Analyzing the Social Skills of Four and Five Year Old Pre-school Children according to their Mothers' Attitudes

Dr. Şermin METİN[1], Assos. Prof. Dr. Ender DURUALP[2], Prof. Dr. Neriman ARAL[3]

[1]Horsunlu Nursery School, Aydın; [2-3]Ankara University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Child Development Department, Ankara, TURKEY.

endora2212@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze whether the social skill levels of four and five year old preschool children change according to their mother' attitudes. This research was conducted among 104 children (58 girls and 46 boys) who attended preschools in central Kayseri and their mothers. The preschools were selected using the simple random sampling method among all preschools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in central Kayseri. Data were collected using the "Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI)" and "Social Skill Scale (SSS)". Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Kruskal Wallis H-tests were used to analyze the data. According to these analyses, children whose mothers adopt moderately protective attitudes, are moderately democratic, reject homemaker roles, do not have marital conflicts, get along well and impose moderate discipline show higher levels of social skills (p>0.05).

Keywords: Social skills, mother's attitude, preschool period, child

INTRODUCTION

Social skills consist of skills involving communication, academic achievements, self-control, helping others, seeking information, thanking, apologizing, starting conversation on a topic, answering questions, observing rules, waiting for one's turn, cooperating, being open to criticism, asking for feedback, introducing oneself, adaptation and assertiveness, and acquirable behaviors including observable-unobservable cognitive and affective elements that help individuals integrate with the society and become involved in social life. Social skills that are defined as the skills needed to interact adaptively in the relevant social environment are essential for building interpersonal communication and realizing social goals. Furthermore social skills enable individuals to fit into society, integrate with society, and communicate and interact with their peers and other individuals (Avcıoğlu, 2005; Çetin et al., 2002; Çiftçi and Sucuoğlu, 2004; Sorias, 1986). People can help, share, and cooperate with other people with whom they live and express their feelings in a manner acceptable to their own cultural surrounding. Thus children's social development should be considered as important as their physical, emotional and mental developments both in the family and at preschool institutions (Anonymous, 2006; Senemoğlu, 1994; Zembat and Unutkan, 2001).

Many social skills are acquired in peer groups and the family, through mothers, fathers, other adults and peers as role models, by means of observation, unwittingly and in an unsystematic manner. However, children should be taught social skills systematically and supported/encouraged to use these skills (Avcıoğlu, 2007). The attitudes and behaviors of mothers and parents, as part of children's immediate surroundings with whom children interact the most during early childhood, have a great impact on the behaviors children will acquire. Parental attitudes are key elements of children's education and essential in children's

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acquiring right and wrong attitudes and developing social skills. Parental attitudes, both specific ones related to teaching certain values and general ones, which work as models for children in every area, are embraced by children by means of taking as a model, imitation, and identification, and become indispensable parts of their identities after they become habits (Durmuşoğlu-Saltalı and Arslan, 2012; Seçer et al., 2006). Research concludes that families are critical for children's behavioral, social, emotional, personality, and cognitive development (Reitman et al., 2002). Parenting attitudes are shaped by a number of factors such as cultural effects, experiences related to parents' own upbringing, relationship between the mother and father, family's socio-economic status, child's age and gender, and depend on the family.   Most classifications related to parenting attitudes include authoritative (democratic), authoritarian, protective, and permissive parenting attitudes defined by Baumrind (1966) (as quoted by Spera, 2005).

It is known that children become socially competent individuals who can manage both themselves and their social relations through opportunities they are provided and their parents' parental attitudes towards child-rearing, and that parents are effective in their children's social developments as they are in all other areas of development. Children's socialization processes are associated with their family and school environments, and can be influenced by parental attitudes and behaviors (Spera, 2005). Socially competent individuals successfully adapt to social norms and expectations they are surrounded with and thus strike a balance between their personal wants and needs and society's requirements.

Ellis (2007) states that parental attitudes towards child-rearing contribute to children's development as a whole including academic achievements and social development, and positive attitudes enable children to perform quite well in terms of social achievements and psycho-social competency. People who lack social skills face various problems in interpersonal relationships, academic studies, emotional-behavioral fields and professional lives during their lifetimes (Avcıoğlu, 2005). Previous research indicates that children who do not acquire certain social skills until the age of six tend to be at risk, at high levels, for the rest of their lives (Hops, 1983; Kargı and Erkan, 2004; Parker and Asher, 1987). Thus children's social development should be considered as important as their physical, emotional, and mental developments both in the family and at preschool institutions (Zembat and Unutkan, 2001). It seems vital to determine parenting attitudes and take necessary measures during early childhood in order to raise healthy and socially competent generations. This study, based on these arguments, aims to investigate whether mothering attitudes, which are important for children's social skills acquisition, make any change in social skills of four and five year old preschool children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a descriptive and comparative study that investigated whether the social skill levels of four and five year old preschool children varied according to their mothers' attitudes. Children's social skills and mothers' attitudes constitute dependent and independent variables of the study, respectively.

