

Examination of Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months Children in Terms of Demographic Variables of Fathers and Children

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Note

This study is produced from the first author's Master dissertation.

ABSTRACT

In this study, anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children were examined in terms of demographic variables of fathers and children. The study was conducted with 300 fathers with 48-72 months old children who were randomly selected living in Istanbul in 2022. The relational screening model was used in the study. The data of the study were collected with "Personal Information Form" and "Renewed Preschool Anxiety Scale". As a result of the research, it was found that the variables of fathers' employment status, fathers' institution satisfaction, fathers' evaluation of their marriage, duration of marriage, average time spent with their children per day, and the gender of the child did not cause any difference in children's anxiety levels. On the other hand, fathers' marital status, perceptions of their own stress and their relationships with their children are a significant determinant of children's anxiety levels.

KEYWORDS

Preschool child; paternal variables; early childhood; anxiety in children.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between parents and children has biological basis. Although this relationship is affected by developmental and contextual conditions, it affects the lifelong development of the individual. For this reason, it is necessary to review and evaluate the relationships of individuals at an early age (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004). The attitudes, behaviours and personality structures of mothers and fathers, who are the most important role models at the age of 0-6, are very important for children to develop healthy adaptations to life and realize themselves. Although mothers were the most important persons responsible for the care of children in the past, today it is seen that fathers participate more in the lives of children and many responsibilities are shared between spouses (Uzun, 2016). It is seen that the increase in father involvement with the current living conditions positively affects various development areas of children such as physical, language, cognitive, social, emotional, self-care and academic development (Özkan, 2014; Taşkın, 2011). However, a healthy father-child relationship is also very important when fathers participate in the lives of their children. Conflicts between father and child and negative evaluation of time spent together can harm children (Cabrera, 2020). Although this situation is seen as less harmful than the conflict between the mother and the child, when the effect of the conflict on the children is considered, it has been determined that the father-child conflict is more harmful in terms of the behavioural development of children (Kane & Garber, 2004). The negative father-child relationship also suggests that it may cause anxiety in children.

Although anxiety generally expresses sadness, fear, and danger, a certain level of anxiety is considered necessary for life, because a certain level of anxiety enables the individual to act, increase motivation or think (Demirsu, 2018). The duration and frequency of anxiety is also very important. While some individuals can end their anxiety in a short time, some individuals may experience anxiety for a long time. The fact that the severity and duration of anxiety is long can cause the individual to experience physiological and psychological problems (Tosun-Sümer, 2008). In studies, the anxiety seen in children can be caused by parents' cognition levels (Wheatcroft & Creswell, 2007), not living under the same roof with their mothers or fathers (Serin & Öztürk, 2007), from attitudes towards children (Van Der Bruggen et al., 2010), parent-child attachment style (Brumairu & Kerns, 2010), and it appears to be influenced by the parental roles of parents (Verhoeven et al., 2012).

Considering the existing studies on this subject, studies concerning the anxiety of children are generally conducted with mothers (Alisinanoğlu & Ulutaş, 2003; Stone et al., 2015) or with both parents (Güngör et al., 2016; Laurin et al., 2015; Matthewson et al., 2012; Verhoeven et al., 2012). But studies with only fathers (Gürsoy et al., 2017; Topaloğlu, 2013) seem to be limited. There is a need for new research that examines the relationships between all kinds of fathers' variables and children's anxiety. In this context, it is thought that the scientific studies that will be planned to reveal the extent of the difference in children's anxiety

will contribute to eliminating the limitation in the literature. It is also expected that it will draw attention to the effects of fathers on their children in early childhood.

Accordingly, in this study, it was aimed to examine the anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children in terms of demographic variables of fathers and children.

The sub-objectives of the research were formed as follows:

- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically according to the employment status of the fathers?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically significantly according to the satisfaction of their fathers with the institution they work for?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically according to the marital status of the fathers?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72 months-old children differ statistically significantly according to their fathers' evaluation of their marriage?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically significantly according to the length of time their fathers were married?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically according to the relationship status of fathers with their children?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically according to the stress levels perceived by their fathers?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically significantly according to the time fathers spend with their children?
- Do the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children differ statistically significantly according to the gender of the children?

