

Analysing Mothers' Self-efficacy Perception towards Parenting in Relation to Peer Relationships of 5-6 year-old Preschool Children*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of self – efficacy perception of mothers' towards parenting on the peer relations of children aged between 5 and 6. The sample group of this study comprised of 200, 5 – 6 year old children (girls= 96, boys= 104), and their mothers. The Ladd and Profilet Child Behaviour Scale, the Peer Victimization Scale and the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale – Mother Form were used to collect data of this study. Study results concluded that there was a negative significant relationship between the level of self-efficacy perceived by mothers towards parenting and variables of aggression, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity, and peer victimisation of their children. Another conclusion obtained from this study was that the level of self-efficacy perceived by mothers towards parenting had a predictor effect on their child's level of aggression, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity, and peer victimisation. There was no significant relationship between the level of self-efficacy perceived by mothers towards parenting and their child's level of prosocial and asocial behaviour.

Key Words

Peer relationships, parenting self-efficacy, preschool period, peer victimisation.

Self – efficacy is the belief of an individual in performing an action. Parenting self - efficacy is considered as personal decisions and beliefs based on the skills of individuals, regarding doing and organising parenting duties. It is emphasised that

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self – efficacy, which is approached as expectation of effective and efficient mothering, and her confidence in skill of meeting needs of the child, has an effect on both children and mothers (Bandura, 1997; Kendall & Bloomfield, 2005; Kotaman, 2008; Leerkes & Burney, 2007; Montigny & Lacharite, 2005; Teti & Gelfand, 1991).

Some researchers set forth that the self – efficacy perception of mothers influences the parenting practices, behaviours and developmental areas of the child (Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2008; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2002; Teti & Gelfand, 1991).

Especially the parenting depression and stress may increase the possibility of using strict and negligent discipline techniques in the education of the child by creating a low level of parenting self – efficacy in mothers. On the other hand, mothers with high parenting self – efficacy level may use more positive

discipline techniques in the education of the child (Jackson & Huang, 2000; O'Neil, Wilson, Shaw, & Dishion, 2009; Sanders & Woolley, 2004; Spielman & Ben-Ari, 2009).

It is put forward that the preschool children, who are exposed to the negative discipline techniques of their mothers, become more aggressive, antisocial, excluded, self-enclosed and less popular in their peer relationships (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Fagot, Hagan, Youngblade, & Potter, 1989).

Studies conducted on the parenting self – efficacy emphasised that a low level of parenting self–efficacy was effective upon raising behavioural problems by affecting the psycho-social and emotional adaptation of the child (Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan, & Rodriguez-Brown, 2000; Jackson & Huang, 2000; Mash & Johnston, 1983; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2009; Weaver, Shaw, Dishion, & Wilson, 2008).

Preschool period is a period when the children seek to be accepted by their peers. For children experiencing this period, the peer acceptance includes activities such as being preferred by their friends for activities at school, sitting on the same desk with friends, sharing toys with them, participating in games, eating together and having fun at a birthday party together outside of school (Asher, MacEvoy, & McDonald, 2008; Yanık, 2011). During this period, children have positive and negative peer experiences in their social lives. Some children may experience difficulties in peer relationships, such as being rejected by peers, and exposed to peer victimisation as from the age of four. While the children who are accepted by their peers are not exposed to peer victimisation, the children who are rejected by their peers are likely to be exposed to peer victimisation to a larger extent (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988). These negative experiences might influence the socio-emotional adaptation and development of children (Boivin, 2005). Preschool period includes the years when the basis of the peer relationships of children are formed and is very important in terms of short and long term effects of peer relationships on the child. As well as supporting the children to be in communion and cooperation with one another, the peer relationships play an important role in enabling them to gain the information and skills required for interpersonal relations, solve problems and cope with them (Beyazkürk, Anlık, & Dinçer, 2007; Gülay, 2008).

