

Examination of the Relationship between Mothers' Couple Burnout and Children's Social Skills

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ABSTRACT

In this study, it has been tried to develop a different perspective in the literature by determining the reflection of couple burnout of mothers, which is examined as a problem between couples or a personal problem, on the social development of children. The study was designed in the relational survey model, one of the general survey models. In the study, the Social Skills Assessment Scale was used to measure the social skills of children, and the Couple Burnout Scale Short Form was used to measure the mother's burnout level. According to the findings, a significant negative relationship was found between the Social Skills Scale's sub-dimensions of Initiating and Maintaining Relationships, Aggressive Behaviors and Coping Skills with Impulses, Planning, Group Communication and Conducting a Job Skills, and Social Skills Scale Total Score and Couple Burnout. It has been observed that couple burnout of mothers negatively and significantly predicts children's social skills and sub-dimensions of social skills, such as initiating and maintaining relationships, coping with aggressive behaviors and impulses, planning, communication with the group and running a business. It was concluded that the couple burnout of the mothers negatively predicted the social skills of the children.

Keywords: Social skill, Couple burnout, Child development, Mothers' couple burnout

INTRODUCTION

The family environment is where the child stays in close contact for a long time throughout the fault. The family carries the traces of other social circles, and the child bears the traces of his family. Therefore, different types of burnout situations experienced by parents can affect children. (Erturk, 2010). Burnout is a syndrome with both physical and emotional symptoms. (Ekberg et al., 1986). Burnout, when viewed in terms of desire, energy, ideals, loss of perspective, and goal, causes physical, emotional, and mental fatigue that causes constant stress, hopelessness, and helplessness (Pines & Aronson, 1988). Burnout occurs at the end of a three-stage process. In the first stage, insomnia, migraine headaches, excessive sweating, muscle tightness, heart palpitations under stress, physical symptoms similar to stomach ulcers occur; Emotional symptoms such as fatigue and inability to respond emotionally also occur (Jackson & Maslach 1982; Shubin et al., 1978). In the second stage of burnout, negative feelings towards others and oneself emerge, and in the third stage, the person experiences a complete disconnection from himself and his humanity (Shubin et al., 1978; Storlie, 1979). Individuals who do not have social interactions and cannot build up interpersonal intimacy are more prone to develop depression (Nezlek, Hampton, & Shean, 2000). Among the emotional symptoms of burnout, a depressed mood is often reported. Parents experiencing burnout feel that they have less energy to devote to their children (Pines, 1996). In addition, depression leads to social skill deficiencies (Segrin, 2000). An important dimension of burnout is spouse burnout, which can occur in married individuals.

Couple burnout, first put forward by Pines (1996), is a state of physical, mental and emotional fatigue that occurs as a result of the intensification of emotional demands in a long-term relationship and is caused by the difference between expectations and reality. As a result of couple burnout resulting from the wear and tear caused by the difference between expectations and reality, a general state of unhappiness prevails in the relationship, and when the relationship comes to an end, couple burnout is intensely observed (Pines, 1996). When evaluated in terms of gender variable, women's couple burnout levels are higher than men (Pines et al. 2011). It has been determined that there are significant relationships between the burnout scores of women and the conflict situations between work and home, and that women experience more stress and burnout in their work and home lives than men in terms of demand conflict (Pines & Kafry, 1981; Pines, 1996; Westman, Etzion et al. Gortler, 2004). The effect of gender roles and, in connection with this, being seen as more responsible for the emotional needs of family members play a role in women's high responsibilities. Therefore, it is stated that women are more at risk for burnout (Babaođlan, 2006).

