

## The Effect of Family Counseling Training on the Relationship between Mother-Father and the Child

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### **Abstract**

The objective of present study is to analyze the effect of family counseling training for 7-19 age group on the relationship between mother-father and the child. In present study, a trial pattern with pre-test and posttest control group has been employed. There were 15 subjects in experimental group and in control group there were 15 subjects as well. In the collection of data, Child –Parent Relationship Scale has been utilized. An eight-week long family counseling training was applied to experimental group. However, in control group no application was performed. The significance of the difference between pretest and posttest scores of the subjects was analyzed via Mann Whitney U test. Research findings pointed out that family training rendered significant effects on improving the relationships that the parents in experimental group forged with their children. The findings of present research also manifested that family counseling training program for 7-19 age group could be utilized as preventive counseling and psychological guidance service in the aim of strengthening the relations between parents and children. Based on the research findings a set of remarks have been prepared and practice & research oriented suggestions have been developed.

**Key Words:** Family counseling, psycho-educational program, level of relationship between mother-father and the child

In the definition of Gladding (2006), family is the union established by individuals among whom exist biological or psychological ties nourished with historical, emotional or financial cooperation secured in the same household of which members identify themselves as the components of one single house. The social institution that any child forges his/her earliest social relations is his/her own family. Family not only provides the basic necessities such as food, care and protection for the child but also assists in developing a social individual by providing support for his/her social and emotional development. Family is the most healthy setting in which such necessities could be fulfilled. To ensure a multidimensional development of the individual, family and intrafamily relations render substantial effects on children (Dizman, 2003; Yörükoğlu, 1993). Mother and father at most create significant effect in the formation of a child's personality. Identification with parents and imitating their lifestyle is an effective factor in the formation of any child's personality (Yavuzer, 2001).

The communication between family members and children plays critical role in designating the status of children within the family. If the family functions in a positive way only then can children rise as individuals with healthy personalities (Bulut, 1993). Family, mother and father primarily, is the setting in which children interact with in the longest and closest terms; hence children can acquire cultural tenets, fundamental habits and attitudes toward developmental tasks in their family environment. In designing a positive ego for the child and gaining competency, the feedbacks that the child receives during his/her interaction with parents play major role. Particularly during the earliest years corresponding to the formation of personality, parental attitudes play critical role in the formation of basic characteristics of children (Gürsoy & Coşkun, 2006). While the child strives hard for adaptation to the physical and social setting s/he is born into, the greatest support in his/her struggle comes from parents. The child's interaction with his/her family and transferring their feelings and ideas among themselves shall be useful in finding solutions to the problems they might face. Lack of communication and repressing the emotions may cause delays in solving the problems, which indicates a dysfunctioning family setting (Yavuzer, 2001). In any family setting where there is a strong and balanced emotional and social interaction, children are raised with sufficient confidence, affection and compassion which allow them to gain the requisite skills for their personal development. In such family settings, family members are aware of their own responsibilities and prepare sufficient means for the independent and innovative development of children hence enable their child to build a sound character (Yavuzer, 2012). The effect of parents in the development of children manifests itself not only in terms of personal and emotional development but in a variety of domains such as the

prospective education and career selection of the child (Yörükoğlu, 2007, 1993). Children who demonstrate success during their developmental stages are the kind of individuals who were raised in favorable family settings. Applaudable relations achieved in the family enable the formation of contented, amicable and constructive individuals. If the situation is opposite and there is a failure in the mother-father-child relationship, it is likely to meet with children bearing adaptation issues. Children who were raised without familial love and care are likely to demonstrate a range of behavioral and adaptation problems. The ability of adolescences to solve the problems that arise during the transition from childhood to adolescent stage heavily relies upon the type of family relations established till that stage. Positively developed family relations shall assist the family and adolescent in solving the unique social and emotional problems of adolescence period (Yavuzer, 2012; Santrock, 2012).

The explanations clearly positing the importance of parents and family members on the child's development paved the way in the preparation of present research on training programs for mothers and fathers. Field specialists who analyzed children, adolescents and families also underpin the gravity of family training activities. To enable contribution in multidimensional development of any child and to unite the child with self-achievement, there is need for family counseling. The primary objective of parental education is to inform mothers and fathers about intra-family communication factors that are effective on the healthy physical, mental, social and emotional growth and develop their skills to secure valuable mother-father and child relationship (Cüceloğlu, 2008; Carlson, 1992). To achieve the desired success in training programs, both mothers and fathers should be present in the sessions to guarantee a durable effect on the family.