As a consequence, revealing the effect the self – efficacy belief of mothers has on the peer relationships of preschool children is important, in terms of developing both the peer relationships of children

and self – efficacy of mothers. When examining the relevant literature in Turkey, there are studies on peer relations and self - efficacy perception of parents (Aksoy & Diken, 2009; Beyazkürk et al., 2007; Diken & Diken, 2008; Gülay, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011; Önder, 2005; Seçer, Çeliköz, & Yaşa, 2007, 2008). However, there is no study that addresses the effect self – efficacy perception of mothers has on the peer relationships of preschool children. Thereby, this study investigated whether or not there is a relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and peer relationships of preschool children aged between 5-6 and whether or not the self – efficacy perception predicts the peer relationships.

Depending on the general purpose of the study, the following questions were sought an answer.

- Is there a relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and peer relationships (aggression, prosocial behaviour, asocial behaviour, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity, and peer victimisation) of preschool children aged between 5-6?
- Do the self – efficacy perceptions of mothers have a predictor effect on the peer relationships (aggression, prosocial behaviour, asocial behaviour, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity, and peer victimisation) of preschool children aged between 5-6?

Method

Model

This study was used relational survey model. Relational survey model is a research model aiming to determine the existence and extent of the covariance between two and more variables (Karasar, 2005).

Participants

The sample group of this study was composed of children aged between 5-6, who attend Kindergarten Classes of Primary Schools and Kindergartens in Merkez District of Aksaray Province, and their mothers. The sample group of the study was selected using simple random sampling method. Five kindergarten classes of primary schools and two kindergartens were selected in accordance with the selection performed with draw method among the kindergarten classes of primary schools and kindergartens affiliated to Aksaray National Education Directorate. Schools were gotten contact with in accordance with the permissions

obtained from the Provincial Directorate for National Education. Among the selected schools, five schools accepted to participate in the study. Therefore, 200 5-6 year-old children and their mothers participated in the study.

Instruments

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale-Mother

Form: The scale was developed by Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman (1978), and its validity-reliability studies were conducted by Seçer et al. (2008). In order to determine the attitudes of mothers towards parenting, the scale was used in the study. Additional validity and reliability studies were not conducted for this study. The scale consists of 16 items. The participants score the items on the scale between 1 – 5. While high scores indicate positive attitude towards parenting, low scores indicate negative attitude. Considering the experiences of mothers regarding their children, the scale includes the self-assessment and reflecting their attitudes towards parenting. The original data collection tool had 16 items and was reassessed and finalised in accordance with expert opinions that were consulted for the purpose of enabling the content validity with the factor analysis conducted. However, no item was excluded since it gave similar results with the original one. Additionally, the original scale had 2 sub-scales but was determined to be 3 sub-scales as a result of the analysis. These elements were (1) competence perception regarding the duty of parenting-7 questions, (2) interest in the duty of parenting-2 questions, and (3) satisfaction obtained from the duty of parenting-7 questions. The scale also includes the total scores obtained from the whole scale, which reflect the general attitudes of mothers towards parenting. This study used overall scores obtained from the scale. Mothers stated their attitudes towards each item on the scale by marking one of the categories “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “undecided”, “agree”, “strongly agree”. While the ratio of the scale for explanation of the total variance aimed at measuring three factors was 50.93%, the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was .84. Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis) was performed in order to provide the construct validity of the scale. The ratio of the scale for explanation of the total variance aimed at measuring 3 factors was 55.09%, and the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient was .88.

Ladd and Profilet Child Behaviour Scale: Ladd and Profilet Child Behaviour Scale is a measurement scale, which was developed by Ladd and

Profilet (1996) to assess the relations of preschool children with their peers at schools, in accordance with the knowledge of teachers. The scale is comprised of six subscales and 44 items that represent various variables including aggressive behaviour that affects peer relationships (7 items), social behaviour that aims to help other people (10 items), asocial behaviour (7 items), exclusion (7 items), fearful-anxiety (9 items) and hyperactivity (4 items). Gülay (2008) adapted the scale into Turkish. As a result of the reliability and validity studies that were performed after the linguistic equivalence study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.81. The internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “aggression towards peers” was 0.87, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “prosocial behaviour” was 0.88, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “asocial behaviour” was 0.84, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “fearful-anxiety” was 0.78, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “exclusion by peers” was 0.89 and the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “hyperactivity” was 0.83. In this study, the internal consistency coefficients of the scale were re-determined. Accordingly, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined to be 0.83. The internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “aggression towards peers” was 0.85, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “prosocial behaviour” was 0.88, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “asocial behaviour” was 0.83, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “fearful-anxiety” was 0.80, the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “exclusion by peers” was 0.89 and the internal consistency coefficient of the subscale “hyperactivity” was 0.80. Scoring the scale was based on subscales. The total scores obtained from subscales indicate how extent children possess those behaviours.