Study Population

This study was conducted among four and five year old children (between the ages of 49 and 69 months) who attended preschools under the Ministry of National Education in central Kayseri during the 2012-2013 academic year. After the required permission was granted by the Provincial Directorate of National Education in Kayseri, two preschools among eighteen and three classes from each school (six in total) were selected using the simple random

sampling method. 104 voluntary mothers and their children (58 girls and 46 boys) were involved in the research.

While 55.8% of the children were girls, 44.2% were boys. They were 61.04 ± 5.88 months old on average. 51% had one sibling. 71.2% of their mothers were between the age of 31 and 35 years. 38.5% were primary school graduates and 94.2% were not working outside the home. 48.1% of their fathers were between 31 and 35 years old. 45.2% were high school graduates and 98.1% were employed.

Data Collection Tools

The Social Skill Scale (SSS) and Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) were used for data collection and the General Information Form was used to identify children's and parents' demographic characteristics. The Social Skill Scale (SSS) was developed by Acun-Kapıkıran, Bora-İvrendi, and Adak (2006) and its factor structure and psychometric properties were re-examined by Durualp and Aral (2010). The scale consists of three subscales-communication, discord and timidity - and 57 items.

The correlation between subscales varied between $r=0.248$ and $r=0.933$ and had a significant relationship at a 0.001 level. Communication ($\alpha=0.90$), discord ($\alpha=0.80$), and timidity ($\alpha=0.84$) subscale scores had high internal consistency reliability. 15 items of the scale, found valid and reliable, were negatively-keyed and reversely scored. It is a 5-point Likert-type scale using the following rating format: "Always (5 points), "Frequently (4 points)", "Sometimes (3 points)", "Rarely (2 points)", and "Never (1 point)". Subscale scores were summed, resulting in a social skill score.

The Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) was developed by Schaefer and Bell (1958) and adapted to Turkish by Le Compte, and Le Compte and Özer (1978). The scale consists of five subscales - overprotective mothering, democratic attitudes and equality, rejecting homemaker role, marital conflict-discord, and strict discipline - and 60 items. The second, 29th and 44th items on the scale are negatively-keyed and reversely coded. It is a Likert-type scale using the following rating format: "I find it very suitable (4)", "I find it rather suitable (3)", "I find it slightly suitable (2)", and "I don't find it suitable (1)". Higher scores in all the subscales except for democratic attitudes and equality reflect negative mothering attitudes. Subscale scores are evaluated separately not resulting in a total score.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected during the first semester of the 2012-2013 academic year after the necessary permission was granted. Teachers completed the Social Skill Scale (SSS) after observing children for about one and half to two months. The Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) was applied to mothers who accepted to voluntarily participate in the research. Incomplete and improperly completed scales were excluded from the project.

Data Analysis

The scores achieved in the scales by the children and their mothers involved in the study were found to not be distributed normally according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p<0.05$). Table 1 and Table 2 present descriptive statistics related to PARI and subscale scores achieved by the mothers, and SSS and subscale scores achieved by the children along with normality test results.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics related to PARI and subscales scores achieved by the mothers involved in the research and normality test results

PARI-Subscales	Mean (X)±Sd	Min	Max	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
Overprotective Mothering	44.96±8.02	25	63	0.080
Democratic Attitudes	25.72±3.52	17	33	0.084
Rejecting Homemaker Role	28.03±5.86	14	50	0.086
Marital Conflict-Discord	14.52±3.77	7	24	0.095*
Strict Discipline	38.10±8.45	21	58	0.056

*p<0.05

Table 2. Descriptive statistics related to SSS and subscale scores achieved by the children involved in the research and normality test results

SSS-Subscales	Mean (X)±Sd	Min	Max	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test
Communication	105.13±21.27	66	151	0.113*
Discord	45.80±5.73	30	57	0.081
Timidity	45.00±8.10	21	58	0.096*
Total	195.94±31.85	135	258	0.108*

