study. The analyses were performed by Correlation tests. As a result of this study, it was determined that there was a positive relationship between parents' marital adjustment and social support systems ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords: Marital adjustments, social support, preschool, child, social skills

INTRODUCTION

The social development in children starts develops and enriches in the family (Bozbeý Akalın, 2005; Pettit, Dodge & Brown, 1988) and the bridges between the children and the society are established via families (Şahin & Baç Karaaslan, 2006). The family have their children's skills improve, direct their behaviours; constitute the bases of their social achievements by supporting them when they have difficulties (Karadağ, 2007). The acquisition of the social skills is essential in this developmental stage. Social skills are learnt behaviours that can be accepted in social environments such as starting an interaction in any atmosphere, problem solving, making decisions, arranging peer relations, establishing positive relations with others, defending own rights and respecting others (Özbey, 2009). Social skills have three components as cognitive, behavioural and environmental. These three components have strong interactions at preschool ages (Altunbaş, 2002: 14). Family and the social system in which the family live in are the sources for the child's social skills development process (Worden, 2002). A child acquires social values and social behaviours primarily in the family. For this reason, families should exhibit positive social behaviour models. The structure of the family is crucial for presenting positive social behaviour models and supporting the child's social development. A healthy family structure is closely related with factors that start with premarital times and continue through the marriage (Vaizoğlu, 2008).

In an adjusted marriage, it is possible for couples to agree upon duties and priorities related to each other. The adjustment in question includes communication, emotional constancy and sexual adjustment (Dimpka, 2010). Marital adjustment requires having a consensus in changing life conditions and on any topic related to family and its members; furthermore, it requires using constructive and positive methods to solve problems (Sardoğan & Karahan,

2005; Erbek et al., 2005). Factors such as parents' ages, economic status, marriage type, marriage date, and their independent decision over their own marriage might affect their marital adjustments (Sardoğan & Karahan, 2005; Demiray, 2006; Cihan Güngör, 2007). Research show that experiencing disorders in marriage such as aggression, ill-communication, maladjustment, not meeting emotional needs and vice versa affect the sensitivity level of the parents to their children negatively. Parallel to this, it was determined that the quality of the interaction between parents and child had changed and parents had protective or repudiative attitude toward their children; and this situation left a negative effect on the children's social behaviours (Cox, 1989; Caty & Stafany, 1997; Jouriles et al., 1999; Marks et al., 2001; Erbek et al., 2005; Cavanagh & Huston, 2006). Stress caused by conflict in the family can hinder parents from looking after their children in a healthy way. It is accentuated that conflicts between couples cause more problems on children than divorces. Yet by the end of the divorce, the conflict between couples ends and children psychologically relieve (Şirvanlı Özen, 1998). Nevertheless, living with only one parent after divorce and the quality of the relation between the child and the other parent are important factors that affect the children's social skills (Brodeski & Hembourgh, 2007; Alisinanoğlu & Özbey, 2011). Along with marital adjustment, social support systems that parents acquired via social relations like family, friends and relatives might have direct or indirect effect on children's social skills. Whilst social support is functioning as psychological relief, it is also helping parents believe they are loved, considered important and they are members of a social net in which they have mutual responsibilities (Gökler, 2008). The relations in social support system increase the socialization and save couples from the feeling of loneliness (Şener & Terzioğlu, 2008).

It was determined that psychological and physical disorders occur in individuals who have weak social support resources. The existence of such resources has positive effects on individual's view of life as well as they relieve individual physically and psychologically. Social acceptance both increases self-respect and arranges one's life. Parents are the first social support resources in the first years of a child's life. Having healthy relations with these resources have important effects on child's behaviours. It is possible that parents with rich social support resources reflect their physical and psychological comforts to their relations with their children. For this reason, it can be said that the effect of parents' social support resources on the quality of the children's relations with their social environment is inevitable (Torun, 1995). Although the effect of distal environment like friend and relatives on child's behaviours seems less obvious in contrast to parental attitude, social support resources of the family have a significant indirect effect on child's behaviour (Atzaba-Poria ve Pike, 2005).

In the related literature, it was seen that the studies examining preschool children's social skills generally investigated these skills in terms of variables such as the parents' professions and educational background; the studies on social support systems investigated families having a disabled child or families having a member with a psychological or any other serious illnesses (Cobb, 1976; Pakalns, 1990; Dunst, 2002; Aksüllü & Doğan, 2004; Gölamış Erhan, 2005; Aytekin, 2005; Esmek, 2007; Kara, 2007; Sencer, 2007; Kızıler, 2007; Fidanoğlu, 2007; Yılmaz et.al. 2008; Coşkun & Akkaş, 2009; Fhiau-Fang, 2010), and many of these studies dealt with the effects of social supports on parents' psychology and behaviours. Besides, it was determined that there are studies on social support systems at primary education level (Karadağ, 2007; Kayhan Yardımcı, 2007; Demirtaş, 2007). The mentioned studies reveal the importance of the studies that can illustrate the effects of parents' marital adjustments and their perceived social support on children's social skills. Therefore, this study was carried out in the order to determine the correlation between children's social skills and their parents' marital adjustments and social support systems.

