

THE ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF MOTHER ATTACHMENT STYLES OF CHILDREN ON THEIR LEVEL OF EMPHATIC SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in order to determine mother attachment styles of children who are 60 months old and over having pre-school education and to analyze the relationship between their mother attachment styles and their level of emphatic skills. In this context, within the academic year of 2015-2016, the research was carried out with 109 children who are 60 months old and over attending official primary education kindergartens and official independent kindergartens located in the centre of Çankırı and with their mothers. In order to collect data in the study, "General Information Form", "Close Relationship Inventory II", "Short Empathy Scale" were used. The obtained data were analyzed by SPSS 22 package program. As a result of the research; it has been found out that 71.9% of girls and 59.6% of boys have a secure attachment style; mother attachment styles and emphatic skills of children do not make a statistically significant difference according to the gender of the child. And also there is no significant relationship between Close Relationship Inventory II and emphatic skill. Suggestions have been made in the light of findings obtained as a result of the research.

Keywords: attachment styles, empathy, pre-school education

INTRODUCTION

Attachment is defined as "the close emotional connection between two people, shaped by the emotions and behaviors shown by the people around them, parallel to cognitive development". The feeling of attachment that starts to develop during infancy and gradually starts to develop in 6-8 months affects many areas of development (Aydoğan & Gültekin Akduman, 2016; San Bayhan & Artan, 2014). Baby's attachment behavior begins in search of closeness. In this process, the baby directs social reactions to the mother; he shows tenseness when the mother leaves and he feels relieved when the mother gets back (Pehlivan Türk, 2004). Attachment styles affect the relationship between mother and child in many ways. (Kayahan, 2002). When the attachment between mother and child in infancy is positive, the child develops a sense of trust in himself and the people around him. However, if attachment develops in a negative way, no sense of trust will be shaped either in himself or in his surroundings. In short, the attachment of the child to the mother is a model of relationships with other people throughout life. (İlaslan, 2009).

Empathy is defined as an individual's reacting by understanding the emotional state of another person and feeling the same or a very similar emotion as the one that another person feels or might feel. Empathy evolves when the child learns perspective. At the same time, the child's empathy is also influenced by language development, mental development, temperament and social experiences (Kabapınar, 2015; San Bayhan & Artan 2014; Sarmusak, 2011). The first indication of empathy is seen during infancy. During the age of 0-1, babies begin to react to the emotions of other people. Between the ages of 1 and 2, children can understand what others feel whereas they cannot understand that they might have different needs. Between the ages of 2 and 10, children can understand other people's feelings, know

that they may have different feelings and may show an approach according to their emotion. From six years old, a child can easily show empathy (Önder & Gülay, 2007).

The connection with the mother, which starts with the birth of the child, can directly or indirectly affect empathic skill development. This is thought to be effective in establishing positive social relations with the mother and the society in the following years. Positive attachment occurs when the mother shows affinity to her child during infancy and meets his needs. Children who are attached in a healthy way can show such behaviors as showing affinity, being interested, and trying to comfort, which are the acquired parts of empathic skill. Parents' showing affection to their children, being sensitive to them and empathizing with their children also play a major role in the development of empathy. Empathy which ensures healthy relationships with people allows one to tolerate other people by reflective thinking without making decisions.

This study was planned in order to determine mother attachment styles of children who are 60 months old and over and also to examine the effects of mother attachment styles on children's empathic skills. This research is thought to be significant in terms of supporting parents by determining children's mother attachment styles and showing the effect of mother-child attachment on the child's empathic skills. As it will allow discussing the effects of mother attachment styles on children's empathic skills, it is also thought to contribute to the literature.

THE METHOD

Research Model

This comparative study on the relationship between mother attachment styles of children over 60 months having preschool education and their empathic skills is a descriptive study in which scanning model is used. The screening model is a research approach that aims to describe either the past or the present situation as it exists. The event, individual or object under research is tried to be defined within its own conditions. (Karasar, 2012).

