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Examination of stress levels of parents with preschool children in terms of different variables

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Abstract

The study aimed to examine the relationship between the stress levels of parents with preschool children and the variables of the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, number of children and age of the child. The study was carried out via relational scanning model. The participants of the study were selected using easy sampling method, and consisted of 307 volunteer parents with children between the ages of 4-6. The data were collected online via the Participation Acceptance Form, General Information Form both of which were developed by the researchers, and Parental Stress Scale developed by Kaymak Özmen ve Özmen (2012) in 2020-2021 school year. The data obtained were analyzed using the SPSS 25 statistical package program, and utilizing the tests such as ANOVA, Mann Whitney U Test, and Kruskal Wallis H Test. The results revealed that there was no relationship between the stress level of the parents and the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, the number of children they have, but there was a relationship between the parental stress level and the age of the children. Various recommendations have been made regarding these results.

Keywords: Preschool period, parents, parental stress, stress levels

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1. Introduction

Stress is "a condition that occurs when the physical and mental boundaries of the organism are threatened and forced" (Baltaş & Baltaş, 2008). Stress sometimes emerges as a trigger (stressor) that causes stress and sometimes as a reaction (Kümüş, 2012). Stress sources (stressors), which are considered as situations that cause stress to the individual, are grouped under three headings as individual, environmental and organizational (Duyan & Duyan, 2018). Among the sources of individual stress, personality traits are among the most important factors. Apart from this, factors such as the age, educational status, gender and marital status of the individual are among the individual stress sources (Ülkü, 2017).

Environmental stress sources can be considered as the physical environment (Kavi, 2007; Baltaş, Baltaş, 2008) consisting of factors such as air pollution, unusual

Corresponding author: Semanur Sancılı E-mail address: semanursancili.ss@gmail.com temperature, excessive humidity or no humidity, bad lighting, noise, radiation (Kavi, 2007; Baltas, Baltas, 2008), and social stress sources encountered by the individual in life. Social stress sources are generally considered as daily difficulties, changes in life and traumatic events. Daily difficulties can be an argument with parents, spouse, friends, long queues during shopping, and unpleasant phone calls (Myers & Dewall, 2016). Positive situations in life such as getting a promotion, getting married, pregnancy, starting / ending school, which disrupt the daily routine and require a new arrangement; Negative situations in life such as moving to a different house, divorce, death of a loved one, job loss, debt, sexual problems, imprisonment are stress situations caused by changes in life (Holme & Rahe, 1967). In addition, traumatic events such as earthquakes, floods, wars, sexual assault, exposure to physical violence, epidemics, traffic accidents that pose a threat to the integrity of the individual's life are also important sources of stress in an individual's life (Doğan, 2020). Organizational stress sources are stress factors arising from working life. These stress sources include excessive workload, tight control, anxiety caused by responsibilities, over-centralized management, lack of feedback, unclear goals, role ambiguity, role conflict, incompatibility between employees, excessive interpersonal competition, lack of trust, heat in the workplace, noise, nonphysical conditions and dangerous working conditions (Kavi, 2017; Aydın, 2016).

Another dimension of stress that needs to be addressed is parental stress. Although being a parent, there are various parental demands that may cause adversities in psychological health, including adaptation to the child's characteristics and parenting roles, that are at risk of stress, and that have not been experienced before the child is born (Deater-Deckard, 1998; Deater-Deckard, 2004), and psychological demands such as attention, affection, and emotion regulation. Parental stress is a balancing process between the parent's perception of these demands and the personal and social resources available to meet these demands (Deater-Deckard, 2004). When it is perceived that parental demands exceed personal and social resources, "parental stress" is experienced (Cooper et al., 2009). This stress is experienced as negative feelings of parents towards themselves and their children (Deater-Deckard, 1998).

