

## An Examination of Variables Affecting the Social Behavior of Four and Five Year Old Pre-School Children

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**Abstract:** This study reveals whether the social behavior of 4 and 5 year old pre-schoolers is affected by age, gender, number of siblings, time spent at school and mother's employment status. A total of 200, 4 and 5 year old children attending independent pre-schools affiliated to the Ministry of Education in Ankara city center were included in the study. Data about the children and families was gathered through the General Information Form prepared by the researchers. Children's social behavior scores were measured by using Behavior Ranking Scale. The results showed that age, gender and mother's employment status created a meaningful difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the cooperation and social relationships dimensions of 4 and 5 year olds social behavior scores.

**Key words:** Examination, variables, social behaviour, pre-school children, education

### INTRODUCTION

Social competence may be defined as a combination of social and communicative abilities used by children to cultivate relationships with adults and other children in order to succeed in an environment. Social competence emerges in preschoolers when they utilize their personal traits such as temperament, linguistic ability and emotional self-regulation for a successful interaction (Mendez *et al.*, 2002). Although, it is argued in most child development studies that social skill development starts at birth and continues throughout a lifetime, it is also claimed that the behaviors which shape social skill development become obvious in childhood (Çimen and Baran, 2001). Social development in early childhood establishes a basis for later social behaviors (Baran, 2005).

Between the ages of 2-5, children learn how to be a part of a social group step by step. This process is influenced by the child-rearing practices of the family, relationships between siblings, friends, family members and the environment (Wortham, 2002). Emotional support and how children perceive it in terms of its kind, amount and source also plays a significant role in social skill development (Utay and Utay, 2005). It has been claimed that the way parents approach children affects their social skill development and social behaviors, therefore making the children who grow up in democratic environments the luckiest of all (Aral *et al.*, 2007). Teacher attitudes are also mentioned as critical in social development. Emotional support from teachers was found to be a significant

and the sole individual predictor of students' social skills and academic competence (Utay and Utay, 2005).

Preschool institutions show children how to establish relationships with peers, how to live together with them, how to play and what rules may exist outside the family. By becoming aware of the existence of others, children learn about the concepts of self and other and by interacting with their peers, they learn about cooperating with each other (Uysal, 1996). At the heart of preschool education lies learning by experience and discovering individual interest areas. Besides, by being in an appropriate physical and social environment, preschool children learn to develop healthy relationships and they display faster and better development (Aral *et al.*, 2002). It has been emphasized that children attending preschool have better social skill development thanks to their play interactions with their peers. As a result of such social interaction, they learn self-control, sharing, helping, playing together and resolving conflicts with family and friends (Wortham, 2002). As social behaviors have a significant role in child development, it is important to identify the social behaviors of children and the factors that influence them at preschool where the first foundations of the personality are laid. This study aims to determine whether the social behavior of 4 and 5 year old preschoolers is affected by age, sex, number of siblings, time spent at school and mother's employment status. Moreover, it aims to offer suggestions so that families and educators can support children's social development.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was conducted on 4 and 5 year old children attending preschool. The study sample consisted of 200 randomly chosen children attending independent pre-schools affiliated to the Ministry of Education in Ankara city center.

Demographic data about the children and their families was gathered with a General Information Form designed by the researchers and the development of children was evaluated with the Behavior Ranking Scale designed by Özgüven (1992) and adapted to 4 and 5 year old children by Çağdaş (1997). The scale was created with the aim of having teachers evaluate the observable social behaviors of 4 and 5 year old children. It consists of two subscales based on cooperation and social relationships, each of which has 20 items. The higher the points obtained on the two subscales, the higher the level of social development. The reliability study conducted by Çağdaş (1997) revealed consistency between expert evaluations. The delayed retest showed that the reliability coefficient of the scale was  $r:79$  for behaviors based on cooperation and  $r:81$  for behaviors based on social relationships. The scale was distributed to teachers to be completed separately for each child. On the other hand, the General Information Form was completed during individual face-to-face interviews held with parents at the end of the school day.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study was conducted to determine whether the social behavior of 4 and 5 year old pre-schoolers is affected by age, sex, number of siblings, time spent at school and mother's employment status. Of the participants, 48.5% were girls and 51.5% were boys; 27% were 4 years old and 73% were 5; 62% were single children; 50.5% had been attending preschool for seven to twelve months and 74% had mothers who were not working.