METHOD

Research Design

General survey method design was selected for this study. In this method, in order to reach a general opinion about the universe, a survey is carried out on samples chosen from the universe. General survey methods can be done in two ways as relational and single survey methods. Relational Survey Method is used in order to determine the changes among two or more variables or the degree of the changes if there are any (Karasar, 2005). So this method was used since the children's social skills were to be examined in terms of different variables.

Universe and Sampling

The universe of this study consisted of children at age six attending nursery classes in state schools and private kindergartens, and their families from districts of Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Randomly chosen 101 six-aged children and their 101 parents, totally 202 participants, formed the sampling. Data were gathered from six schools according to the willingness of the participants.

Data Collection Tools

Preschool and Kindergarten Behaviour Scale was developed by Merrel in 1994 and was reviewed in 2003 and it was adapted into Turkish and its validity and reliability for Turkish children were studied by Alisinanoğlu and Özbey (2009). The scale is composed of two independent subscales; Social Skills Scale and Problem Behaviour Scale. Social Skills Scale was used for the present study. This scale includes 23 items about 3 subscales: Social Cooperation (11 items), Social Interaction (4 items), and Social Independence (8 items). Structural reliability for the first subscale was .96 and explained variance was .67; structural reliability for the second subscale was .91 and explained variance was .52; structural reliability for the last subscale was .88 and explained variance was .64, and total Cronbach Alpha value of Social Skills Scale was found as .94. The items are Likert type four point scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 3 (Frequently). The highest score could be 69 and the lowest could be 23 for this scale. High scores show that children's social skills are high.

Marital Adjustment Test was developed by Locke and Wallace and its validity and reliability for Turkish couples were studied by Tutarel Kışlak (1999). It consists of 15 items and has two parts; agreement or conflict situations in the family and relation type. First part is composed of first nine items evaluating general adjustment. These nine items are related to agreements on situations including general marital adjustments like expressing feelings, friends, sexuality, societal norms, and philosophy of life.

The last six items are related to the relation style like spare time and outdoor activities, conflict resolution, and trust. In order to determine the reliability of Marital Adjustment Scale, internal consistency reliability coefficient, split half reliability, test retest reliability, and item test correlation were calculated for all participants. Cronbach alpha value of the scale was found .84. This value was .85 for females; .83 for males. The maximum score for the scale is 58 (Tutarel Kışlak, 1999).

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was developed by Zimet et al. (1988) and its validity and reliability for Turkish peoples were studied by Eker et al. (2001). Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support is a 12-item likert type scale assess perceived social support received from different resources. The scale has three subscales: Family (4 items), Friends (4 items), Significant others (4 items). The minimum score for the whole scale is 12, and the maximum is 84. High score represents higher perceived social supports. Internal consistency reliability of the scale is .89 (Eker et al., 2001:18)

Personal information form was prepared by the researcher in order to get demographic information about the participants such as gender, their marriage years and ages, marriage types, their perceived socio-economic levels and whether they have their parents' permission about their marriages.

Data and Analysis

Social Skills Scale was filled in for each student by classroom teachers. Marital Adjustment Scale and Perceived Social Support Scale were filled in by children's parents. Pearson Correlation Test was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Findings about the Relation between Children's Social Skills and Parents' Marital Adjustments

Pearson Correlation Test results for the relation between children's social skills and parents' marital adjustments were presented in table 1.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Test Results for the Relation between Children's Social Skills and Parents' Marital Adjustments

		<i>MAS Factor 1</i>	<i>MAS Factor 2</i>	<i>MAS Total</i>
SSS	r	.218(*)	.145	.221(*)
Social Cooperation	p	.028	.147	.026
SSS	r	.139	.089	.140
Social Independence and Acceptance	p	.166	.376	.164
SSS	r	.090	.055	.090
Social Interaction	p	.371	.584	.373
SSS Total	r	.183	.119	.184
	p	.067	.235	.065

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

MAS: Marital Adjustment Scale

SSS: Social Skills Scale

Table 1 indicates that there were positive significant correlations between Social Interaction subscale of Social Skills Scale and Factor 1 of Marital Adjustment Scale ($r=.218$, $p<0.05$) and the total of Marital Adjustment Scale ($r=.221$, $p<0.05$).