Children interact with their mothers and internalize these mutual interactions. These interactions serve as a basis for the social relationships of the children in their later lives. (Bowlby, 1973; Ainsworth (1989). Children who

develop a healthy attachment relationship with their parents tend to be more successful in establishing relationships with others and tend to have more positive social expectations (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Colman & Thompson, 2002). Moreover, they are more cooperative and more determined to continue their work (Matas et al., 1978). The quality of the mother-child relationship affects children's aggression towards their peers, their emotional sensitivity, empathic behaviors, social skills, and impulsive behaviors (Booth & Amato, 1991; Chisholm, 1999; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). The mother's secure and healthy attachment relationships affect the mother's social skills, which in turn affects the child's social skills and self-esteem. The social and psychological well-being of the mother affects the psycho-social well-being of the children (Curran et al., 2021). It is seen that children who have negative relationships (Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1981; Achenbach et al., 1987) with their families show aggression, tantrums, introversion, unhappiness, fear and anxiety in children, while children who have positive family relationships show harmonious social behaviors in the areas of communication and social functioning (Miles & Stipek, 2006). McCrae and Costa (1985) determined that children who describe their families as loving have good extrovert behaviors and a good ability of taking responsibility. Goodman & Shatz (1993) determined that maternal depression signs have a negative impact on the positive self-esteem, impulse control development, establishment of relations, and development of social acceptance behaviors of children. Uluğtekin (1991) determined that aggression and addictive behavior in children and mother-child relationship are important, and that parental rejecting behaviors lead to aggressive behavior in children.

In the relevant literature, it is determined that couple burnout affects the mothers emotionally and physically, and mothers whose emotional states are deteriorated cannot develop a healthy relationship with their children (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994; Colman & Thompson, 2002; Booth & Amato, 1991; Chisholm, 1999; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Positive emotional relationship of the mothers with children is known to affect the social skills of the children (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981; Achenbach et al., 1987; Curran et al., 2021; Miles & Stipek, 2006; Goodman & Shatz, 1993; Uluğtekin 1991). In the light of this information, the aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between couple burnout in mothers with children aged between 7-11 years and the social skills of their offspring. A different perspective has been attempted to be brought to the relevant literature by determining the impact of the mother experiencing couple burnout, considered as a personal problem between the couples or as a personal problem, on the social development of children. Hereby, the highlighted aim is to draw attention to social problems arising from the couple burnout problem experienced by mothers and most of the time borne in silence without taking any professional help.

THE STUDY

This study was designed in the relational survey model, which aims to determine the existence of co-variation between two or more variables, which is one of the general survey models, and the correlational analysis was obtained by looking at the correlation type relationship (Karasar, 2006).

Participants

The participants of the present study are 213 children aged between 7-11 years enrolled at various primary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education, Konya Directorate in Turkey and their mothers. Participation of the school and families in the present study has been on voluntary bases. The study included children aged 7 (n=7), 8 (n=62), 9 (n=63), 10 (n=62), 11 (n=19). When the age distribution of the children included in the study is examined, it is seen that the numbers of children aged 8, 9 and 10 are almost equal, whereas the number of children aged 7 and 11 are less. The underlying reason of this fact is that most 7-year-olds are in the first grade and can neither read nor write. Furthermore, the fact that some of the 11-year-old children have passed to secondary school and that secondary school children are excluded accounts for the scarce number of 7- and 11-years old participants. While choosing the schools included in the study, three different schools with children from all socio-economic levels were preferred. The sample group participant children in the present study have according to their school files family integrity and are within normal development ranges.

Data Collection & Material

In the study, the Social Skills Assessment Scale (SSAS) was used to measure the social skills of the children, and the Couple Burnout Scale Short Form was used to measure the mother's burnout level. Necessary permissions were obtained both for the Social Skills Assessment Scale and Couple Burnout Scale Short Form to be used in the present study. In addition, ethics and research permission was obtained from Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education. Non-confidential personal data obtained from the school counselling services were used to meet the criteria of participation in the study of the children included in the sample. School guidance and psychological counseling services were informed about how and why the study was to be carried out and necessary planning was made based on the common feedback received. Based on voluntary consent forms, SSAS and CBS-SF were administered to all the mothers participating in the study in groups. The data used in the study were collected in the 2019-2020 academic year.