Table 1 shows that sex created a meaningful difference in scores relating to the cooperation ( $t(198) = 2.67, p<0.05$ ) and social relationships ( $t(198) = 2.21, p<0.05$ ) dimensions of social behavior. It is worth noting that both cooperation and social relationships average scores of girls ( $76.96\pm9.83; 75.57\pm11.15$ ) were higher than those of boys. A review of the relevant literature shows that females were found to have higher social behavior average scores than boys in other studies too (Çimen and Baran, 2001; Gizir and Baran, 2003). Walker (2004) for example, stressed in his study that teachers rated boys as more aggressive and more likely to use aggressive or

Table 1: Social behavior average scores, standard deviation and t-test scores of participating children with respect to their gender

Gender	N	Social behavior score			
		Cooperation $\bar{X}$		Social relationships	
Female	97	76.96±9.83		75.57±11.15	
Male	103	72.98±11.22		72.08±11.09	
t-test results	SD	t	p	t	p
	198	2.67	0.008*	2.21	0.028*

$p<0.05$

Table 2: Social behavior average scores, standard deviation and t-test scores of participating children with respect to their age

Gender	N	Social behavior score			
		Cooperation $\bar{X}$		Social relationships	
4 years	54	71.85±10.53		70.24±9.60	
5 years	146	76.04±10.61		75.08±11.54	
t-test results	SD	t	p	t	p
	198	2.49	0.014*	2.99	0.003*

$p<0.05$

disruptive strategies than girls in group entry or conflict resolution. Turner (1991) too, maintained that boys are prone to aggressive behaviors within a group whereas girls were more adaptable. The results of such studies seem to suggest that more aggressive behavior on the part of boys may affect their social behavior. As a result, girls are expected to have higher average scores than boys. Burford *et al.* (1999) observed the sharing behavior of preschool children and concluded that girls engage in more sharing and cooperation than boys.

When children's average scores were analyzed with respect to their age, it was seen that the cooperation and social relationships average scores of children in aged 5 (Cooperation:  $76.04\pm10.61$ ; Social Relationships:  $75.08\pm11.54$ ) were higher than those aged 4 (Cooperation:  $71.85\pm10.53$ ; Social Relationships:  $70.24\pm9.60$ ) (Table 2). The results of statistical analyses revealed that age caused a meaningful difference in the dimensions of social behaviors (Cooperation  $t(198) = 2.49, p<0.05$ ; Social Relationships  $t(198) = 2.99, p<0.05$ ). Baran (2005) also discovered in a study about the development of social behaviors and family environment in 4 and 5 year old children that age created a meaningful difference in the scores of cooperation and social relationships and that the average scores of children aged 5 were higher than those of children aged 4. In a different study, Çimen and Baran (2001) concluded that the psychosocial development of 5 and 6 year old children were different and that children aged 6 were ahead of those aged 5 with respect to psychosocial development. Mendez *et al.* (2002) found in a study about the social development of preschool children that younger boys experienced the greatest difficulties in starting and sustaining games with classmates. They also showed that linguistic abilities and self-regulation were significantly

greater among older children attending preschool. This may be because children learn rules and play more often with their friends as they become older. Eratay (1993) examined the relationship between children's creativity and their psycho-social development and emphasized that both creativity and psycho-social development comes with age.

As shown in Table 3, the number of siblings was not found to cause a meaningful difference between children's average scores of the dimensions of social behavior (cooperation:  $F(197-2) = 1.06$   $p > 0.05$ ; social relationships  $F(2-197) = 1.82$   $p > 0.05$ ). An examination of average scores shows that children with siblings had higher scores than those without siblings in both cooperation and social relationships subscales. This may be stemming from the interaction that children have with their siblings at home. Those children with siblings may be more successful at cooperation and social relationships as a result of the sibling relationships, which are thought to have multiple effects on children's social and emotional development. Also, children seem to use sibling relationships as a kind of learning experience in which they create, practice and improve strategies for social interaction, including interactions with peers. In the literature too, sibling warmth was meaningfully related to more positive peer relations assessed at the group and individual level (Lockwood *et al.*, 2001).