Population and Sample

The population of the study is composed of children 60 months old and over continuing their preschool education within the academic year of 2015-2016 in the schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the centre of Çankırı province. In the academic year of 2015-2016, the total number of children 60 months old and over in the kindergartens in Çankırı is 1621. The minimum sample size is calculated as 91. After the distribution of the questionnaires, within a total of 218 forms of 109 children and 109 mothers, the ones which were returned and which were found to be appropriate were evaluated for statistical analysis. 52.3% of the children included in the survey are girls, while 47.7% are boys. 18.3% of them are single children, 50.5% are first-born children. 7.3% of the mothers of the participating children and 9.2% of the fathers are 25 years of age and under; 9.2% of mothers and 17.4% of fathers are 40 years old and over. 25.7% of the mothers of the children participating in the survey and 11.9% of the fathers are graduates of primary school; 15.6% of mothers and 32.1% of fathers are university graduates. 14.7% of the mothers of the children participating in the survey work while 85.3% of them do not work. While 78.0% of the children participating in the research have a nuclear family structure, 22.0% have an extended family structure.

Collection of Data

In the study, "General Information Form" was used to determine the demographic characteristics of the child and his / her family, "Close Relationship Inventory II" was used to

determine the mother attachment style of the children and "Short Empathy Scale" to determine the empathic skills of the children.

General Information Form

The general information form includes the gender of the child, the number of siblings, the order of birth, the age of the mother and father, the education status of the mother and father, the mother working status and family structure.

Close Relationship Inventory II

"Inventory of Experiences in Close Relationships II" developed by Fraley and his colleagues in 2000 consists of a total of 36 items 18 of which measure dimensions of anxiety and 18 of the others measuring avoidance dimensions. From 1 to 7, participants were asked to evaluate how much each item reflects their feelings and thoughts in their romantic relationship. (1= totally disagree, 7= totally agree) The items measuring the relevant dimensions were collected separately and the averages were taken and the anxiety and avoidance scores were calculated for each participant. To calculate the anxiety score, the average of the odd-numbered items is taken, and the average of the even-numbered items is taken to calculate the avoidance score. According to their anxiety and avoidance dimensions, individuals are classified into four categories. These categories include secure, preoccupied, dismissive avoidant and fearful attachment styles. Those who scored low on the two dimensions (those with low anxiety and avoidance) are classified within secure attachment style, those who scored high on both scales are fearful, those who scored high on the anxiety dimension but low on the avoidance dimension are preoccupied and those scoring low on the anxiety dimension but high on the avoidance dimension are classified within dismissive attachment style. When determining which of the four attachment styles the participant has, the highest average of these attachment styles is based on. (Günaydın, Selçuk, Sümer ve Uysal, 2005; Bozkurt, 2006; Kırimer, Akça & Sümer, 2014). Inventory of Experiences in Close Relationships II was translated into Turkish by Günaydın vd. (2005) using the standard translation and re-translation method. Three experts from the field, after translating the scales separately into Turkish, jointly decided on a single translation at the end of the discussions. This Turkish form was later translated into English by a graduate student who can speak very well in both languages and the scale was finalized by eliminating inconsistencies as a result of comparison (Günaydın vd., 2005). Test - retest reliability of the anxiety and avoidance dimensions was performed using the data of 86 participants who filled the scale of ECR II in both times. The analysis showed that the anxiety dimension had a .82 and the avoidance dimension had a test - retest reliability of .81. At the same time, it was found that the dimensions of anxiety and avoidance were at a high level of internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha coefficients are .90 and .86, respectively, for anxiety and avoidance (Günaydın vd., 2005).

