

The Predictive Effect of Father-Child Relationship on Peer Relationships of Young Children

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the predictive effect of father-child relationship on peer relationships of young children. The population of the study comprised of 5–6 year-old children (N=105), who were attending the kindergarten class of primary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Denizli, as well as their fathers. A relational survey method was used in this study. A Personal Information Form, developed by the researchers, Child-Parent Relationship Scale (Father Form), the Child Behaviour Scale, and the Peer Victimization Scale were used to collect data of the study. Father-child relationship significantly predicted levels of prosocial, aggressive, asocial, excluded, hyperactivity-distractible, and peer victimization behaviours of young children. Accordingly, it could be concluded that father-child relationship is effective on peer relationships of young children.

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Keywords:³

Father-child relationships, peer relationships, young children.

INTRODUCTION

Social and emotional development rapidly progresses in the preschool period (Masten, Gewirtz and Sapienza, 2013; Rochat, 2014; Schaffer, 1996; Webster Stratton, 2016). Development is affected by several factors in the first years of life (Engle, Young and Tamburlini, 2013; Harkness et al., 2013; Spodek and Saracho, 2014). Mother-father-child relationship is one of these factors (Kim and Kochanska, 2012; Lyons-Ruth, 2015; McLanahan, Tach and Schneider, 2013; Malekpour, 2013). Parents who support their children's social and emotional development spend quality and sufficient time with them, share their social experiences with them, listen to them, answer their questions, provide stimuli required for children's development, seek solution to problems together with their children by exhibiting a democratic attitude and occasionally place restrictions in a reassuring and tolerant attitude (Kandır and Alpan, 2008).

Father is as important a figure of attachment as a mother for children. In addition, the father-child attachment relationship develops differently from the mother-child attachment relationship. Fathers are likely to be more active in game-related activities and have a more passive role in child care compared to mothers. Additionally, games that children play with their fathers may involve more physical activities. Fathers emotionally encourage their children to play games and thus undertake an intermediary role for their children to develop self-confidence, trust others, and explore the outside world. As a figure opening up to the outside world, fathers have a great effect on the development of their children (Dumont, 2011).

Importance of fathers in lives of their children has become more comprehensible together with the changing social life and value judgements. In developing countries, main responsibility of fathers is to bring home the bread instead of subjects such as running of home and care and education of children. However, they are also expected to undertake care of children and their education now (Güngörmüş Özkardeş, 2015; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2012; Nar, 2009). In this respect, the presence of a healthy communication between fathers and their children is important for the development and positive behaviours of children. The studies have also suggested that fathers are very important for their children (Amato, 1994; Benzies, and Evans, 2015; Bowey, 1995; Culpin et al., 2013; Downer and Mendez, 2005; Ferreira et al., 2016; Kochanska et al., 2015; Parent-Boursier and Hébert, 2015). For instance, in the study conducted by Levesque (2009) to investigate the father figure in preschool children, it was determined that four-year-old male children displayed behaviours reflecting the figure of father in their symbolic games at least once. In the longitudinal study of Hamel (2015) investigating the relationship of 39 fathers with their children in age range of 12-18 months until the age of 3-

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5; the results showed that the father-child activation relationship had a poor stability (46%) and no factor was related to stability or instability.

The relationship of fathers with their children is mainly dynamic and characterized by physical and activating games and also has distinct boundaries. This type of relationship is defined as activation relationship. Activation relationship has a positive effect upon self-regulation of children while safely exploring their determination and environment. The studies have revealed the relationship between social development and activation relationship of children. As the theoretical frame of activation relationship is grounded on the functioning of fathers, the question still remains as to whether or not mothers have the potential to replace fathers within this dynamic relationship (Gagnon Lafond, 2014).

The number of studies investigating the roles of fathers in the development of preschool children in Turkey has increased in recent years. However, these studies apparently remain insufficient compared to studies on mother-child relationship (Aydın Kılıç, 2016; Özkan, 2014; Ünlü, 2010; Ünüvar, 2008). The reason for a limited number of studies on father-child relationship in Turkey might be factors such as fathers' longer working hours, their working in different hours of the day due to the shift system and mothers' keen interest in their children's education (Albukrek, 2002; Güngörmüş Özkardeş, 2015). In the literature, there are studies examining different aspects of behaviours of preschool children in Turkey and the correlation of those behaviours with different variables (Kaya, 2016; Kuruçırak, 2010; Pekkarakaş, 2010; Ünüvar, 2008). Also some of these studies have investigated mothers and fathers together (Dursun, 2010; Ekinci Vural, 2006; Günalp, 2007; Kandır and Alpan, 2008; Kartal, 2007; Karaca, Gündüz and Aral, 2011; Kesebir, Kavzoğlu and Üstündağ, 2011; Öngider, 2013; Özyürek and Şahin, 2005; Seven, 2007), on the other hand, there is a limited number of studies focusing only on father-child relationship (Güleç and Kavlak, 2015; Kuzucu, 2011; Şahin and Özbey, 2009). No study investigating the effect of fathers on peer relationships is present among those studies examining father-child relationship in Turkey. Fathers also have various effects on peer relationships of their children (Gülay Ogelman, 2018). It is important to reveal the effect of fathers on peer relationships of their preschool children in Turkey in terms of understanding the social development of the children and to demonstrate the importance of father-child relationship from various aspects. Also, the present study is thought to guide studies emphasizing the importance of father especially in developing countries. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the predictive effect of father-child relationship on peer relationships of young children. Subgoals of the study are as follows:

- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on prosocial behaviours of young children?
- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on aggressive behaviours of young children?
- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on asocial behaviours of young children?
- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on excluded levels of young children?
- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on fearful anxiety levels of young children?
- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on hyperactivity-distractible levels of young children?
- Does father-child relationship have a predictive effect on peer victimization levels of young children?

METHOD

In this study, a relational survey method was used to examine the predictive effect of the father-child relationship on peer relationships of young children.

Participants

One hundred and five 5–6 year-old children and their fathers were included in this study. The population of the study comprised of 5–6 year-old children, attending the kindergarten class of primary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, in Denizli, as well as their fathers. The sample group was selected using a random sampling method. The participants of the study were a total of 105 children who were selected from 10 kindergarten classes of 10 primary schools. 58 (55.2%) of the children were girls;

whereas, 47 (44.8%) of the children were boys. Fourteen (13.3%) of the children were 5 year-olds; whereas, ninety-one (86.7%) of the children were 6 year-olds. On the other hand, one (1.0%) of the fathers was illiterate, thirty-eight (36.2%) were primary-school graduates, thirty-one (29.5%) were secondary-school graduates, thirty-one (29.5%) were higher education, and four (3.8%) were university graduates. Twelve (11.4%) of the fathers were aged between 20 and 30, seventy-seven (73.3%) were aged between 31 and 40, and sixteen (15.2%) were aged above 41. Two (1.9%) of the fathers were non-workers, eighty-one (77.1%) were workers, twenty (19.0%) were self-employed, and two (1.9%) were retired.

Measures

A Personal Information Form, developed by the researchers, Child Parent Relationship Scale (Father form), the Child Behaviour Scale, and the Peer Victimization Scale were used to collect data of the study.

Child Parent Relationship Scale (Father form): The scale was developed by Robert C. Pianta in 1992 for the purpose of understanding the mother-father-child relationship. The scale items were prepared based on the literature of mother-father-child interaction, attachment theory, and Attachment Q-Set Scale. The original version of the scale consists of three subscales and 30 items (14 items in the subscale of Conflict, 6 items in the subscale of Attachment, and 10 items in the subscale of Positive Relationship). The items are scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly inappropriate to (5) Strongly appropriate. The scale contains positive and negative statements and negative statements are scored reversely. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the subscales are .83 (Conflict), .72 (Positive Aspects), and .50 (Incompatibility) (Pianta, 1992). (Sample item: "My child can easily get angry with me.") The assessment instrument was adapted into Turkish by Uzun and Baran (2015). They found that the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency of Turkish version of the scale was .71 for the overall scale, .76 for first subscale (Positive Aspects), .61 for second subscale (Incompatibility) and .62 for third subscale (Conflicts) (Uzun and Baran, 2015).

The Child Behaviour Scale: This scale is a measurement tool, developed by Ladd and Profilet (1996) to evaluate the peer relationships of preschool children according to the information provided by teachers. The scale consists of six subscales and 44 items. The subscales are aggression with peers (7 Items), prosocial behaviour with peers (10 Items), asocial behaviour with peers (7 Items), anxiety fear (9 Items), exclusion by peers (7 Items), and hyperactivity-distractibility (4 Items). (Sample item: "Prefers to play alone"). All the subscales of the Child Behaviour Scale were used in this study. All the scale items are scored as 'Never', 'Sometimes', or 'Always'. The internal consistency coefficients for the subscales of its original version were 0.92 for subscale 'aggression with peers', 0.88 for the subscale 'prosocial behaviour with peers', 0.88 for the subscale 'asocial behaviour with peers', 0.79 for the subscale 'anxiety-fear', 0.96 for the subscale 'exclusion by peers', and 0.93 for the subscale 'hyperactivity-distractibility' (Ladd and Profilet, 1996). The internal consistency coefficients for the subscales of its Turkish version were 0.87 for the subscale 'aggression with peers', 0.91 for the subscale 'prosocial behaviours with peers', 0.84 for the subscale 'asocial behaviours with peers', 0.78 for the subscale 'anxiety-fear', 0.89 for the subscale 'exclusion by peers', and 0.83 for the subscale 'hyperactivity-distractibility' (Gülay, 2008). In the present study, the internal consistency coefficients were 0.81 for the subscale 'aggression with peers', 0.92 for the subscale 'prosocial behaviour with peers', 0.84 for the subscale 'asocial behaviour with peers', 0.79 for the subscale 'anxiety-fear', 0.89 for the subscale 'exclusion by peers', and 0.80 for the subscale 'hyperactivity-distractibility'.