Belsky (1984) discusses three sources that have an impact on parenting. These are the parent's psychological resources, the child's individual characteristics, and contextual sources of stress and support. Changes in these resources affect parenting functioning. Parents' personal maturity, psychological well-being, positive developmental background support parenting. On the contrary, psychological problems and negative experiences of parents negatively affect parenting and child development. Parental subjective perspective is also a factor associated with parental stress. An overly active, demanding child of one parent can be an energetic and assertive child for another parent (Deater-Deckard, 2004). Sources of social support that affect parenting include emotional support for parents, instrumental support in routine child-rearing tasks. In addition to these, factors such as the parents' marital relationship, working life and social environment also affect the parenting functioning and the character and development of the child (Belsky, 1984). According to Deater-Deckard (2004), there are two approaches that evaluate the causes and consequences of parental stress: These are the parent-child relationship theory and the daily difficulties theory.

Parent-child relationship theory, the "parent" component that reveals aspects of parental stress that arise in the parent; It consists of three components: the "child" component, which reveals the aspects of parental stress emerging in children's behavior, and the "parent-child relationship" component, which reveals the aspects of parental stress emerging in the parent-child relationship. Personality and pathological components of the child such as adaptation, acceptability, being demanding, mood, hyperactivity and distraction directly affect the child's character and indirectly stress the parents; While personality and pathological components such as depression and sense of competence directly affect parental attitude, they indirectly affect parental stress. In addition, parental perceptions of parental functioning such as relationship with spouse, social support, parental health, restriction of roles, social isolation also affect parental stress (Loyd & Abidin, 1985; Abidin, 1990; Abidin et al., 2013)

According to the theory of daily difficulties, some difficulties may be situation-specific and infrequent, while others may be repetitive. Some problem behaviors of children, what to do regarding childcare, complex and contradictory family life constitute typical stress situations. Typical stress situations sometimes strain or even hinder parental responsibilities. However, when compared with stress factors such as divorce, job loss, loss of relatives, these situations are not seen as an important source of stress. Even if the parent perceives a single event as a difficulty or not, the effects of these events increase over time and this resulting cumulative effect leads to chronic parental stress and negatively affects the parent-child relationship (Kohn, 1996; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990).

To sum up it can be stated that all parents experience parental stress to some extent, regardless of their economic status, educational status, working life, personality traits, child personality and behavioral characteristics, culture, and support network. In the preschool period, when the child acquires basic habits and his development is extremely rapid, the stress level of the parents can affect the child's personality, attitudes, behaviors and psychological well-being. This particular study aimed to reveal the relationship between the stress level of the parents and the individual stress sources, including the gender, age, education level, perceived income level, number of children, and the child's age. Therefore, the research question of the study was formulated as; "Do the stress levels of parents with children aged 4-6 differ according to the variables of the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, number of children and age of children?"

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In the study, it was aimed to examine the relationship between the stress levels of parents with preschool children and the variables of the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, number of children and age of the child. For this purpose, the research was carried out utilizing the relational scanning model as the research pattern. Relational screening aims to determine the existence of a relationship between two or more variables and the degree of this relationship (Karasar, 2016).

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 307 volunteer parents living in Istanbul with children between the ages of 4-6. The participants were determined via easy sampling method, one of the non-random sampling methods. Initially, 341 parents were reached out within the scope of the study. When the responses of those 341 parents were examined, the main participants of 307 parents were created by removing the parents who had children other than 4-6 years of age group. Demographic features of the participating parents are given in the following table (See Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information about parents

Variables	Responses	n	%
Gender	Female	289	94,1
	Male	18	5,9
	20-30	37	12,1
\mathbf{Age}	30-40	207	67,2
	40-50	63	20,5
Education level	Elementary	7	2,3
	Secondary	17	5,5
	High School	68	22,1
	University	176	57,3
	MA/PhD	39	12,7
Perceived income level	Low	22	7,2
	Average	256	83,4
	High	29	9,4
Number of children	1	137	44,6
	2	131	42,7
	3+	39	12,7
Total		307	100

