

Adolescents' Evaluation of Their Own Peer Relations

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Abstract: This study aims to determine whether gender, family relationships and playing a sport create a difference in peer relations of adolescents. It was carried out with 173 adolescents studying at the first and second grades of middle socio-economic level high schools in downtown Ankara. Data about the adolescents and their families was collected with the help of the General Information Form developed by the researchers. Data about peer relations was collected using the Peer Relations Scale developed and tested for validity and reliability. The data obtained was then evaluated using t-test and one-way ANOVA. The results suggested that gender, family relationships and playing a sport had a significant effect on peer relationships ($p < .001$, $p < .01$, $p < .05$).

Key words: Adolescents, peer relations, adolescent development

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of transition during which individuals form their social personality. During this transition, adolescents try to determine who they are, what to value, who to believe and who to become attached to. By associating with people they admire, they start to form their personality. As they make an effort to find themselves, adolescents need peer relations through which they can express their feelings, acquire group membership and mutually confirm each other (Çağdaş and Seğer, 2002).

Other factors than family also affect adolescent peer relations. These include socio-economic level, physical appearance, academic success, personality traits and taking part in social activities (Duck, 1973; Onur, 1976; Kon and Losenkov, 1987). For adolescents, peer relations have a very different role from that of family relationships. Through peer relations, they learn how to establish social relationships, act confidently, express their ideas and tolerate others'. Additionally, they learn how to socialize in a peer group and learn the concepts of loyalty, courage and sharing. Parental attitudes toward adolescents have an effect on their personality and emotional life as well as their peer relations and interaction with their environment. To illustrate, unhealthy family relationships may lead to adolescents making wrong friends and eventually joining gangs. To stop this from happening, parents sometimes resort to physical

punishment. However, giving such punishment only results in even more detrimental acts on the part of adolescents. Other parents choose to stay apathetic to the problem of unfit friends, which almost always pushes adolescents to new environments in search of acceptance and interest. In contrast, adolescents raised in a democratic environment have more self-confidence and express themselves better. This allows them to form healthier friendships and find their identity and power in a peer group (Erwin, 2000).

There are differences between girls' and boys' peer relations. Boys, on the whole, are more dependent on friends and allow peer relations to affect their development to a great extent (Burlingame, 1967; Moore and Boldere, 1991; Ünlü, 2001). Girls, on the other hand, perceive their peer relations more positively and are thus affected more positively by these relations than are boys (Goodenow and Grady, 1992). Further, girls are able to form longer-term friendships. Ülkü and Arısoy (1983) states that socio-economic level creates a difference in peer relations while Arslan (1997) emphasizes the importance of personality traits in peer relations. Adolescents also value the opinions of their friends much more than those of their family members (Erol, 2000).

Believing that the seeds of tomorrow's healthy societies can be sown today by raising healthy individuals, the present study aims to investigate the peer relations of high school students with respect to gender, family relationships and playing a sport.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Population and sample: The study was conducted on 173 adolescents aged between 15 and 17 (aged 15 = 81, aged 16 = 60, aged 17 = 32 and $M = 2.71$, $SD = .75$) who volunteered to take part in the research. Disabled volunteers and those from single-parent homes were excluded from the study. The random sampling method was used to determine the sample and, consequently, 173 first and second year students aged between 15 and 17 from middle socio-economic high schools were included in the study. The socioeconomic classification of downtown Ankara was determined by the Turkish Statistical Institute.

Data collection tools

General information form: The form consists of questions about participants' gender, family relations and interest in sport.

Peer relations scale: Developed by Kaner this scale evaluates four different dimensions of peer relations: Attachment, trust and association, sharing and loyalty. More precisely:

Attachment: This sub-scale comprises 8 items about mutual love and closeness between adolescents (1, 4, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 16).

Trust and association: This sub-scale includes 4 items about mutual trust and association between adolescents (2, 8, 9 and 18).

Sharing: Consisting of 3 items, this sub-scale measures the extent to which adolescents share their problems with their friends (6, 7 and 14).