In Turkey Mother-Child Education Foundation (AÇEP) led the stage for mother-father training programs. The aim of AÇEP is to reach socially and financially disadvantaged mothers and mothers with children in age 5-6 group (60-72 months) who are deprived of the opportunity to attend kindergarten and to strengthen motherhood and educator roles of the participant women. Within this context, learning environments have been prepared for mothers to provide support for their kids' cognitive, physical, socio-emotional development inside home (<http://panel.unicef.org.tr>). In year 1982 family-training programs were initiated to cover preschool children and families but presently they also integrate family training programs for 0-18 age group. As witnessed in national literature, many researches are available on the communication between mother-father-child. In a study conducted by Akgün and Yeşilyaprak (2010a) it was detected that educational program to improve mother and child relationship via games significantly contributed to developing the relations mothers

establish with their kids. Kabasakal (2001) in his research concluded that mother training program rendered positive effects to correct unhealthy family functions of the children dealing with adaptation issues. As the training programs for mothers were analyzed, it has been detected that motherhood training programs rendered positive effects on the self-respect and mother-child relations of women (Çağdaş, Arslan, Erbay, & Orçan, 2010). Aside from mother-child relationship, the research conducted by Kaymak Özmen (2013) revealed that the children of parents who participated in mother-father training program demonstrated significant decrease in behavioral problems. In a different training program it has been concluded that group training provided to mothers positively changed mothers' self-efficacy and development scores of their kids (Elibol, Mağden, & Alpar, 2006). However unlike previous studies, in present research the efficacy of family counseling program prepared on the basis of families' and children's views shall be tested.

The status of relationship between parents and kids constitutes the field scope of psychological counselors. Psychological counselors stationed in schools are expected to provide counseling and psychological guidance service to the parents of all students enrolled in their school. Accordingly it is envisaged that results of current study shall guide the contents of parental training programs developed by school psychological counselors. These training programs are expected from field workers in preventive counseling and psychological guidance services. In line with this expectation the objective of current study is to detect whether family counseling training for 7-19 age group affects the relations of parents with their children. Independent variable of the research is family counseling training for 7-19 age groups. Dependent variable is the level of relationship between parents and the child.

In line with overall objective, below-given hypothesis shall be tested:

Hypothesis 1. Pretest and posttest difference scores of "Child – Parent Relationship Scale" differ significantly in favor of experimental group.

### Method

In present research, pretest and posttest control grouped experimental pattern which is one of the quasi-experimental designs has been utilized. In cases when checks required by real experimental models cannot be ensured, quasi-experimental designs are employed (Karasar, 1999). The research pattern is experimental and control grouped pretest posttest modeled (2x2) and prior to conducting the research Child - Parent Relationship Scale has been applied as pretest to experimental and control groups. Next, an eight-session "Family counseling" Training each lasting for 90 minutes was applied to experimental group, while no application

was conducted on control group. At the end of eight weeks Child - Parent Relationship Scale was reapplied as posttest to experimental and control groups.

*Designing the Study Groups*

Subjects in present research were selected on the basis of volunteering from the parents of children who received education during 2014-2015 fall term in public schools within Osmaniye Kadirli central district. Consequently, pretest scores of experimental and control group were computed accordingly. Age mean of experimental group in this research is 35.73 and age mean of control group is 33.47. Parents in experimental group have approximately 1-5 children. The distribution of groups as per educational level: in experimental group primary school graduates are (3), secondary school graduates are (2), high school graduates are (6), two-year degree holders are (1), and bachelor’s degree holders are (3). In control group primary school graduates are (2), high school graduates are (9), two-year degree holders are (2), and bachelor’s degree holders are (2). In experimental group there were 3 couples having participated in the training program as mother and father (as a couple). In control group, there were no couples.

In order to detect if, with respect to pretest scores, child-parent relationship of mothers and fathers in experimental and control groups were similar in terms of dependent variables, Mann Whitney U Test was applied for the analysis of which results are as outlined in Table 1.

*Table 1*  
Mann- Whitney U Test Results related to Pretest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups’ Child-Parent Relationship Scale

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U	P
Child - Parent Relationship	Experimental	15	14.13	212.50	92.00	.412
	Control	15	16.87	253.00		

Table 1 demonstrates that in the analysis of Child - Parent Relationship Scale scores, no significant differentiation could be detected between experimental and control (U: 92.00 p> .05) groups.