As seen in Table 1, 289 (94.1%) of the parents participating in the study are female and 18 (5.9) of them are male. 37 parents (12.1%) are in the 20-30 age range, 207 (67.2%) are in the 30-40 age range, 63 (20.5%) are in the 40-50 age range. When the education level of the parents was examined, 7 (2.3%) parents were primary school, 17 (5.5%) parents were secondary school, 68 (22.1%) high school, 176 (57.3%) parents were undergraduate, 39 (12.7%) it is seen that the parent has a master's / doctorate level. When the perceived income level is examined, it is seen that 22 (7.2%) parents have low income perception, 256 (83.4%) parents have a perception of middle income, and 29 (9.4%) parents have a high income perception. 137 of the parents (44.6%) have a single child, 131 (42.7%) have 2 children, and 39 (12.7) have 3 or more children.

Demographic features of the children within the scope of the study are as in the following (See Table 2).

	Table 2. Demographic	information	about the child	dren
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Age	n	%	
4	105	34,2	
5	117	38,1	
6	85	27,7	
Total	307	100,0	

As it is seen in the table above, 105 (34.2%) children are four years old, 117 (38.1%) are five years old, and 8 (27.7%) are six years old.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The data of the study were collected utilizing the following data collection tools:

2.3.1. Participation Acceptance Form: The form was developed by the researchers for the participating parents. It was composed of the information about the purpose of the research, the reason for the research, the place where the research will be conducted, and the method of the research. Through the form, the parents were informed that the study was on voluntary basis, and their consent of participation was obtained.

2.3.2. General Information Form: The form was developed by the researchers to collect data from the participating parents. It was composed of items about the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, the number of children they have, the age of their children.

2.3.3. Parent Stress Scale: The scale, which measures the stress level of parents, was developed by Kaymak Özmen and Özmen (2012). It is a 4-point Likert type singledimensional scale consisting of 16 items questioning the daily relationships of parents with their children. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale with a rating is 16 and the highest score is 64. High scores from the scale indicate high parental stress. The Cronbach Alpha value calculated for the internal consistency reliability of the scale was 0.85 and the Spearman Brown split half test reliability was 0.82. Item total correlations for all items in the scale vary between 0.34 and 0.58. It was observed that the t values obtained within the scope of item analysis were significant (p <.001) (Özmen & Ozmen, 2020). Within the scope of this research, the Cronbach Alpha (a) value of the scale was calculated as 0.94.

2.3.4. Data Collection and Analysis of the Data

Upon the necessary permission of the researchers who developed and adapted the Parent Stress Scale, all the data collection tools were transferred into digital platform in order to administer them in distance. The data obtained were analyzed via the SPSS 25 statistical package program using descriptive statistics, and in order to decide the test type to utilize, the graphs showing the normality distribution and the skewness and kurtosis values were created.

Within the scope of this study, the skewness and kurtosis values were evaluated between the limits of -1 and +1 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). It was examined whether there was a difference between the total score obtained from the scale according to the variables of gender, age, education level, perceived income level, number of children and age of the child. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used when comparing the average of more than two groups among normally distributed data. The Mann Whitney U Test, one of the paired comparisons, was used when analyzing the data that did not show normal distribution, and the Kruskal Wallis H Test was used when comparing the mean of more than two groups. When the difference between groups emerged as a result of the Kruskal Wallis H Test, the Mann Whitney U test was conducted to determine in which group the difference was significant. Bonferroni correction was made in order to reduce the error rate, as paired comparisons were made in multiple groups during the Mann Whitney U Test. As a result, a new significance level was obtained by dividing the significance level, p <0.05, by the number of groups.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the Parent Stress Scale (PSS)

	n	x-	ss	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
PSS	307	33,93	10,53	16,00	64,00	,797	,220

As seen in Table 3, the arithmetic mean of the Parental Stress Scale (x) is 33.93; standard deviation (ss) 10.53; its minimum value is 16.00; its maximum value has been calculated as 64.00. The skewness value of the scale is 797 and the kurtosis value is 220.

3. Results

In this section, the answer to the research question; "Do the stress levels of parents with children aged 4-6 differ according to the variables of the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, number of children and age of children?" was presented via related tables to each of the variables.