*p<0.05

Thus, non-parametric statistics were used to analyze the data gathered. Accordingly, the Kruskal Wallis H-Test was employed to investigate whether children achieve different social skill scores according to their mothers' attitudes (Bayram, 2009; Büyüköztürk, 2008). In order to analyze children's social skills according to mothers' attitudes, mothers whose mean scores were one standard deviation above the mean score of each sub score were modeled as overprotective; those whose mean scores were below one standard deviation were modeled as not overprotective and those whose mean scores were between these two scores were modeled as moderately protective [X+Ss (high)], [X (moderate)], [X-Ss (low)]. For instance, mothers who scored above 44.96 points were considered as completely overprotective mothers, those who scored below 36.94 points as not overprotective mothers, and finally those who scored between these two points as moderately overprotective mothers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study investigated whether children's mean social skill scores differed significantly according to overprotective mothering, democratic attitudes, rejecting the homemaker role, marital conflict-discord, and strict discipline. Mothers attained, on average, 44.96±8.02 points in overprotective mothering, 25.72±3.52 points in democratic attitudes, 28.03±5.86 points in rejection of the homemaker role, 14.52±3.77 points in marital conflict-discord, and 38.10±8.45 points in strict discipline. On the other hand, children achieved, on average, 105.13±21.27 points in communication, 45.80±5.73 points in discord, 45.00±8.10 points in timidity, and 195.94±3185 points in total social skills.

Table 3. Results of the Kruskal Wallis H-test concerning children's social skills according to their mothers' attitudes

PARI-Subscales	Levels	Social Skills Scale			
		n	Mean (X)±Sd	Mean Rank	χ^2, df, p
Overprotective mothering	Not overprotective mothering	16	197.00±36.09	52.22	0.562
	Moderately overprotective mothering	70	196.82±31.21	*53.77*	2
	Completely overprotective mothering	18	191.55±31.95	47.81	0.755
Democratic attitudes	Non-democratic	23	188.95±28.14	45.98	2.368
	Moderately democratic	58	200.46±34.27	*56.45*	2
	Completely democratic	23	191.52±28.09	49.07	0.306
Rejecting homemaker roles	Mothers who do not reject homemaker roles	23	196.69±28.13	53.52	0.711
	Mothers who moderately reject homemaker roles	64	194.14±33.58	50.79	2
	Mothers who reject homemaker roles	17	201.70±30.87	*57.56*	0.701
Marital conflict-discord	Parents who get along well	14	207.35±29.99	*63.04*	2.621
	Parents who are moderately incompatible	72	192.87±33.13	49.58	2
	Parents who are incompatible	18	199.33±26.72	55.97	0.270
Strict discipline	Mothers who do not apply strict discipline	16	190.12±35.81	47.34	0.657
	Mothers who apply moderately strict discipline	68	197.50±32.03	*54.00*	2
	Mothers who apply strict discipline	20	195.30±28.82	51.52	0.720

Table 1 indicates that children involved in the study did not score significantly differently in the Social Skill Scale according to their mothers' attitudes (p>0.05). Based on the average rankings by the groups in an overprotective mothering subscale, children whose mothers adopted moderately overprotective mothering attitudes were found to have higher social skills. Children whose mothers exhibited not overprotective mothering attitudes and completely overprotective mothering attitude followed, respectively. Over protective mothering involves certain attitudes and behaviors such as too much control, interfering, making sacrifices, and believing that the child should understand, and demanding dependence and success from the child. According to Bowman et al. (2007), attachment to mother and control in family relations are important elements that influence children's social development and peer relations, and academic and good psychosocial history are associated with attachment to and control by mothers. In their study on the connection between different parental attitudes and children's skills to regulate disruptive behaviors and emotions, Duncombe et al. (2012) concluded that parents' expressed negative emotions and mental health are closely associated with children's disruptive behaviors and as a result children

have difficulty regulating their emotions. Findings of the research by Seçer et al. (2006) suggesting that children whose mothers are overprotective take social rules less seriously than children whose mothers are not overprotective support the findings of this study. It is similarly indicated that protective parental attitudes enable children to face fewer problems in internalizing social behaviors (Bowman et al., 2007). Ekşi (1999), analyzing the relationship between healthy-unhealthy behaviors of children between the ages of two and five and parental attitudes, argued that negligent, unloving, and excluding parental attitudes or those which are over fond of, over dependent on, and over-identify with children or those who are over-domineering and over-punitive are associated with pathological behaviors (as quoted by Gürşimşek et al., 2006).

Based on the average rankings of the groups in the subscale involving democratic attitudes and equality, the children whose mothers were moderately democratic had the highest social skills, followed by the children with completely democratic mothers. The children whose mothers did not adopt democratic behaviors and attitudes received the lowest mean score in social skills. The democratic attitudes and equality subscale involves certain behaviors, such as according equal rights to children, encouraging children to clearly express emotions and thoughts, befriending, and sharing. Reitman et al. (2002) states that authoritative or indulgent parental attitudes are effective in children's academic achievements and social adaptation. According to Deater-Deckard et al. (1996) and Seçer et al. (2006), children with democratic mothers do not construe social rules in the same way as children with undemocratic mothers; as such, they consider social rules related to authority and rules and for them less generalizable. Moreover Arı and Seçer (2003) indicated the relationship between democratic parental attitudes and psychosocial problem solving skills stating that the more democratic parents are, the higher psychosocial problem solving skills children have.