Sullivan Short Empathy Scale for Children

The "Short Empathy Scale" developed by Sullivan was made to give information about the empathic skills of children who are between 4 and 10 years old. The adaptation of the scale to Turkish, validity and reliability studies were carried out by Ulutaş (2005). The empathy scale consists of 10 items that are read aloud to the child and this is done individually for children aged 4-7 and in groups for children aged 8-10 years. The answers given to the Short Empathy Scale Form are "yes, I know, no". When the score obtained from the scale is high, it can be said that the child's empathy level is high. (Ulutaş, 2005). The adaptation of the scale to Turkish was done by Ulutaş and Ömeroğlu (2005), and at the end of the study the alpha value was found 0.67, and the test-retest correlation was found 0.99 (Ulutaş, 2005). In the light of

these results, the scale is considered to be a valid and reliable tool. In order for this scale to be used in this research, the necessary permission was granted by the researcher via e-mail correspondence.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data obtained in this study were analyzed in the SPSS 22 packet program. Before the analyzes, missing value analysis and extreme value analysis were done in the data set. No missing values were found. In the extreme value analysis, some erroneous data entries were corrected and some extreme values that might corrupt normality were transformed into values closest to themselves, thus eliminating the negative effects on the analyzes.

Another hypothesis, normality assumption, was also examined. For this study the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used because the sample size was greater than 50. In addition, the skewness and kurtosis values of the distribution were also investigated. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results were found to be significant. This situation indicates that the distribution has moved away from normality. However, this statistic, which is influenced by the sample size, can be misleading when the sample size is very large. For this reason, while deciding the normality of the distribution, the values of skewness and kurtosis, which are the final tests, were examined. It has been determined that the skewness and kurtosis values of each variable are in the range of -2 - +2. This indicates that these variables are normally distributed and that parametric tests can be applied (George & Mallery, 2003). T-test was used in order to determine whether close relationship inventory II (anxiety, avoidance), mother attachment style, and level of emphatic skills of children participating in the study differentiate according to demographic characteristics and Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relation between the variables. The significance level in the statistics was chosen as 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, findings obtained as a result of statistical analysis of the data collected to answer the sub problems of the research were included. Percent distribution of the child's gender according to attachment style, the relationship between the gender of the child and the Close Relationship Inventory II, and the relationship between the gender of the child and the empathic skill were analyzed. In addition, the correlation between the Close Relationship Inventory and the empathic skill was examined.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Attachment Styles According to Child's Gender

Gender of the child	Attachment Styles									
	Secure		Fearful		Preoccupied		Dismissive		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female	41	71,9	1	1,8	9	15,8	6	10,5	57	100
Male	31	59,6	4	7,7	12	23,1	5	9,6	52	100
Total	72	66,1	5	4,6	21	19,3	11	10,1	109	100

It has been found that of the girls participating in the study, 71.9% (n: 41) and 59.6% (n: 31) of boys have secure attachment style; 1.8% (n: 1) of girls and 7.7% (n: 4) of boys have fearful attachment style; 15.8% (n: 9) of girls and 23.1% (n: 12) of boys have preoccupied attachment style; 10.5% (n: 6) of girls and 9.6% (n: 5) of boys have dismissive attachment style; and in total 66.1% (n:72) have secure attachment style, 4.6% (n:5) have fearful

attachment style, 19,3% (n:21) have preoccupied attachment style, 10,1% (n:11) have dismissive attachment style.

Table 2. Score averages, Standard Deviations, and Independent T Test Results for Close Relationship Inventory II According To Gender of Children

Gender of the child	Close Relationship Inventory II				
	N	Anxiety		Avoidance	
		X	SS	X	SS
Female	57	58,26	15,01	44,90	18,74
Male	52	60,35	18,29	47,31	21,65
Total	109	59,26	16,65	46,03	20,12
T Test Results		t	p	t	p
		-0,651	0,517	-0,434	0,664

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that the boys have higher scores on both anxiety (X: 60,35) and avoidance (X: 47,31) than girls. However, according to the result of the T-test, the dimensions of both anxiety ($t=-0,651, p>0,05$) and avoidance ($t=-0,434, p>0,05$) of Close Relationship Inventory II don't make a statistically significant difference according to the gender of the child. In the research, it has been found that girls have higher percentages of secure attachment styles and boys have higher percentages of preoccupied and fearful attachment styles. Dismissive attachment styles are very close to each other. In the study, The fact that girls' secure attachment style scores are higher suggests mother-daughter relationship. This may be due to the fact that the time mothers spend with the girls and the things that they share are different from those they do with boys. As in this study, there are studies that show there is no significant difference between gender and attachment, and that girls are found to be more securely attached than boys. (İlaslan, 2009; Seven, 2006). However, contrary to this study, there are also studies in the literature which find a significant difference between attachment and gender (İşinsu, 2003). This is considered to be due to the characteristics of the selected sample.