Based on this finding it can be claimed that in “child-parent relationship scale’s” subscales, with respect to dependent variables, there were no significant differences in the score means of groups prior to test application, but still they were statistically near equal.

### *Data Collection Tools*

Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS): The scale was developed by Pianta (1992) in order to comprehend and interpret mother-child relationship. This is a 5 Likert type scale and the responses vary between (1) Definitely not appropriate at all; and (5) Definitely appropriate completely. In the scale there are positive and negative statements and negative statements are scored after changing into positive expressions. The scale has two factors as conflict and positive relationship. Test re-test reliability of the scale was measured as .97 ( $p < .01$ ) for Conflict subdimension and .87 ( $p < .01$ ) for positive relationship subdimension and .95 ( $p < .01$ ) for the total score. .70 internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) of the scale was computed as .85 for conflict dimension subscale; .74 for positive dimension subscale. High scores received from the scale indicated negative relationship whereas low scores pointed to positive relationship. Maximum total score is 120 (the most negative) and the lowest score is 24 (the most positive) (Akgün & Yeşilyaprak, 2010b).

### *Procedure*

Survey study of the research was conducted during the first academic term of year 2014-2015. The families who volunteered to participate in study group were notified and informed about the projected training program. Following the notification process personal interviews were organized with the parents who volunteered to participate in training program and extensive information was shared as regards the projected training program. The primary conditions to enable the inclusion of parents in experimental group were; volunteering to participate in training and the absence of any personal activities that might prevent regular attendance to training program. Parents who failed to meet these conditions were excluded from the candidate list in experimental group.

In the preparation of Family counseling Training Program for 7-19 age group, 2 Workshops were held in Ankara and Abant. The first “Effective Parenting Workshop” was held in Ankara between 16-17 February 2006 and this workshop welcomed families with adolescent kids and 10-19 age group adolescents. In this workshop, opinions were collected from the children and adolescents on the projected 7-19 Age group Family Training Program, the issues to treat were identified and participating children were enlightened about children’s rights.

The second workshop was organized in Abant between 19-20 February 2006 and the organization welcomed program supporter firms as well as children and their families. It was aimed to forge the cooperation required to prepare and implement Family Training Program for 7-19 age group. Workshop outputs, family -focused group meetings and electronic survey results were collectively evaluated to identify the program contents and topic headings. A report covering the scope of both workshops is available on the website of the Ministry of National Education (<http://orgm.meb.gov.tr>).

The Program consists of total 8 sessions. 1<sup>st</sup> session lasts 175 minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> session lasts 195 minutes, 3<sup>rd</sup> session lasts 215 minutes, 4<sup>th</sup> session lasts 215 minutes, 5<sup>th</sup> session lasts 205 minutes, 6<sup>th</sup> session lasts 195 minutes, 7<sup>th</sup> session lasts 185 minutes and 8<sup>th</sup> session lasts 220 minutes. In these sessions below-listed objectives and acquisitions were provided. In the first session; program introduction, contract, introduction activities, development stages in adolescence period, how to support children and their immediate relatives during adolescence period, knowledge and skills to support development stage during adolescence period, activity selection were discussed. In the second session; fundamental facts about communication, time- management in communication, communication skills for adolescent children; in the third session gaining awareness on motherhood, fatherhood and spouse roles in the family, skills to secure a healthy relationship; in the fourth session the effects of different attitudes in the family on parents and children, competent attitude skills to secure a healthy relationship; in the fifth session the emotional and behavioral effects of risk factors on parents and children, ability to take appropriate actions in risky situations; in the sixth session the methods to employ in the formation of personality and behavior change, ability to change undesired behavior and making positive behavior permanent; in the seventh session, information on conflict, conflicts arising from stage characteristics, conflict-solution skills; and in the eighth session importance of future planning for the prospective careers of children, critical role that parents play in future planning and prospective careers of their children, personal and societal barriers in front of future planning and assessment of the entire implementation process of the program were focused upon. Training program was concluded with the general assessment, closure and application of posttests. In the execution of Program question-answer, narration, games, role-play, case study analysis, small-large group works, story and learning by doing educational method and techniques were utilized. No activity was made with the control group.