Loyalty: The 3 items in this sub-scale include statements about lying to protect friends who are in trouble and standing by these friends even when they only bring trouble (3, 5 and 17).

The respondents answered these items by ticking always (5 points), frequently (4 points), sometimes (3 points), rarely (2 points) and never (1 point). The highest and lowest points available range between 5 times the number of items and 1. A total point is also obtained from the scale. A higher point indicates more positive peer relations.

Data analysis: The data obtained was evaluated using SPSS 10.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). T-test was used in order to determine whether gender affected the peer relations of adolescents and one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether family relationships and playing a sport created a difference in peer relations. The group that caused the significance was identified by Scheefe Test (Büyüköztürk, 2002).

RESULTS

Data showed that 31% of the participants had primary school graduate mothers, 44.5% had high-school graduate mothers and 23.5% had university graduate mothers. Of all the fathers, 30.3% were primary school graduates, 44.7% were high school graduates and 25% were university graduates.

As can be seen from Table 1, the t-test results suggested no meaningful difference between the score averages of adolescents' peer relations with respect to gender ($t_{(170)} = 1.547$, $p > .05$).

Table 2 shows variance analysis results. According to these, a meaningful difference existed between the peer relationship score averages of adolescents with respect to total familial relationships ($F_{(2,170)} = 6.805$, $p < .001$). Scheffe test results showed that this difference was caused by the difference in the score averages of adolescents who reported high amount of sharing and those who reported medium and little amounts.

The variance analysis results given in Table 3 show that playing a sport was effective in the score averages of total peer relations ($F_{(2,170)} = 3.435$, $p < .05$).

Table 1: Peer relations score averages, standard deviation by gender

| Gender | n | Attachment | | Trust and association | | Sharing | | Loyalty | | Total test | |
|-------------------|----|------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|------------|-------|
| | | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Female | 98 | 33.11 | 6.07 | 15.60 | 3.21 | 10.16 | 3.05 | 7.91 | 3.41 | 66.69 | 10.38 |
| Male | 75 | 31.45 | 7.31 | 15.18 | 3.79 | 8.04 | 3.45 | 9.01 | 3.65 | 63.70 | 13.97 |
| Results of T-Test | | t | p | t | p | t | p | t | p | t | p |
| | | 1.479 | 0.141 | 0.753 | 0.453 | 4.190 | 0.000 | 2.00 | 0.047 | 1.547 | 0.124 |

Note: Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p < .05$, $p < .001$ and not statistically significantly different $p > .05$

Table 2: Peer relations score averages, standard deviation by family relationships

| Family relationships | n | Attachment | | Trust and association | | Sharing | | Loyalty | | Total test | |
|-----------------------------|-----|------------|------|-----------------------|------|---------|------|---------|------|------------|-------|
| | | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| High sharing ¹ | 31 | 32.22 | 6.82 | 15.16 | 4.10 | 10.16 | 3.32 | 9.51 | 3.86 | 67.06 | 13.15 |
| Medium sharing ² | 117 | 33.42 | 5.74 | 15.88 | 3.13 | 9.42 | 3.31 | 8.11 | 3.55 | 66.85 | 10.65 |
| Low sharing ³ | 25 | 27.64 | 8.41 | 13.76 | 3.77 | 7.52 | 3.45 | 8.56 | 3.16 | 57.48 | 14.92 |
| General | 173 | 32.37 | 6.65 | 15.45 | 3.48 | 9.28 | 3.40 | 8.42 | 3.57 | 65.53 | 12.20 |
| Meaningful | | 1-2,1-3 | | 2-3 | | 1-2,1-3 | | - | | 1-2,1-3 | |

Note: Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p<.001$, $p<.01$, $p<.05$ and not statistically significantly different $p>.05$