Table 3. Score averages, Standard Deviations, and Independent T Test Results for Empathy According To Gender of Children

Gender of the Child	Empathy		
	N	X	SS
Female	57	9,37	0,98
Male	52	9,31	1,17
Toplam	109	9,34	1,07
T Test Results		t	p
		-0,142	0,887

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that girls' empathic skill scores (X: 9,37) are higher than boys. However, according to the T test result, it has been determined that empathy ($t = -0,142, p> 0,05$) does not make a statistically significant difference according to the gender of the child. In the study, no significant difference between empathy and the gender of the child has been observed. When the averages of the scores are examined, it is seen that the scores of the boys and girls are close to each other, but the empathy scores of the girls are higher than the scores of the boys. In our society, children can spend more time with their mothers as fathers work in general. This suggests that girls model their mothers, share and communicate

more with them than boys. There are also studies in the literature finding a significant difference between gender and empathic skill and showing girls have more empathic skills than boys (Köseoğlu, 2013). Girls' having higher scores than boys can be due to the way girls are raised in our community. Girls are raised to be more compatible and understanding than boys by their parents and other individuals around. Boys being raised to be stronger and not being able to express their emotions easily may cause them to have lower empathic skills. This may be the cause of girls' being more empathic (Rehber, 2007).

Correlation Findings between Close Relationship Inventory II and Empathy

Findings related to the relationship between Close Relationship Inventory II and children 's empathic skills are given in Table 4.

Table 4. The Test Results of Correlation between Close Relationship Inventory II and Empathy

Variables	Empathy	
Anxiety	r	-0,106
	p	0,274
	N	109
	r²	0,011
Avoidance	r	0,016
	p	0,872
	N	109
	r²	0,000

When Table 4 is examined, the relationship between the anxiety dimension of Close Relationship inventory II and the empathy score was determined as $r = -0,106$. This coefficient is not significant, but it is highly close to zero. It can be said that there is no relation between these variables ($p > 0,05$).

The relationship between Close Relationship Inventory II avoidance dimension and the empathy score was determined as $r = 0.016$. This coefficient is not significant, but it is highly close to zero. It can be said that there is no relation between these variables ($p > 0,05$).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to determine mother attachment styles of children who are 60 months and over continuing preschool education and to study the relationship between their attachment styles and level of empathic skills. As a result, it has been found that 71.9% of the girls and 59.6% of the boys have secure attachment style; 1.8% of girls and 7.7% of boys have fearful attachment style ; 15.8% of girls and 23.1% of boys have preoccupied attachment style; 10.5% of girls and 9.6% of boys have dismissive attachment style; and in total 66,1% have secure attachment style, 4,6% have fearful attachment style, 19,3% have preoccupied attachment style, 10,1% have dismissive attachment style. It has been found that children's mother attachment styles and empathic skills do not make a statistically significant difference according to the gender of the child. And also in the study, the relationship between the anxiety dimension of Close Relationship inventory II and the empathy score was determined as $r = -0,106$ and the relationship between avoidance dimension and the empathy

score was determined as $r = 0.016$. These coefficients are not significant, but they are highly close to zero. According to the results of the survey, only 66% of children showed secure attachment. However, in order for them to have a healthy development, it is desired that all children have a secure attachment. For this reason, in the region of study, trainings should be organized on mother baby attachment, which may increase the rates of secure attachment. In the research, it was observed that girls got higher scores in secure attachment style and emphatic skills. For this reason, parents' participating in seminars about their attitudes towards their children and their communication with them can have a positive effect on the gender variable. Moreover, this study was carried out in the schools located in Çankırı province. That there is no significant difference may be due to the fact that Çankırı is a small city and family structures are very similar to each other. Therefore, the research should be conducted in different regions and with families with different socioeconomic levels.

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