Peer Victimization Scale: Peer Victimization Scale is a measurement tool developed by Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2002) for children aged between 5-6. It is completed by teachers. The scale has four items, each of which is related to four types of aggression (physical, indirect, direct and general). The linguistic equivalence and validity-reliability studies of the scale were conducted by Gülay (2008). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.72. Within the scope of this study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.73. The overall score obtained from the scale indicates how extent the child is exposed to the peer victimisation.

Procedure

The initial step was to hold a meeting with teachers at schools, which accepted to participate in the study, during the process of collecting data of the study. The teachers were primarily informed by researchers about the measurement tools to be completed by both the children and mothers, and the purposes of the study. And then depending on the approximately five-month observations of teachers, they completed Ladd and Profilet Child Behaviour Scale and Peer Victimization Scale for each child in their classes. Since the measurement tool to obtain information about the peer relationships of children was based on teachers' views, the information about children was obtained from teachers. The scale, which the study used in an effort to determine the parenting self – efficacy perception of mothers, was taken to mothers by teachers and completed by mothers personally. Even though it was aimed to apply the scale to approximately 240 children and their mothers within the scope of the study, the statistical analyses were conducted over scales completed by 200 children and their mothers, since 40 mothers did not return the data. It took approximately one month to collect the data.

Data Analysis

The SPSS 17.0 statistics package program was used to analyse the data of the study. During the analyses, the technique of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to reveal the relationship between the parenting self – efficacy perception of mothers of preschool children and peer relationships of children, obtained through and teachers' observations. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was conducted to identify whether or not the self – efficacy perception of mothers has a predictor effect on the peer relationship of children.

Findings

There was a low-level negative significant relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and aggression ($R = -.23, p < .001$), exclusion ($R = -.14, p < .001$), fearful-anxiety ($R = -.20, p < .001$), hyperactivity ($R = -.25, p < .001$) and peer victimisation ($R = -.24, p < .001$) levels of children. As the self – efficacy perception scores of the mothers increased, the aggression, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity and peer victimisation levels of children decreased. On the other hand, as the self – efficacy perception of the mothers decreased, the

aggression, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity and peer victimisation levels of children increased. There was an insignificant relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and prosocial behaviour and asocial behaviour levels of children.

The self – efficacy perception of mothers had significantly a predictor effect on each variable of children, such as aggression, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity and peer victimisation. Furthermore, the self – efficacy level of mothers significantly predicted the aggression ($R = 0.23, R^2 = 0.05, F = 11.48, p < .01$), exclusion ($R = 0.14, R^2 = 0.02, F = 4.217, p < .05$), fearful-anxiety ($R = .20, R^2 = .04, F = 8.386, p < .05$), hyperactivity ($R = 0.25, R^2 = 0.06, F = 13.317, p < .01$) and peer victimisation levels of children ($R = 0.24, R^2 = 0.06, F = 12.195, p < .01$). On the other hand, it is possible to explain 5% of the total variance for the aggression level of children, 2% of the total variance for their exclusion level, 4% of the total variance for their fearful-anxiety level, 6% of the total variance for their hyperactivity level, and 6% of the total variance for their peer victimisation level in relation to self – efficacy perception of mothers. This condition proved that there were other factors effective on the peer relationships of children, as well. On the other hand, according to the standardised regression coefficients (b), the relative importance order of parenting self – efficacy perception of mothers on the peer relationships of their children is as follows; (1) hyperactivity, (2) peer victimisation, (3) aggression, (4) fearful-anxiety, (5) exclusion. The results of t-test regarding the significance of regression coefficients concluded that self – efficacy value of mothers was a significant predictor for exclusion, aggression, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity and peer victimisation behaviours of children, except for their prosocial behaviour and asocial behaviour.