### Data Analysis

Prior to testing the hypotheses it was examined if “child-parent relationship” scores of experimental and control groups met normality and homogeneity hypotheses and it was detected that with respect to “child-parent relationship” scores, there was a normal distribution. However considering the fact that in both experimental group and control group the number of subjects included in the research was below critical value 30, nonparametric analyses were also conducted (Alpar, 2014). Within this context, the difference between posttest and pretest scores of subjects was computed and the scores were analyzed via Mann Whitney U test applied through dual comparisons of the groups in the series formed by difference of scores (Büyüköztürk, 2007). Data obtained from experimental and control group were analyzed via SPSS-WINDOWS 15.0 software program and significance level was set as .05.

### Findings

In this part the results of the statistical analyses conducted according to the hypothesis of research have been listed

Hypothesis 1. Pretest and posttest difference scores of “Child – Parent Relationship” differ significantly in favor of experimental group.

This hypothesis is related to detect if, at the end of family counseling training program, pretest and posttest difference scores of child-parent relationship level differed significantly in favor of experimental group and Mann-Whitney U test was applied to measure the significance of score differences. Mann-Whitney U test results are as given in Table 2.

*Table 2*

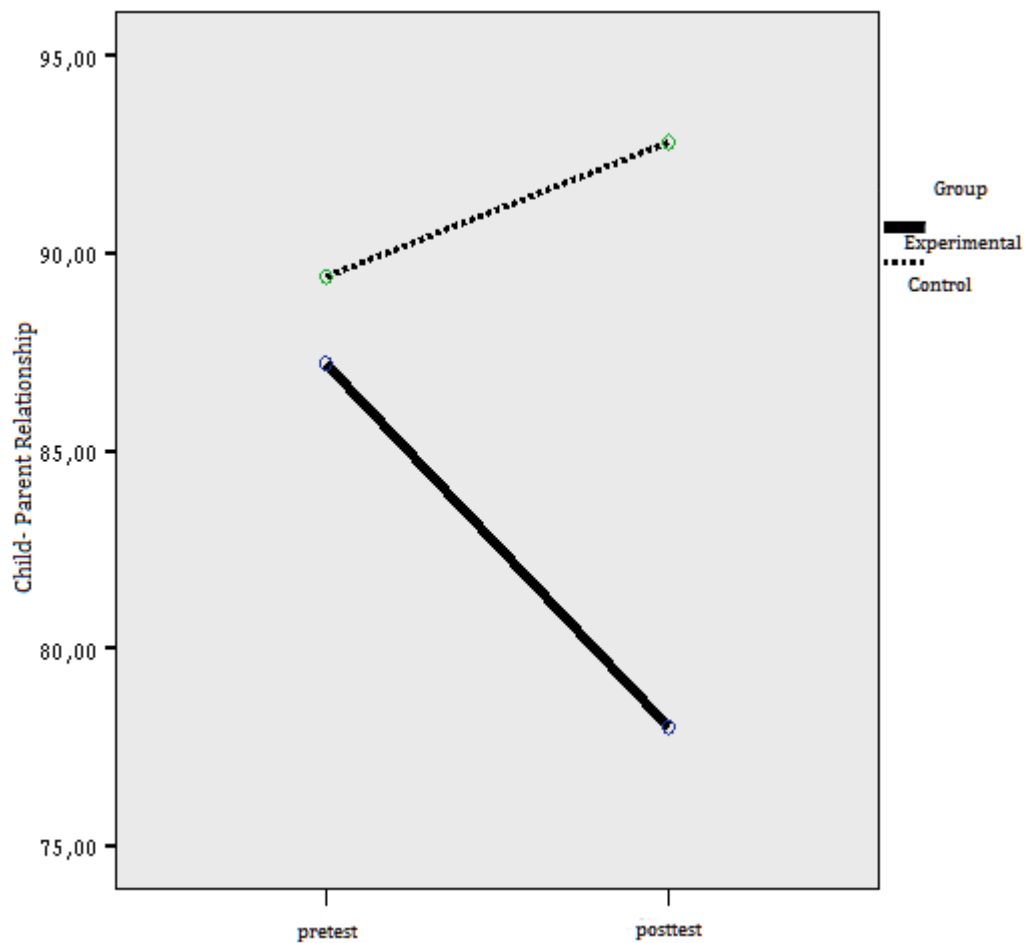
Mann- Whitney U Test Results related to Pretest -Posttest Score Differences of Experimental and Control Group’s Child-Parent Relationship Scale

	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U	P
Experimental	15	12.00	180.00	60.000	
Control	15	19.00	285.00		.029

Table 2 manifests that according to child-parent relationship scale analysis results between experimental and control (U: 60.000  $p < .05$ ) groups, there is a significant differentiation in favor of experimental group. Based on their mean ranks it can be argued that subjects who attended family counseling training program for 7-19 age group have, compared



to the subjects not having participated in the program, better child-parent relationships. This finding indicates that family counseling program for 7-19 age group creates positive effect on mother-father-child relationship (Graphic 1).