Table 4. Mann Whitney U Test Results Regarding Parental Stress Scale Scores According to Parents' Gender

	Gender	n	Median	Z	U	р
	Female	289	32			
PSS				-,759	2324	,44
	Male	18	35,5			

Table 4 contains the result of the Mann Whitney U test conducted to determine whether the total scores obtained from the Parental Stress Scale differ according to the gender of the parents. Accordingly, there was no significant difference between women's parental stress score (median = 32) and men's parental stress score (median = 35.5) (U = 2324; z =- 759, p> 0.05).

Table 5. Kruskal Wallis H Test Results Related to Parents 'Stress Scale Scores According to Parents' Age

	Age	n	Median	X^2	sd	p
	20-30	37	32,00			
PSS	30-40	207	32,00	,200	2	,905
	40-50	63	34,00			

Table 5 shows the result of the Kruskal Wallis H test, which was conducted to determine whether the total scores obtained from the Parental Stress Scale differ according to the age of the parents. Accordingly, no significant difference was observed between parental stress scores according to the ages of the parents (p > 0.05).

Table 4. Kruskal Wallis H Test Results Related to the Parents' Stress Scale Scores According to the Education Level of the Parents

Education Level of the Farents						
	Education level	n	Median	X^2	sd	p
	Elementary	7	25,00			
\mathbf{PSS}	Secondary	17	32,00			
	High School	68	32,00	3,605	4	,462
	University MA/PhD	176 39	32,00 30,00			
					4	

Table 6 shows the result of the Kruskal Wallis H test, which was conducted to determine whether the total scores obtained from the Parental Stress Scale differ according to the education level of the parents. Accordingly, no significant difference was observed between the parental stress scores according to the education level of the parents (p> 0.05).

mome never of fareing						
	Perceived income	n	Median	X^2	sd	p
	level					
	Low	22	39,50			
PSS	Average	256	32,00	3,967	2	,138
	High	29	31,00			

Tablo 7. Kruskal Wallis H Test Results Related to Parents' Stress Scale Scores According to Perceived Income Level of Parents

Table 7 shows the result of the Kruskal Wallis H test, which was conducted to determine whether the total scores obtained from the Parental Stress Scale differ according to the income level according to the perceptions of the parents. Accordingly, no significant difference was observed between the stress scores of the parents according to the perceived income level of the parents (p> 0.05).

Table 8. Kruskal Wallis H Test Results Related to Parents Stress Scale Scores According to the Number of Parents' Children

		Number of children	n	Median	X^2	sd	p
		1	137	31,00			
	PSS	2	131	32,00	6,223	2	,045
		3+	39	37,00			
		3+	39	37,00			
<0,05							

Table 8 shows the result of the Kruskal Wallis H test conducted to determine whether the total scores obtained from the Parental Stress Scale differ according to the number of children the parents have. Accordingly, a significant difference was observed in the scores the parents got from the Parental Stress Scale (x^2 (x^2 (x^2 (x^2 (x^2)) = 6.223, p<0.05). Looking at the medians of the number of children, 3 and above the highest median value of the number of children; It is seen that the number of children 1 has the lowest median value.

Mann Whitney U Test was conducted in order to determine among which groups the difference obtained as a result of analysis.

Table 9. Mann Whitney U Test Results Related to Paired Comparison of Total Scores Obtained from Parental Stress Scale by Number of Children

	Number of children	n	${f z}$	U	р
	1-2	268	-1,141	8041,5	,141
PSS	1-3+	176	-2,269	2035	,023
	2-3+	170	-1,588	2126,5	,112

In the Mann Whitney U Test, which was carried out to determine the differences between the groups. Bonferroni correction was made in order to prevent an increase in error, and the significance level was taken as 0.016 instead of 0.05. As a result of the Bonferroni correction, it was revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups as the sensitivity increased (p > 0.016).