The Table 4 suggests that the cooperation and social relationships scores of children who attended preschool between 19- 24 months were higher than those of children who spent less time at school. The variance analysis showed that time spent at preschool did not create a meaningful difference between children's social behavior scores (cooperation:  $F(196-3) = 1.05$   $p > 0.05$ ; social relationships  $F(3-196) = 0.65$   $p > 0.05$ ). Although no statistically meaningful relationship was found, the children who spent a longer duration of time at preschool had more development with respect to social relationships and cooperation skills. The game activities in preschool educational institutions teach children how to socialize within a group, observe rules, cooperate with others and assume responsibility (Çimen and Baran, 2001). In a study by Baran (2005), it was concluded that time spent at preschool created a meaningful difference in children's cooperation and social relationships scores and that more time at preschool meant higher average scores. Preschoolers come together for short interactions and separate easily. Typical kindergarteners and first graders seek convenient friends who share interests (Utay and Utay, 2005).

It can be seen from Table 5 that mother's employment status created a meaningful difference on the

Table 3: Social behavior average scores, standard deviation and variance analysis scores of participating children with respect to number of siblings

Number of siblings	N	Social behavior score			
		Cooperation $\bar{X}$		Social relationships	
Single child	124	74.11±10.53		72.59±11.95	
One sibling	61	76.55±10.97		75.68±9.53	
Two siblings or more	15	74.86±11.32		75.80±10.78	
Total	200	74.91±10.73		73.78±11.23	
Variance analysis results	SD	F	p	F	p
Between groups	2	1.06	0.348	1.82	0.164
Within groups	197				
Total	199				

Table 4: Social behavior average scores, standard deviation and variance analysis scores of participating children with respect to time spent at preschool

Number of siblings	N	Social behavior score			
		Cooperation $\bar{X}$		Social relationships	
0-6 months	52	74.71±11.65		74.09±13.02	
7-12 months	101	74.26±10.88		73.13±10.82	
13-18 months	23	74.43±10.31		72.95±11.10	
19-24 months	24	78.54±7.91		76.58±8.83	
Total	200	74.91±10.73		73.78±11.23	
Variance analysis results	SD	F	p	F	p
Between groups	3	1.05	0.368	0.65	0.578
Within groups	196				
Total	199				

Table 5: Social behavior average scores, standard deviation and t-test scores of participating children with respect to mother's employment status

Mother's employment status	N	Social behavior score			
		Cooperation $\bar{X}$		Social relationships	
Working	52	78.15±10.65		76.78±12.92	
Not working	148	73.77±10.56		72.72±10.42	
t-test results	SD	t	p	t	p
	198	2.55	0.012*	2.04	0.044*

$p < 0.05$

social behavior scores of participants (cooperation;  $t(198) = 2.55$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , social relationships;  $t(198) = 2.04$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Children with working mothers had higher cooperation and social relationships averages than those whose mothers do not work. When mothers work, other members of the family including children need to carry more responsibilities and solve the problems they face, which ultimately leads to the socialization of children. It has been argued that working mothers improve not only their own self development but also that of their children's, which improves their social behaviors too (Yıldız Bıçakçı and Gürsoy, 2004). Aral *et al.* (2007) studied children's social development and mentioned that working mothers contributed positively to it. Topalak (1985) compared the psycho-social development of 8 year old children with working and non-working mothers and concluded that working mothers had a positive effect on psycho-social development.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this study which aimed to determine whether the social behavior of 4 and 5 year old pre-schoolers is affected by age, gender, number of siblings, time spent at school and mother's employment status, it was found that children's gender, age and mother's employment status caused a meaningful difference between children's social behavior average scores ( $p<0.05$ ) while time spent at preschool and the number of siblings did not ( $p>0.05$ ).

It is a fact that factors other than the family such as the environment, school and teachers have a role in children's social skill development. Therefore parents and teachers may be advised to adopt attitudes which will support children's social behaviors.

Considering the positive effects of preschools on children's social development, the importance of giving a preschool education to children can be seen. Therefore, families with preschool age children should be encouraged to send their children to preschool. Awareness-raising activities directed towards families and the society may therefore be beneficial.

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