Graphic 1. *The Graphics of Variation related to the Groups' Measurements on Child-Parent Relationship Scale*

#### Conclusion and Discussion

Findings of present research indicate that family counseling training renders significant contributions to improve the relationship between parents and children. As a component of the applied training program, it was aimed to enlighten the families about basic communication skills, essential skills to form a healthy relationship, the effects of different attitudes in the family for parents and children, competent attitude skill for a healthy relationship, ability to take appropriate actions and solving the conflicts faced with their children. It is projected that the contents of given training rendered positive effect on the relationship between parents and children. The emergence of such positive findings is attributed to the facts that those trainings which were demanded from the families themselves welcomed already committed participants who were dedicatedly interested in the program

activities. At the same time, in the execution of this training program which was prepared at the end of wide-scope workshops that welcomed families and children, new educational methods and techniques such as games, role play, case study analysis, small-large group works, story and learning by doing were utilized, which are all considered to be effective in obtaining this positive finding above. Families also state that the training they received not only positively affected their relations with husbands/wives but also their interaction with children. As mother-oriented training programs were examined it surfaces that the training improved mothers' communication skills (Sala Razı, 2004), emphatic skills (Ünal, 2003), relations that they form with children (Akgün and Yeşilyaprak, 2010c; Balcı and Yılmaz, 2000; Li, Chan, Mak and Lam, 2013; Şimşek, 2007), child-raising attitudes and behaviors (Yılmaz Bolat, 2011), anger-management skills (Kabasakal, 2013) and there was a significant decrease in the adaptation and behavioral problems of children (Franz, Weihrach and Schafer, 2011; Kaymak Özmen, 2013; Srivastava, Gupta, Talukdar, Kalra and Lahan, 2011).

Within the framework of social learning model, the improvement in child-parent relations reflects itself as the betterment in healthy communication skills of children who naturally imitate their parents (Yörükoğlu, 1993). Even if the training was rendered only to the families, a number of positive developments were observed in both families and children. In a family training research conducted by Kierfeld, Ise, Hanisch, Dorten and Döpfner (2013) the family members reported to have experienced lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression and correspondingly a lower level of behavioral problems in children. Improved intra-family relations provide significant effects in bettering children's and adolescents' social skills and curtailing adaptation and behavioral problems (Yavuzer, 2012; Raikes and Thompson, 2008). Families reported to possess much better feelings about their relations with children and less worries in the face of problems they have with children (Michelson, Ben-Zion, James, Draper, Penney and Day, 2014). In lieu of nonfunctional attitudes, parents have learnt effective parenting strategies and solidified their skills in the practical activities. According to a research conducted by Totan and Yöndem (2007), parallel to the improved relations that adolescents form with their parents, it is less likely to be victimized by bullying or adopt bully/victim status. As a consequence of the betterment in the relationship that parents establish with children, parents' self confidence also climbs upward (Winter, Morawska and Sanders, 2012), which in effect boosts children's self-confidence (Onaylı and Erdur Baker, 2013) and experiencing positive feelings (Abraham and Kerns, 2013). The family counseling training programs also strengthened intra-family relations and the programs

are also in full accord with preventive and protective mental health studies directed towards children and adolescents (Fabrizio, Lam, Hirschmann and Stewart, 2013).

At the end of present research it has been concluded that family counseling training for 7-19 age group significantly contributed to developing the communication that parents form with children, which in effect proved that psychological counselors working in their subject field should allot wider place for “mother-father training programs” that will be executed on the principle of developmental and preventive counseling and psychological guidance approach. Present research has included only a limited number of volunteer mothers. In the future such researches focusing on families should be adopted as a general educational policy of schools and be spread over the entire institution. Required efforts should be exerted to increase the number of male participants in training programs and family training programs should be extended to cover 0-18 age group as well.

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