METHOD

Research Design

The relational screening model was used in the research. This model examines whether there is a change between two or more variables. In the event of a change, the relational survey model is used to determine the degree of change (Karasar, 2014).

Sample

The sample of the research consisted of 300 fathers with 48-72 months old children randomly selected in Istanbul. Random sampling method was chosen in the sample selection. In Table 1, the birth dates of the fathers are given.

Table 1. *Frequency and Percentage Values of Fathers' Dates of Birth Variable*

Groups	F	%
1970-1980	45	15
1981-1990	195	65
1991-1998	60	20
Total	300	100

As seen in Table 1, 45 (15%) of the fathers participating in the study were born in 1970-1980, 195 (65%) were born in 1981-1990 and 60 (20%) were born in 1991-1998.

Measurements

"Personal Information Form" and the "Revised Preschool Anxiety Scale" are data collection tools used in the research.

Personal Information Form

This form includes questions about 48-72 months old children and their fathers. These questions are about the child's gender, age, fathers' age, employment status, marital status, evaluation of their marriage, their perceived relationship with their children, their perceived stress about themselves, the time they spend with their children, the duration of their marriage, and their satisfaction with the institution they work for.

Revised Preschool Anxiety Scale

The measurement tool, the original version of which belongs to Edwards et al. (2001), evaluates the anxiety levels of children aged 3-6 years. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was made by Güler (2016) and it contains 30 items. The Turkish version of the scale consists of 5 sub-dimensions as general anxiety, social anxiety, separation anxiety and specific fears. The scale is of a 5-point Likert type and is scored as (1) not true at all, (5) often true. The scale is filled in by the parents of the children. For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach Alpha value and McDonald omega value were checked, and Cronbach Alpha value was calculated as .90 and McDonald omega value as .92. When the analyses for the retest reliability of the scale were examined, it was determined that the social anxiety dimension was .53, the generalized anxiety dimension was .35, the separation anxiety dimension was .55, the specific fears dimension was .59, and significant correlations were found at the total level of .53 (Güler, 2016).

Data Collection Process

The scale was applied to the parents of 48-72 months old children. In this study, the measurement tool and the personal information form were filled by the fathers through the google form. First of all, the purpose of the study was explained to the fathers and it was stated that participation in the study was voluntary. After the explanations, the fathers who volunteered to participate in the study and signed the written consent forms filled out the data collection tools.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process started with data transfer to the SPSS package program. First of all, kurtosis and skewness values were examined in order to reveal whether the scores of the data showed a normal distribution. In this context, it was determined that the kurtosis and skewness values of the variables ranged from -1.96 to +1.96. These values are an indication that the data has a normal distribution according to Can, (2019) and Çokluk et al., (2018). Then, in line with the research questions, the data were evaluated by subjecting the t-test and single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests for independent samples, which are parametric tests.

RESULTS

The findings regarding the research variables are presented in tables below.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics on anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children*

Variable	n	\bar{x}	ss	Skewness	Kurtosis
Anxiety of 48-72 Months-Old Children	300	63.27	20.51	.160	-.765

As can be seen in table 2, the average anxiety level of 48-72-month-old children is 63.27. In addition, it was seen that the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children, Skewness and Kurtosis values, were between the acceptable limits (Can, 2019; Çokluk et al., 2018) stated in the literature. Therefore, it can be said that it has normality.

Table 3. *Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to Fathers' Employment Status*

Variable	n	\bar{x}	ss	F	p
Employment Status (Father)					
I'm Working Continuously	269	63.60	20.56	1.012	.365
I work from time to time	25	62.52	19.86		
I'm not working	6	51.66	20.94		

As explained in Table 3, the employment status of fathers does not cause a significant difference in the anxiety levels of children aged 48-72 months. ($F=1.012$; $p>.05$). Children's anxiety levels were independent of fathers' working status.