Discussion

According to the first result of the study, there was a low-level negative significant relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and aggression of children, which explains 5% of the aggression level of children. Relevant studies conducted on the subject stated that the aggressive behaviours of preschool children were associated with behaviour management skills of parents and their discipline techniques. Especially strict and negligent discipline techniques may cause aggression in children. It was put forward that these discipline techniques are most frequently used by mothers with a low parenting self – efficacy perception (Sanders & Wool-

ley, 2004). Researchers (Chan, 2010; Nelson, Hart, Yang, Olsen, & Jin, 2006) proved that the children of authoritative parents using negative and strict discipline techniques were more aggressive. Such families usually try to solve their discipline problems with pressure, as well as physical and verbal punishments. In short, a low parenting self – efficacy is thought to trigger the aggressive behaviours in children, due to the negative parenting practices of parents and possibility of frequently using behaviour-controlling methods. In addition to results of the studies conducted abroad to identify the effect of discipline methods used by mothers on the aggressive behaviours of children, there are also similar studies conducted in Turkey. For example, in his study, Akduman (2010) reported that the most frequent methods used by the Turkish mothers to discipline their preschool children were yelling at and scolding, punishing, and threatening the child, as well as, some of the mothers applied to the methods of swearing, insulting or abusing, saddling them with enormous tasks and punishing them physically in order to discipline their children. Nacak, Yağmurlu, Durgel, and Vijver (2011) conducted a study by sampling the provinces of Konya, Kayseri and Nevşehir where rural population is dense, and proved that mothers in the sample of rural cities used more frequently behaviours of expecting the unquestionable obedience and punishment in comparison to mothers living in metropolis. In addition to these results, Hamamcı and Köksal-Akyol (2004) asserted that parents perceived inadequately their knowledge and skills regarding the subjects of family communication, discipline, directing children's behaviours and personal development. Accordingly, it is possible for mothers have a low self – efficacy perception due to lack of their knowledge about parenting. A low level of parenting perception is considered as one of the variables that could affect the child aggression.

The other result of the study was that there was a low-level negative significant relation between the self – efficacy of mothers and the scores of *exclusion by peers* of children, which explains 2% of the exclusion level of children. There was a relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and parenting practices (Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999; Coleman & Karraker, 1998). In other words, as a result of the negative discipline techniques applied by mothers with a low level of parenting self – efficacy perception, it is expected that these techniques affect adversely social skills of preschool children, cause problems in their relations with peers and these children be excluded by peers (Dodge et al.,

1994; Fagot et al., 1989). According to Erbay (2008), the future lives of children excluded by their peers are in danger. Being excluded by peers is a negative experience for the social and emotional development of children. The children who become isolated in a group will feel alone and unconfident. This feeling not only prevents them from participating in group activities, but also causes them to be reluctant about going to school. In the long term, the child will completely get alienated from the environment and have mental problems. As a consequence, the low self – efficacy perception of mothers may increase the probability of exclusion by peers as a result of affecting negatively the social skills of children.

Another result obtained from the study is that there was a low-level negative relation between the parenting self – efficacy of mothers and fearful-anxiety status of children. The relation between the self – efficacy of mothers and fearful-anxiety status of children could be explained based on studies on both the attachment theory and motherhood depression and stress. In accordance with the attachment theory, the early inter-family experiences form an important base for developing subsequent relationships of children with peers (Michiels, Grietens, Onghena, & Kuppens, 2010). The studies conducted put forward that the type of attachment formed between the mother and child might affect the peer relationships of the child in the future. For example, Wood et al. (2004) investigated the relation between the attachment style of preschool children on their mother and their peer relationships. In this study, it was concluded that children who developed a low level of reliable attachment were excluded by their peers at a high rate and had both inner-directed and outer-directed behavioural problems. Accordingly, the fact that the low parenting self – efficacy perception of mothers might affect the mother-child attachment negatively at the beginning, and this condition could play a role in the determination of peer relationships of preschool children is considered to be one of the variables in prospect. On the other hand, according to Sayıl (n.d.), one of the reasons behind the anxieties of preschool children is the parent depression. While the depression and stress of the parent cause anxiety in the child, it causes a low level of parenting self – efficacy in the parent (Jackson & Huang; 2000; O'Neil et al., 2009; Spielman & Ben-Ari, 2009). One of the studies conducted (Efe, Taşkın, & Eroğlu, 2009) proved that the most important factor leading to the postpartum depression of mothers in Turkey was the inadequacy knowledge of the mother regarding