The Peer Victimization Scale: This scale is a measurement tool, developed by Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2002) for children aged between 5 and 6. The teachers completed the scale. The scale includes four items, each of which focuses on one of the four types of peer aggression (physical, indirect, direct, and general). (Sample item: "Is picked on by other children.") Each item is scored as 'Never', 'Sometimes', or 'Always'. The internal consistency coefficient for the original version of the scale was 0.91 (Ladd and Kochenderfer Ladd, 2002). In 2008, Gülay carried out linguistic equivalence, reliability, and validity studies for the scale. The internal consistency coefficient for the Turkish version of the scale was 0.72 (Gülay, 2008). The internal consistency coefficient for the scale was 0.82 in the present study.

Procedure

The preschool teachers applied the Child Behaviour Scale and the Peer Victimization Scale individually for each child. Child Parent Relationship Scale (Father Form) was completed by the fathers.

Data Analysis

A Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 18.0 package programme was used to analyse the data obtained from the study. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was performed for testing normal distribution of variables in the study. According to results of the test, it was determined that the variables of prosocial behaviour (Ks (Z)=200); aggressive behaviour (Ks (Z)=107); asocial behaviour (Ks (Z)=110); excluded (Ks (Z)=144); fearful-anxiety (Ks (Z)=195); hyperactivity-distractible (Ks (Z)=151); peer victimization (Ks (Z)=127); and father-child relationship (Ks (Z)=248) were normally distributed.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and basic linear regression technique were used to analyse the data. Basic linear regression analysis was used to put forth the predictor effect of father-child relationships on children's peer relationships.

RESULTS

Table 1. The Results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Analysis Regarding the Correlation between Father-Child Relationship and Peer Relationships Levels of Young Children

	$\bar{\chi}$	sd	r
Father-child relationship	87.47	9.84	
Prosocial behaviour	13.39	4.84	.37**
Aggressive behaviour	2.11	2.41	-.25*
Asocial behaviour	1.88	2.35	-.26**
Excluded	2.28	2.90	-.20*
Fearful anxiety	2.62	2.68	-.16
Hyperactivity-distractible	1.79	2.22	-.21*
Peer victimization	.59	1.17	-.22*

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 2. The Results of the Simple Linear Regression Analysis Regarding the Predictive Effect of Father-Child Relationship on Peer Relationships of Young Children

Father-child relationship	R	R ²	F	Std. E.	β	t	p
Prosocial behaviour	.367	.135	16.029	.045	.367	4.004	.000*
Aggressive behaviour	.250	.062	6.841	.023	-.250	-2.615	.010**
Asocial behaviour	.258	.066	7.317	.023	-.258	-2.705	.008**
Excluded	.200	.040	4.307	.028	-.200	-2.075	.040**
Hyperactivity-distractible	.207	.043	4.614	.022	-.207	-2.148	.034**
Peer victimization	.223	.050	5.387	.011	-.223	-2.321	.022**

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$

According to Table 2; the father-child relationship had a significantly predictive effect on prosocial behaviour ($R=.367$, $R^2=.135$, $F=16.029$, $p<.01$), aggressive behaviour ($R=.250$, $R^2=.062$, $F=6.841$, $p<.05$), asocial behaviour ($R=.258$, $R^2=.066$, $F=7.317$, $p<.01$), excluded ($R=.200$, $R^2=.040$, $F=4.307$, $p<.05$), hyperactivity-distractible ($R=.207$, $R^2=.043$, $F=4.614$, $p<.05$), and peer victimization ($R=.223$, $R^2=.050$, $F=5.387$, $p<.05$). The father-child relationship predicted 13.5% of prosocial behaviour level, 6.2% of aggressive behaviour level, 6.6% of asocial behaviour level, 4% of excluded level, 4.3% of hyperactivity-distractible level, and 5% of peer victimization. The father-child relationship predicted the variable of prosocial behaviours at most and the variables of excluded and hyperactivity-distractible at least. Father-child relationship did not significantly predict the fearful anxiety levels of young children.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Father-child relationship significantly predicted levels of prosocial, aggressive, asocial, excluded, hyperactivity-distractible, and peer victimization behaviours of young children. Accordingly, it could be concluded that father-child relationship is effective on peer relationships of young children. Gander and Gardiner (2001) stated that a warm father-child relationship may support prosocial behaviours of children and increase their self-control levels; whereas, a hostile relationship may increase their aggression. Negative attitudes and behaviours of fathers towards their children may cause their children to display negative behaviours in their interpersonal relationships, as well (Albukrek, 2002; Nar, 2009). In parallel with the result of this study; the researchers mention that behaviours of family members may affect children's social life (Berk, 2001). In another study, a significant difference was determined between fathers' educational level and children's affective strength and peer acceptance. There was also a statistically significant difference between fathers' efforts of supporting their children's strengths and children's family participation, personal strength, participation in school activities, affective strength, cognitive competence, peer acceptance and mother acceptance (Argun, 2005). As is seen, it could be thought that children also require a healthy father-child relationship to develop healthy peer relationships.