Table 4. *The Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Satisfaction of the Fathers with the Company/Institution They Work For*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	ss	F	p
Satisfaction with the Company/Institution	very satisfied	75	60.10	22.11	.872	.481
	satisfied	144	63.34	19.87		
	undecided	49	66.30	19.58		
	not satisfied	26	66.46	21.12		
	not satisfied at all	6	62.66	20.46		

As explained in Table 4, it is seen that the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children do not differ significantly according to the satisfaction of the fathers with the company/institution they work for ($F=.872$; $p>.05$). Anxiety levels of children aged 48-72 months are independent of the satisfaction of fathers with the company/institution they work for.

Table 5. *Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Marital Status of the Fathers*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	ss	t	p
Marital Status	Married	289	63.78	20.40	2.231	.026
	Single	11	49.81	19.63		

It is seen that (table 5) the anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children show a significant difference according to the marital status of the fathers ($t=2.231$; $p<.05$). It is seen that the significant difference between the groups is in favour of single fathers ($\bar{x}=49.81$). This finding shows that the anxiety levels of the children of single fathers are significantly lower than the anxiety levels of the children of married fathers.

Table 6. *Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to Their Fathers' Evaluation of Marriage*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	ss	F	p
Evaluation of Marriage	Fairly Compatible	175	62.25	21.64	.770	.512
	Conflict at times	101	65.42	19.17		
	Mismatched, Unhappy	12	64.91	14.13		
	Other	12	58.33	20.00		

When Table 6 is examined; It is seen that the anxiety levels of 48-72 months-old children do not differ significantly according to the fathers' evaluation of their marriage ($F=.770$; $p>.05$). Fathers' evaluation of their marriage is not a significant predictor of children's anxiety levels.

Table 7. *The Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Marriage Period of the Fathers*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	ss	F	p
Marriage Period	5 years and below	67	64.86	22.88	1.331	.259
	6-10 years	147	62.63	19.70		
	11-15 years	64	65.78	19.50		
	16 years and above	12	52.41	19.89		
	Other	10	59.00	21.18		

As indicated in table 7, anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children do not show a significant difference according to the marriage period of their fathers. ($F=1.331$; $p>.05$). This result shows that the anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children are independent of the father's marriage period.

Table 8. *The Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Relationships Perceived by the Fathers with their Children*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	Ss	F	p
Perceived Relationship with the Child	Warm and Close	236	60.90	19.76	6.185	.000
	Conflicted	28	70.89	19.58		
	Dependant	29	75.65	21.71		
	Other	7	61.28	22.64		

When Table 8 is examined; anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children show a significant difference according to the relationship status of the fathers with their children ($F=6.185$; $p<.05$). As a result of the Scheffe test, which was conducted to determine between which groups there was a significant difference, the anxiety levels of the children of fathers who defined their perceived relationship with their children as "dependent" were found to be statistically significantly higher than the anxiety levels of the children of fathers who perceived it as "warm and close".

Table 9. *The Differences in the Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Stress Perceived by the Fathers*

Variable			n	\bar{x}	ss	F	p
Perceived (Father)	Stress	Stressed	58	68.12	22.03	7.456	.001
		Stress free	47	70.72	19.47		
		Sometimes Stressful	195	60.03	19.62		

According to the values in Table 9, the anxiety levels of 48-72-month-old children show a significant difference according to the stress levels perceived by the fathers ($F=7.456$; $p<.05$).

In the Scheffe test, which is performed to determine between which groups the significant difference is, it was observed that the significant difference was between the stressed and sometimes stressed groups. According to the related finding, it was observed that the anxiety levels of the children of fathers who defined their perceived stress situation as "stressful" were significantly higher than the anxiety levels of the children of fathers who perceived their perceived stress as "stressful from time to time".

Table 10. *Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Average Time They Spent with Their Children per Day*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	ss	F	p
Time with Child	1 hour	46	65.93	19.36	1.110	.331
	2 hours	91	64.75	20.39		
	3 hours or more	163	61.69	20.87		

According to the results in Table 10, it is seen that the anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children do not differ significantly according to the time spent by fathers with their children on average per day ($F=1.110$; $p>.05$). Anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children are independent of the time that fathers spend with their children on average per day.