Social Skills Assessment Scale

The Social Skills Assessment Scale, developed in 201 by Ataş, Efeçınar and Tatar in Turkey, has been filled out either by a parent, teacher, or another person related to the participating child in order to evaluate all the participants of the present study. The scale consists of 76 items and seven sub-dimensions These sub-dimensions are; " skills for the initiation and continuity of relationships ", " assertiveness skills", " emotional skills", "skills for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses", "problem solving skills", " making plans, group interaction " and "skills for conducting a task" The adapted version of the scale targeting children between the ages of 4-15 was conducted with a total of 727 people, 369 mothers, 99 fathers, 179 teachers, and 80 relatives responsible for the care of these children. The internal consistency coefficient was determined as .97 for the whole scale, and between .84 and .92 for its sub-dimensions. In this study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .87 for the whole scale, and between .64 and .90 for its sub-dimensions.

Couple Burnout Scale Short Form (CBS- SF)

The consisting of 21 items developed by Pines (1996) was revised by Pines et al. in 2011 and thus CBS – SF consisting of 10 items was created. CBS-SF is applied to measure the burnout levels of people in all types of relationships in which they are defined as couples. The seven-point Likert scale is scored according to the answers of the participants. The internal consistency coefficient scores of the scale were calculated with the data obtained from married participants and determined for married men. as .95 and for married women as .94. In addition, when the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the CBS-SF was calculated, the result was determined as .91. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for the whole scale was found to be .89.

Data Analyses

SPSS 21 package program was used to determine the relationship between the data obtained from the Social Skills Assessment Scale and the data obtained from the Spousal Burnout Scale Short Form. Simple Correlation (pearson) was used to determine the existence of a relationship. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was performed to see the predictors of all social skills sub-dimensions, which were found to be significantly associated with spouse burnout. For normality tests, Skewness-Kurtosis and Durbin-Watson values were examined.

FINDINGS

In this section, the results of the analysis of the data obtained from the research are given in tables.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis and results of normality of the sobece child social skills assessment scale total and sub-dimensional scores and spousal burnout scale

Groups	\bar{X}	Ss	Skewness	Kurtosis
Skills for the Initiation and Continuity of Relationships	3.93	.68	-1.12	1.04
Assertiveness Skills	4.11	.89	1.4	1.8
Emotional Skills	4.12	.76	-1.28	1.19
Skills for Coping with Aggressive Behavior and Impulses	3.45	.74	-0.06	-.69
Problem Solving Skills	3.78	.95	-.65	.05
Making Plans	3.22	.95	-.10	-.77
Skills For Group Interaction and Conducting a Task	4.09	.62	-.61	.12
Couple Burnout Total	2.23	1.07	1.27	1.69

When Table 1 is examined, Skewness-Kurtosis values are in the range of values (+2 and -2) for all sub-dimensions of the Sobece Social Skills Assessment Scale and the total score of the Spouse Burnout Scale. The mean scores ranged from 3.22 to 4.12 for all sub-dimensions of the Sobece Social Skills Assessment Scale. The mean score of the Spousal Burnout Scale was found to be 2.23.

Table 2. Findings concerning children's total and sub-dimension scores of SOBECE child social skills assessment scale and the correlation scores with couple burnout scale SF

Couple Burnout Scale Short Form		
SOBECE CHILD SOCIAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT SCALE	Skills for the Initiation and Continuity of Relationships	-.14*
	Assertiveness Skills	.03
	Emotional Skills	.213
	Skills for Coping with Aggressive Behavior and Impulses	-.09
	Problem Solving Skills	.15
	Making Plans	.213
Skills For Group Interaction and Conducting a Task	-.09	
Couple Burnout Total	.15	

	221
	-.28**
Skills for Coping with Aggressive Behavior and Impulses	.00
	213
	-.08
Problem Solving Skills	.19
	213
	-.15*
Making Plans	.02
	213
	-.16*
Skills For Group Interaction and Conducting a Task	.01
	213
	-.19**
Total	.00
	213