Table 3: Peer relations score averages, standard deviation with respect to playing a sport

| Playing a sport | n | Attachment | | Trust and association | | Sharing | | Loyalty | | Total test | |
|------------------------|-----|------------|------|-----------------------|------|---------|------|---------|------|------------|-------|
| | | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Yes ¹ | 105 | 33.60 | 6.44 | 15.87 | 3.49 | 9.60 | 3.47 | 8.18 | 3.53 | 67.26 | 12.16 |
| No ² | 44 | 29.22 | 6.71 | 14.84 | 3.18 | 8.68 | 3.15 | 8.86 | 3.81 | 61.61 | 11.67 |
| Sometimes ³ | 24 | 32.75 | 5.75 | 14.70 | 3.78 | 9.00 | 3.51 | 8.70 | 3.36 | 65.16 | 12.07 |
| General | 173 | 32.37 | 6.65 | 15.45 | 3.48 | 9.28 | 3.40 | 8.42 | 3.57 | 65.53 | 12.20 |
| Meaningful | | 1-2 | | - | | - | | - | | 1-2 | |

Note: -Means with different superscripts in the same column are statistically significantly different $p<.001$, $p<.05$ and not statistically significantly different $p>.05$

According to Scheffe test, the difference was caused by the score averages of adolescents who play a sport and those who do not.

DISCUSSION

Peer group plays an important role in helping adolescents find themselves (Özgüven, 2001). In adolescence, young people wage war on their families to claim their independence and they only find solace in their friends (Köknel, 1997). The researchers believe that the results of the present study will help further understand adolescence.

Although the findings suggest that gender was not significant in total peer relations, it was found to be significant in sharing score averages and thus the sharing score averages of girls were higher. Taking too much responsibility as a result of social and cultural pressures and expectations may be preventing boys from expressing their emotions and personal problems. Such reserved attitude may subsequently affect boys' peer relations negatively. On the other hand, girls can have closer relationships with peers when it comes to attachment, trust and sharing. Studies have also shown that girls have more emotional personalities (Berndt and Perry, 1990). While some studies have claimed that gender affects peer relations, others have concluded otherwise. While Çok (1993) emphasized that gender was not significant in peer relations, Solmaz (2002) concluded in a study about adolescents' perceptions of their peer relations that gender caused a meaningful difference in peer relations perception scores.

Adolescence is one of the riskiest periods in human life. At such difficult times, a good family relationship is

crucial for adolescents to feel supported, overcome difficulties and develop a positive outlook (Gürsoy and Yıldız Bıçakçı, 2003). The findings of the present study also corroborate this. The results show that adolescents who have healthier relationships with their families and who feel supported opt for better friends and thus end up perceiving their peer relations more positively. In a study with 156 girls and 149 boys, Koç (2002) concluded that parental attitudes toward adolescents affect their social adaptation and relationships and that adolescents who have healthy relations and share more with their parents establish more positive relationships with the larger society.

Participating in social activities in adolescence also affects peer relations positively. Sport activities particularly provide physical and psychological relaxation and help adolescents expand their social circle and establish harmonious peer relations. In a study aiming to identify the aggressiveness tendencies of children who play a sport, Mülazımoğlu and Gürsoy (2006) stated that these children are more at ease with themselves and are able to establish positive relationships with friends.

CONCLUSION

Adolescence is a tumultuous time during which young people find themselves in constant conflict with their environment. Such conflicting thoughts and behaviors should be considered normal during such difficult times. In this transition period between puberty and adulthood, parents should strive to give confidence to adolescents, listen to them openly and respect their views. It is a fact that as adolescents become older, they have a higher tendency towards deviant peers and risky

behavior. Therefore parents should make an effort to get to know their children's friends and closely monitor their children's peer relations. When parents do not approve of adolescents' friends, they should talk to their children about choosing the right friends instead of punishing them or unnecessarily criticizing them. Additionally, parents should not worry that their children's friendships will weaken their family relations. Keeping in mind that adolescents should have the freedom to choose their own friends, parents should not prevent their children from doing so. On the school front, counselling departments should inform adolescents about friendships and peer pressure and hold meetings to discuss case studies as well as the positive and negative effects of friends, friendship and groups.

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