Table 11. *The Differences in Anxiety Levels of 48-72 Months-Old Children According to the Gender of the Children*

Variable		n	\bar{x}	ss	t	p
Gender of Children	Girl	149	65.00	19.71	1.457	.146
	Boy	151	61.56	21.19		

Considering the values in Table 11, it was concluded that the anxiety levels of 48-72 month-old children did not differ significantly according to the gender of the children. ($t=1.457$; $p>.05$). As a result of this finding, it can be said that the anxiety levels of 48-72 months old children are independent of the gender of the children.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine whether the demographic variables of the fathers and the gender of the children cause a difference in the anxiety levels of the children. The genders of the children do not cause any difference in their anxiety levels. While similar study results were found in the literature (Alisinanoğlu & Ulutaş, 2003; Bosquet & Egeland, 2006; Gürsoy et al., 2017; Verhoeven et al., 2012), different results were found in some studies. Bora and Ünüvar (2020) stated that girls' anxiety levels are higher than boys. These results can be interpreted as the anxiety levels of children evaluated with different measurement tools in different samples reveal different results.

Another result of the study is that the time that fathers spend with their children on average per day does not cause a significant difference in children's anxiety levels. Yavuzer (2016) similarly states that the quality of the time fathers spend with their children is more important than the time they spend with their children. In this context, it can be thought that fathers should focus on the quality of the time they spend with their children rather than the duration.

In this study, it was concluded that the duration of marriage of the fathers, their evaluation of their marriage, their working status and their satisfaction with the institution they work for do not cause a difference in the anxiety levels of the children. This result suggests that different variables may also be determinative in children's anxiety levels. As a matter of fact, it is seen that the anxiety levels of children vary in different studies and in different samples. This situation indicates that the variables that may cause differentiation in children's anxiety are not only the father's variables, but also various variables such as the child's birth order, number of siblings, class level, family type (Gürsoy et al., 2017), socio-economic levels (Bora & Ünüvar, 2020; Gürsoy, 2006). It can be interpreted as an indicator that the variables can also affect the anxiety level of children.

Another result of the research is that the marital status of the fathers causes a significant difference on the children's anxiety. The anxiety levels of the children of unmarried fathers are higher than the children of married fathers. Serin and Öztürk (2008) showed a different result in their study and stated that the anxiety levels of children with divorced parents are higher than the anxiety levels of children with undivorced parents. According to Yakupoğlu (2011), the fact that children do not live in the same house with their fathers can negatively affect children socially, emotionally and psychologically; and situations such as a parent leaving the house or moving the children to a different place can cause separation anxiety in the child. For this reason, lower anxiety levels of children of single fathers can be considered as an opposite result of what is expected. However, when it is considered that the custody of the children is usually with the mother after the parents' divorce, the time spent by single fathers and their children is limited compared to the time spent by the mothers and children together. This limited time can be interpreted as the fact that fathers and children spend more uneventfully and more qualifiedly may cause children to experience low anxiety.

In the study, there is a result that the anxiety levels of the children of fathers who describe themselves as stressful are high. In the literature, there are statements supporting this result. Parenting stress experienced by parents can cause negative attitudes and behavioural problems in their children (Chung et al., 2022). Morgan et al. (2002) states that high parents' stress levels may cause them to focus more on their children's negative behaviours, and the tolerance of the parents against these negative behaviours may decrease.

Another variable that causes differentiation in children's anxiety is the way fathers perceive their relationships with their children. As indicated in the results of the research, the anxiety levels of the children of fathers who describe their relations with their children as warm

and close are low. Laurin et al. (2015) stated that these variables increase the probability of children aged 2.5-8 years to experience high anxiety in their study, in which they examined the effects of overprotective and compulsive parents towards their children on their children's anxiety levels.

This research has some limitations. In the study, only the fathers of 48-72 months old children living in Istanbul were studied. In this context, the results of this research can be compared with new data to be collected from fathers of different provinces and different age groups. Studies can be conducted on the effects of children's demographic variables on children's anxiety levels with siblings with whom the child first establishes social relations in early childhood. Different studies can be planned to obtain more in-depth results with qualitative research based on children's anxiety in early childhood. In-service trainings can be organized for preschool teachers in schools on the effects of father-child relationship on children in early childhood, and teachers can be supported by improving their knowledge and awareness on this issue. In these trainings, provincial directorates of National Education, guidance research centres and guidance units of schools can work in cooperation.

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