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

On examining Table 2, a statistically significant relation is seen in the Total Score of Sobece Children's Social Skills Assessment Scale is ($r = -.19$; $p < .01$), of the sub-dimensions "initiating and continuity of relationships" ($r = -.14$; $p < .05$), of "skills for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses" ($r = -.28$; $p < .01$), "making plans" ($r = -.15$; $p < .05$), of "group interaction and conducting a task" ($r = -.16$; $p < .05$); yet, no significant difference was determined between the total scores of "assertiveness skills" ($r = -.09$; $p < .05$), of "emotional skills" ($r = -.09$; $p < .05$), of "problem solving skills" ($r = -.08$; $p < .05$) subscales and the total score of Couple Burnout Scale. The simple linear regression analysis for predictiveness is as follows:

Table. 3. Simple regression analysis results regarding the predictors of participants' couple burnout levels on their children's social skill areas

Predicted Variables	B	Std. Error	β	t	P	R	R ²	Durbin-Watson
Constant	4.15	.10	-	39.44	.00	-	-	-
Skills for Initiation and Continuity of Relationships	-.09	.04	-.14	-2.13	.03	.14	.02	2.10
Constant	3.90	.11	-	35.27	.00	-	-	-
Skills for Coping with Aggressive Behavior and Impulses	-.19	.04	-.28	-4.35	.00	.28	.07	1.88
Constant	3.52	.14	-	24.19	.00	-	-	-
Making Plans	-.13	.05	-.15	-2.25	.02	.15	.02	1.95
Constant	4.32	.09	-	45.84	.00	-	-	-
Skills for Group Interaction and Conducting a Task	-.09	.03	-.16	-2.51	.01	.16	.02	2.09

Predictive: Couple Burnout

Predicted: Skills for Initiation Continuity of Relationships, Coping with Aggressive Behavior and Impulses, Making Plans, Group Interaction and Conducting a Task Skills

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

According to Table 3, the predictor of CBS -SF has determined a negative, yet significant prediction for the subscales of "skills for the initiation and continuity of relationships" ($\beta = -.14$; $p < .05$), "skills for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses" ($\beta = -.28$; $p < .01$), "making plans" sub-dimension ($\beta = -.13$; $p < .05$), "skills for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses", ($\beta = -.09$; $p < .05$). The explanatory rate of the predictor was 2% for initiation and continuity of relationships ($R^2 = .02$), 7% for skills for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses ($R^2 = .07$), 2% for making plans ($R^2 = .02$), group interaction, and skills for conducting a task, and 2% ($R^2 = .02$) for executive skills and 3% ($R^2 = .03$) for the total of the social skills.

According to these findings, it was seen that the high scores of the mothers obtained from the Couple Burnout Test Total scores predicted the decrease in the scores of the children in the sub-dimensions of skills for initiation and

maintenance of relationships, for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses, making plans, and for group interaction and conducting a task.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the findings of the study, a statistically significant relationship was determined between Social Skills Scale, “skills for the initiation and continuity of relationships”, “skills for coping with aggressive behavior and impulses”, “making plans”, “making plans, group interaction” and “skills for conducting a task” sub-dimensions and Social Skills Scale Total Score and CBS-SF. Couple burnout of mothers has a negative; yet statistically significant prediction on the social skills of children and on the sub skills of “initiation and continuity of relationships”, “of coping with aggressive behavior and impulses”, “making plans”, “communicating with the group and conducting task sub-dimensions”.