Table 5. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results Regarding Parental Stress Scale Scores According to Children's Age

	Age of children	n	x-	ss	Source of variance	Sum of squares	sd	Mean of squares	\mathbf{F}	р
	4	105	35,32	11,9	Between Groups	409,764	2	204,882	1,858	,158
PSS	5	117	32,61	9,4	Within Groups	33523,799	304	110,276		
	6	85	34,04	10						

In Table 10, the result of One-Way Variance Analysis performed to determine whether the total scores obtained from the Mother Father Stress Scale differ according to the age of the children. Accordingly, no significant difference was observed between the parental stress scores according to the age of the children (p> 0.05).

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The minimum score that can be obtained from the Parental Stress Scale applied to the parents is 16 and the maximum score is 64. When the answers of the parents were evaluated within the scope of the study, it was revealed that the lowest score obtained from the scale was 16 and the highest score was 64. Accordingly, it is seen that some parents in the study experience high levels of parental stress. Considering that mothers are more involved in raising children than fathers, it is possible that they have higher stress due to factors such as feelings of inadequacy (McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002). However, within the scope of this study, no significant relationship was observed between parental stress and gender. In a study conducted by Skreden et al. (2012) with parents who have preschool children, it was found that mothers have higher parental stress than fathers. It was observed that especially the age of young children and having the next child predicted the stress of the mothers. When evaluated in this context, this study revealed that there was no significant relationship between children's age and parental stress. When looking at the relationship between parental stress and the number of children, it was seen that there was a relationship between the scores of the parents on the Parental Stress Scale and the number of children at the beginning, parents with 3 or more children had the highest median value, and parents with one child had the lowest median value. However, in order to evaluate the differences between the groups, it was concluded that there was no significant difference between the groups as the sensitivity increased as a result of the analysis performed by preventing the increase in error. Similar results were obtained in the study conducted by Menon et al. (2012) with parents with preschool children and in the study conducted by Koç and Paslı (2019) with parents with children between the ages of 0-3, indicating that parental stress is not related to the gender of the parent and the number of children. In studies conducted by Calıskan (2020) with parents with children at primary school level, Menon et al. (2012) with parents with preschool children, Gülaildi (2010) with parents with children with cerebral palsy and autism spectrum disorder, the parental stress It has been concluded that there is no predictor. These results are consistent with the results of this study. As a result of the research, it was seen that parental age does not have a significant relationship with parental stress. When the literature is examined, it is seen that the income level factor of the parents has an effect on the parental stress and the parents in the low income group have higher parental stress (Chan et al., 2005; Menon et al., 2012). In this study, it was concluded that there was no relationship between perceived income level and parental stress. The same result was found in the relationship between education level factor and parental stress. However, in the research conducted by Kochan (2019) with parents with disabled children, it was found that middle school graduate parents had higher stress scores; In a study conducted by Güladı (2010) with parents with children with Cerebral Palsy and Autism spectrum disorder, it was revealed that mothers with primary education graduates had higher stress scores. Parents who have children with special needs and are in the low education group are at a more disadvantage in terms of accessing knowledge and skills, getting expert support, and this may cause them to be less resistant to difficulties (Aysever & Sakallı Demirok, 2019). In a study conducted with the parents of normally developing children with preschool children, it was found that parents with higher education levels have higher stress levels. This reveals that the highly educated group may have other expectations from life (Skreden et al., 2012).

In this study, it was revealed that the stress levels of parents related to being a parent varied between the minimum and maximum stress points taken from the scale, but this stress level did not differ according to the parents' gender, age, education level, perceived income level, the number of children they had, but only according to the age of the children. The amount of time spent on parenting to determine the source of stress levels of parents, emotional and behavioral problems of children, relationship with spouse, physical and / or psychological disturbances of parents, coping strategies of parents, social support networks owned by parents, Studies can be carried out with different variables such as conflicts. There are several limitations to this research. First of all, the relationship between children's gender and parental stress has not been examined. Therefore, the gender of the child can be added as a variable in future studies.

The second limitation is that the study is limited to Istanbul province, it can be studied with a larger sample group.

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