Findings about the Relation between Children's Social Skills and Parents' Perceived Social Support

Pearson Correlation Test results for the relation between children's social skills and parents' perceived social support systems were presented in table 2.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Test Analysis of the Relation between Children's Social Skills (CSS) and Their Parents' Perceived Social Support Scale (PPSS)

		<i>PPSS Significant Other</i>	<i>PPSS Family</i>	<i>PPSS Friend</i>	<i>PPSS Total</i>
CSS Social Cooperation	r	.131	.062	.196	.179
	p	.193	.540	.050	.073
CSS Social Independence and Acceptance	r	.055	-.001	.202(*)	.119
	p	.585	.995	.043	.235
CSS Social Interaction	r	.081	.046	.184	.143
	p	.420	.648	.065	.154
CSS Total	r	.105	.041	.220(*)	.170
	p	.295	.682	.027	.090

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to the results shown in Table 2, there is a positive significant relation between parents' scores from *Friends* subscale of Perceived Social Support Scale and Children's Social Skills Scores ($r=.220$, $p<0.05$). Beside this, there is also a positive and significant correlation between *Friends* subscale and *Social Independence and Acceptance* subscale of Social Skills Scale ($r=.202$, $p<0.05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore whether preschool children's social skills the relation between children's social skills and their parents' marital adjustments and social support systems. The results of this study revealed that there are positive correlations between children's social skills and parents' marital adjustment. It can be said that this result is consistent with the literature. Marital adjustment affects the quality of the relationship between parents and children positively. The situation when couples show respect, love and tenderness to each other not only makes children feel themselves happy and safe but also helps couples work out their parenting roles effectively. Decrease in marital adjustment might make the communication between parents and their children problematic (Vaizoğlu, 2008). Jouriles et al. (1999) and Papp et al. (2002) found out there is a strong relation between parents' marital adjustment and children's adjustment problems. Sarı (2007) found a significant positive correlation between parents' attitudes and children's social adjustment. According to the results of the present study, it is possible to say that an increase in parents' marital adjustment helps children enhance their social skills. It is possible to say that when couples are well-adjusted to each other in managing the friendship relations, obeying public rules, expressing feelings and so on, children also have positive progress in social cooperation skills parallel with their parents' attitudes.

The results of this study revealed that there are positive correlations between children's social skills and social support systems. This result also confirms the view claiming that family social support systems have an effect on children's social skills. Other previous studies support this finding. Burchinal et al. (1996), in their studies investigating the effects of social

support systems and family structure on children's social and cognitive development, determined that mothers with a wide range of social support resources interact with their children more close than mothers with limited social support resources. Dunst (2002) studied the effect of social support on family and parent-child interaction, and found out that social support had positive effect on parents' attitudes and children's behaviours. The above finding of the present study is also consistent with these mentioned studies. *Friends* subscale of Social Support Scale tries to determine the existence of friends whom parents can consult and get support, and assess the degree of their relationships. The degree of friendship relations shows the competence of individuals in using social skills. This competence also creates opportunities for children to develop their social skills, because children learn social behaviours by observing and experiencing. Within this context, the results of the study can be interpreted as parents' perceived social support systems positively affect their relations with their children; furthermore, children also benefit from the social support systems.

According to the results, hypotheses related to the factors affecting children's social skills, which were mentioned in the introduction, were confirmed. Different features of families affect children's social skills directly or indirectly. Since some variables affecting parents' marital adjustments can also have effects on children's social skills, it can be useful to provide family counselling about the factors hindering marital adjustments before and after the marriage. This support should be given by psychological counsellors in state schools, and parents should be made aware of the importance of counselling support in parenting a child. Within this context, preschool teachers should play a more active role in raising the awareness of parents about benefitting from this counselling.

Preschool teachers should provide activities aimed at enhancing social support resources and marital adjustments in the scope of parent participation workshops. Preschool teachers might also have their students do some activities that lead parents to the centres where they can get social support. Social support groups may be formed among parents. By designing experimental studies on enhancing marital adjustment and social support, the effects of these experiments on children behaviour might be examined.

According to the results of the study, these types of activities can be carried out as packages in schools, work places of parents and community colleges. These packages may include important points for various professions. Suggested support programs should also include the effects of marriage age, family permission, and relations with family and friends on marital adjustment. In line with this, the awareness about the individual roles of men and women in increasing marital adjustment should be raised. These planned packages may be extended to include small urban settlements. The effect of personal development on marital adjustment cannot be ignored. For this purpose, it could be suggested to frame necessary regulations to support personal development in all educational levels. Similar studies can be done through qualitative research design. The results of the qualitative studies can be compared to the results of quantitative ones.

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