parenthood and insufficient support from the environment. Postpartum depression has a negative effect on the first three-year development of the child. It affects especially the emotional and behavioural development of children negatively. Furthermore, mothers are unable to apply for treatment due to the fear of being stigmatized by the society (Stein et al., 2008). Since the low parenting self – efficacy could be formed in the mother as a result of the postpartum depression and stress that is generally caused by the fact that mothers feel themselves inadequate in terms of motherhood and they cannot obtain support, it could be considered to be one of the variables that could affect the high anxiety level of children in peer relationships.

Another result obtained from the study is that there was a low-level negative relation between the parenting self – efficacy of mothers and *hyperactivity* of children. Similar results have been obtained in similar studies conducted both inland and abroad. For example, McLaughlin and Harrison (2006) reported that both disruptive behaviours of children and low parenting self – efficacy perception caused less effective parenting practices, and explained this condition with Bandura's theory on self – efficacy, which emphasises the relation between the self – efficacy perception and behaviour. On the other hand, Keown and Woodward (2006) concluded that the discipline styles of parents, their management style for behaviours of children and interaction samples of parent-child affected the peer relationships of preschool hyperactive children. Gülay (2008) indicated that the depression level of mother, stressful lives in the family, and extremely permissive parent attitudes increased the intensity of child hyperactivity and their mothers had more negative attitudes. Besides, mothers of normal children have negative emotions and low self – efficacy perceptions regarding the hyperactive children. Emotions affect cognitive assessment processes, which cause self – efficacy perceptions (Maniadaki, Sonuga-Barke, Kakouros, & Karaba, 2006). In short, there is a mutually negative interaction between the low parenting self – efficacy perception and hyperactivity.

Another result obtained from the study is that there was a negative significant relation between the self – efficacy perception of mothers and *peer victimisation* levels of children. In other words, low self – efficacy of mothers is one of the variables that cause the preschool children to be victimised by their peers. According to Şirvanlı-Özen (2010), peer victimisation in Turkey has become one of the subjects that

have been ignored due to culture specific thoughts, such as “boys will be boys”. Thereby, number of the studies on bullying in Turkey is limited and they includes other grades of education (Bilgiç & Yurtal, 2009; Kapçı, 2004; Şahin, Sarı, Özer, & Er, 2010). Karataş and Öztürk (2009) stated that bullying is frequently seen during the adolescence period; however, some studies (Gülay, 2009a) concluded that preschool children might also be exposed to bullying ; indeed, the peer victimisation of children during this period is likely to affect their social development negatively. Preschool children are exposed to low-level violence in various environments such as home primarily, school and neighbourhood; however, the greatest violence is experienced in the neighbourhood environment (Yıldız & Sümer, 2010). Adolescents and children who are exposed to overbearing behaviours will be probably individuals displaying overbearing behaviours in the future (Karataş & Öztürk) and while exposure to peer victimisation increases their depression level , it decreases the self esteem in children (Çetinkaya, Nur, Ayvaz, Özdemir, & Kavakçı, 2009). According to Bayraktar, Özdeikmenli-Demir, and Sayıl (2008), authoritarian parenting styles (low level of sensibility and support, high level of psychological control) might cause peer bullying . Mothers with a low self – efficacy frequently use strict and negligent discipline techniques (Sanders & Woolley, 2004). In other words, a low level of self – efficacy not only affects negatively the parenting styles and practices of mothers, but also causes the child to have more conflicts in their peer relationships and be exposed to peer victimisation as a result of being unable to express themselves.

As a consequence, self – efficacy of mothers affects the aggression, exclusion, fearful-anxiety, hyperactivity and peer victimisation levels of children and that this condition might be effective on shaping peer relationships of their preschool children.

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