Children need social skills, especially in the primary school period, to get along with others and establish good relations (Bacanlı, 2002). These skills are basically related to all aspects of children's lives and affect their compatibility (Maleki, et al. 2018). When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that social skills are associated with different variables. Among these variables are attachment style, social competence, gender and parental relationship of the children, and parenting attitudes of mothers. (Aydin & Sönmez, 2014; Kapıkıran, İvrendi & Adak, 2006). The functioning of the family is closely related to the socialization of children. Especially, the positive emotional relationships with the mother affect children's social skills (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981; Achenbach et al., 1987; Curran et al., 2021; Miles & Stipek, 2006; Goodman & Shatz, 1993; Uluğtekin 1991). Disappointment in the marital relationship and increasing stress and frustration cause burnout between couples (Pines, 1996). Couples experiencing couple burnout tend to generalize the thought of unsuccessful marital relationship to other areas of their lives. Hence, the couple experiencing mental fatigue experiences disappointment and forms as low self-perception leading to a negative perception of life in general (Çapri, 2008; Kızıldağ, 2015). Depression symptoms such as seeing life as meaningless and empty, chronic unhappiness, difficulty in performing daily routine tasks and not feeling energetic about the tasks that need to be done can be seen in spouses who experience emotional fatigue. In addition to these, suicidal thoughts may develop as a result of the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness experienced in these individuals (Can, 2013). In this study, the fact that the mental and emotional fatigue experienced by the mothers and therefore the spouse burnout was significantly related to the social skills of their children suggests that marital burnout also plays a role in the development of children's social skills.

This research was carried out with mothers who have children aged between 7 and 11 years. Considering the roles within the family and the gender roles attributed to women in Turkey, the mother is the person who has the role of primary caretaker in the family (Arslan et al., 2002). In addition, the increase in the knowledge and skills that individuals need to acquire due to rapid social changes and the greater participation of mothers in business life also effects the development of children's coexistence and social skills (Bacanlı, 2002). In most of the research outcomes related to burnout, it has been determined that women experience higher levels of burnout contrary to men in their marital life. (Capri, 2008). According to Pines (1996), the first and most important reason why women experience burnout more than men in their marital life is that they start their marriage with a very high level of expectation. A further reason is that married women who are trying to cope with the duties related to being a couple and mother role become more prone to distress, hopelessness, fatigue, and burnout due to the hardships and stress conditions encountered and due to the burden of responsibilities resulting from being the primary caretaker in the family (Cited by Capri, 2008). As a result of a study conducted by Güler and Çapri (2020), it was determined that the couple burnout scores of mothers with disabled children were moderately correlated with their state and trait anxiety scores with statistical significance. Stressful and angry attitudes and behaviors of mothers towards their children leads to anxiety in children (Ajilchi & Kargar, 2013). According to Ambrose (2013), negative reactions of mothers towards children cause difficulties in emotional adjustment and lack of basic social skills such as cooperation in children. On the other hand, besides their maternal roles, the high level of expectation of the mothers at the beginning of their marital life increases couple burnout level of the mother which has a negative impact on her relations with their couple and children. (Belsky and Cassidy, 1994; Colman and Thompson, 2002; Booth & Amato, 1991; Chisholm, 1999; Mikulincer and Florian, 1998). It can be said that the psychological characteristics of the mother and her relationships with her children play a role in the emergence of a significant relationship between the spouse burnout scores of the mothers participating in this study and the social skill scores of the children.

Limitations of the study; children and their mothers were not subjected to a structured psychiatric diagnosis evaluation, the study was cross-sectional and based on self-report. When the results of this study are examined, it is seen that the predictiveness is low. For this reason, in future studies, the role of mothers and fathers in the development of their children's social skills can be examined by working with a larger sample group.

Considering the impact on the children's social skills, it is recommended that mothers are also evaluated by the school guidance and counselling services and counseling programs for couple burnout are administered. Considering the requirement of social skills throughout their lives, programs to increase children's social skills may also be beneficial within this context.

According to the results of this study, whether there is a different mediating variable between the mother's spousal burnout and the child's social skills may be a new research topic. Considering the literature in the discussion section; These mediator variables are thought to be mother-child attachment, mother's self-perception, mother's anxiety level or mother's child-rearing attitudes.

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