Children whose mothers reject homemaker roles scored the highest points in social skills, while those who mothers moderately reject homemaker roles had the lowest scores. This finding was not found statistically significant is not supported by other studies' findings. It is suggested that the study be evaluated after being conducted among more children. This subscale involving mothers' rejection of homemaker roles includes various behaviors such as dependency on their own mothers' or others, nervousness, not spending long periods of time with children, and being anxious about taking care of a newborn. Such mothering characteristics and psychological manifestations have adverse effects on mother-child communication and interaction. It is reported that these children experience various behavioral disorders such as halts in emotional and cognitive development and sometimes even a slow-down in mental functions, physical disorders, symptoms of depression, anxiety and fears, hostility, aggression, problems in adapting to school, attention deficit, and hyperactivity (Gürşimşek et al., 2006). Furthermore Gürşimşek et al. (2006) concluded that there is a significant relationship between mothers' psychological manifestations and behavioral problems of children at the age of five and six. According to Seçer et al. (2006), while mothers' democratic attitudes have positive effects on children's level of knowledge of moral and social rules, overprotective mothering and rejecting homemaker roles have adverse effects. Arı and Seçer (2003) concluded that mothers who reject homemaker roles affect their children's psychosocial problem solving behaviors suggesting that mothers who reject homemaker rules to a lesser extent promote their children's psychosocial problem solving skills.

Children whose parents were compatible recorded the highest average scores in social skills. Children whose parents were incompatible or moderately incompatible scored lower mean points in social skills. This subscale involves reckless spouse, spouse's not helping, and

discord between spouses. The relationship between mother, father, and child is essential for the child to develop a healthy identity and successfully adapt to social surroundings. For a healthy relationship between mother, father, and child, the mother and father first need to build a healthy relationship. Communication between mother and father affects the child; communication between child and mother affects the father and communication between child and father affects mother. Parents should be self-confident, have self-esteem, show respect to their children, be responsive to their children's problems, be cooperative, encourage their children to share their emotions and thoughts and accept their children in order to establish healthy relationships with their children (Ömeroğlu and Can-Yaşar, 2006). Family relationships are important for children's future interpersonal communications. It is acknowledged that children rose in families where problems are not settled, and incompatibilities replace problem solving behaviors have problems in their adult lives fixing interpersonal problems. Arı and Seçer (2003) state that children whose parents face greater marital conflicts have lower psychosocial problem solving skills and children's social relationships are affected adversely by unhealthy family relationships.

Based on the average ranking of the groups in the subscale involving strict discipline, children whose mothers applied moderately strict discipline received higher scores in social skills, followed by children whose mothers applied strict discipline, and then by those who did not apply discipline at all. The sub clause about relying on strict discipline includes certain behaviors such as forcing the child and believing in the parents' absolute authority. According to Patterson, children rose by parents who talk a lot and in a yelling manner and adopt menacing and explosive attitudes do not only develop anti-social behaviors such as discord, querulousness, bullying, hitting, and yelling but also become aggressive (Simons et al., 1991). In their study on the relationships of children between the ages of 6 and 11 with their friends and parental behaviors, Dekovic and Janssens (1992) suggest that children who are sociable within their groups have democratic parents, while children who are rejected in their groups of peers have authoritarian and rejecting parents. Furthermore, Stams et al. (2002), in their longitudinal study where they observed children starting from the age of six months to the age of seven years, indicated that a healthy bonding relationship and communication between the mother and child speed up and boost the child's social and mental development. According to Aunola and Nurmi (2005), children who are subject to strict discipline have high problems both with themselves and the outer world. Deater-Deckard et al. (1996) conclude that children exposed to physical disciplinary practices by their mothers adopt problematic behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study suggests that children can acquire social skills such as communication, adaptation, and assertiveness in family environments where parents adopt democratic attitudes, do not face marital conflict, and homemaker roles are shared between spouses and that moderate protective mothering and moderately strict discipline may have positive impacts. Moreover it argues that completely overprotective mothering, undemocratic attitudes, marital conflict-discord, and a lack of discipline may affect children's social skills adversely.

Children may be provided with proper surroundings and opportunities to develop their social skills. Based on the evaluation of children's social skill levels, initiatives can be planned for those with lower levels of social skills and their parents. Training sessions on family life and parenting attitudes can be organized for mothers starting from their pregnancy periods. The importance and impacts of democratic and compatible family environment on children's

social skills can be emphasized. Mothers can be informed about how to promote their children's social skills. Parents can be informed about how to serve as role models for their children. Similar studies can be conducted among different groups and results can be compared. The scope of this pilot study involving only mothers can be expanded to include more children and fathers as well as mothers. Other variables that are likely to influence parental attitudes towards child-rearing can be analyzed.

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