Father-child relationship is effective in children's lives from various aspects. For instance, father is the symbol of power and authority in family and children expect this power to accompany and support them (Kıldan, 2012). Besides, a sustainable and positive father-child relationship develops children's emotional efficiency, social relations, and problem-solving skills (Iruka, Burchinal and Cai, 2010; West, Mathewes and Kerns, 2013). According to Güngörmüş Özkardeş (2015), young children who perceive their fathers as warmer, more affectionate, and friendly share their stuff with their friends more easily and display less aggressive behaviours. Accordingly, children who encounter with prosocial behaviours of their parents may reflect this situation on their own social environment (Derman and Başal, 2013). In a study, Ferreira et al., (2016) determined a direct relationship between a quality father-child relationship and prosocial behaviours of children. Lamb (1977) also stated that fathers could be effective on their children's socialisation.

An active role exhibited by fathers in their children's lives has a positive effect on their child's cognitive and social development (Nugnet, 1991). Fathers' involvement in their children's education may also decrease behavioural problems of their children (Amato and Rivera, 1999). Fathers are effective on child's ability of learning social skills more quickly and making friends in social life (Lieberman, Doyle and Markiewicz, 1999). They also have an important role in social emotional development of their children (Barnett and Baruch, 2015; Marsiglio, Day and Lamb, 2008). Father factor in family may develop children's skill of emotion regulation skills (Downer and Mendez, 2005). In addition, the children who established a close relationship with their fathers in the first years of life are self-confident, investigate, question, and take responsibility (Saygılı and Çankırlı, 2014). Fathers' attitudes and behaviours towards their children may affect some personality traits of the children such as shyness, timidity, leadership, and friendship (Güngörmüş Özkardeş, 2015). In a family having an efficient father-child relationship, positive behaviours, cognitive structures, social competences, sense of self, and emotional maturity of the children develop (Santrock, 2011).

In this study, it was determined that father-child relationship did not significantly predict the fearful anxiety levels of young children. In accordance with this result, it could be interpreted that children's fearful anxiety behaviours might be affected by different variables (such as mother-child relationship, teacher-child relationship, and sibling relationship) within family (Erermiş et al., 2009; Demirkaya and Abalı, 2012; Gülay

Ogelman and Topaloğlu, 2014; Howes, 2000). For instance, in their study, Gülay Ogelman, Körükçü and Ersan (2015) determined that a positive mother-child relationship level was a significant predictor of children's fearful anxiety towards their peers, as well as their aggression, prosocial behaviour, hyperactivity and peer victimization levels. In this study, it could be suggested that mother-child relationship may be effective in children's peer relationships.

As a consequence, it could be asserted that father factor in family is effective on children's peer relationships. Accordingly, even existence of father provides many positive acquisitions to children in terms of peer relationships and positive behaviours. In a study, it was determined that children who lost their fathers had higher prosocial behaviour and exclusion levels than children with living fathers; whereas, children with living fathers had higher psychological resiliency levels than children who lost their fathers (Gülay Ogelman et al., 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, conducted for the purpose of revealing the predictive effect of the correlation between fathers and young children on children's peer relationships, it was determined that the relationship between fathers and children was a significant predictor for young children's prosocial, aggressive, asocial, excluded, hyperactivity-distractible and peer victimization behaviour levels; however, it did not predict their fearful anxiety behaviour level. The study has several limitations. The sample size is a limitation of the study. Based on the limitations, some recommendations could be offered for future studies. For instance, this study was limited with a developing country such as Turkey. Future studies could compare father-child relationship between Turkey and different countries and cultures. In the study, peer relationships were determined based on teachers' views. Future studies could determine peer relationships based on peer views and observations. It is also recommended to conduct longitudinal studies for examining the effect of father-child relationship; carry out family involvement studies at preschool educational institutions for encouraging fathers to communicate with their children and support to spend more time with them; inform fathers about peer relationships of their children and the effects of this relations; and develop programs for father-child relationship and examine its effects.

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