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RESEARCH

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The Examination of Mother with Child and Father with Child Interaction in Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the interactional behaviors of the parents who have a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in terms of various variables. In this descriptive survey study, the participants were 24 parents who have a child with ASD within 36-72 months-old age range. The data were collected through video records of interactions of parents and their child, and were analyze dusing a statistical program. The results showed that the parents who have a child with ASD had low interaction scores in the subscales of emotional expressive and responsive-interactive behaviors. Their scores in the subscale of guiding and success-oriented interactive behaviors were high, meaning that they are extremely success-oriented. It was not found a noteworthy difference in terms of the variables that ASD probability of child, child's gender, and educationa lstatus of the parents', during the mother-child and the father-child interactions.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder, mother-child Interaction, father-child interaction.

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), occurring in early period of life, is a developmental disorder characterized by lack of social contact and social interaction seen in different ways. It is also a deficiency seen with restricted repetitive behaviors, and interests or activities in social communication (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). The prevalence rate of the ASD which is not fully known is reported differently in each country. Studies conducted in the United States in 2014 show that ASD is present in 1 of the 68 children and that ASD has a different prevalence (1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls) in relation to gender (Autism Speaks, 2014).

According to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) prepared by the APA (2013), there are two basic criteria used for the diagnosis of ASD. The first of these criteria is social interaction / communication problems and the second is limited and repetitive interest, behavior and activities. The limited level of verbal and non-verbal communication skills they use intentionally affect the parent and child communication in daily life (Meirsschaut, Roeyers and Warreyn, 2011). For these reasons, parents of children with ASD spare a lot of time to communicate with their children. Meanwhile they use more directives while trying to establish a physical closeness (Watson, 1988) and face difficulties due to their short and low-quality interactions during their plays (Töret, Özdemir, Gürel-Selimoğlu and Özkubat, 2014).

In repetitive behaviors, which are another criteria of the ASD, some behavioral patterns can be shown as examples of repeated repetitive behaviors such as continuous repetition, hand shaking, tapping, and dealing with parts of objects (APA, 2013). These behaviors can occur at a level that can prevent children with ASD from interacting with their parents, learning and performing, and developing social relationships (Wilke et al., 2012) and it is known that parents have had intense stress to cope with these problem behaviors (Ludlow, Skelly and Rohleder, 2012). There are also emotional and behavioral problems such as anger attacks and self-destructive behaviors in children with ASD (Dominick, Davis, Lainhart, Tager-Flusberg, and Folstein 2007). Parent-child interactions are significantly influenced by parents having the most communication with children with ASD, due to their children exhibiting limited social interaction behaviors, having repetitive behaviors, and emotional-behavioral problems (El-Ghoroury and Romanczyk, 1999).

In order to reduce the limitations caused by autism, it is crucial to raise awareness and support for all family members, especially parents. It has been observed that interaction behaviors of mothers and fathers were examined in parent-child interaction behaviors in abroad literature (Chiarello, Huntington and Bundy, 2006; Kochanska and Aksan, 2004; Mendonca, Cosette, Strayer and Gravel, 2011; Nugent, 1991; Rusell and Rusell, 1987; Wilson and Durbin, 2013). In the domestic literature, a limited number of research studies have been carried out which simultaneously examine the interaction behaviors of Turkish parents (Karaaslan, 2016a, 2016b; Küçükler, Bakkaloğlu and Sucuoğlu, 2001; Maviş, 2004; Taşkın and Erkan, 2009). Therefore in this study, the interaction of father-child couple as well as the interaction of the mother-child couple has been evaluated because of father-child interaction is at least as important as mother-child interaction in the development of the child (Cooksey and Fondell, 1996; Fagan and Iglesias, 1999) and because of the limited study of parent-child interaction in the domestic literature.

In summary, it was aimed to determine the level of interactional behaviors of the children with their mothers (n=12) and fathers (n=12) who had ASD children between 36-72 months and also to determine whether the level of parental interaction with their children on mother with child and father with child basis differ in terms of educational status, child's gender, and the ASD probability of the child.

Method

A group consisting of 12 parents with a child with ASD aged between 36-72 months participated in the descriptive survey model of the study. As a sample selection criterion, it is considered sufficient for the parents to have a child 36-72 months of age range with ASD diagnosis and without an additional clinical diagnosis other than ASD. Since the precise diagnosis of ASD is often not put in before the age of 3, 36-72 months of age children were selected for the study to reach the children with definite diagnosis. The institution in which the first author works was identified as having twenty-five parent pairs that met these criteria and parents were interviewed.

However, 13 parental pairs were not able to attend due to the fact that working conditions of the mothers of the three interviewed parents and of the fathers of the six interviewed parents; and that the fathers of four parents were not willing to participate in the study. As a result, the study was conducted with 12 parent pairs meeting the criteria for participation in the study and volunteering to participate in the study.

Research data were collected by the first researcher separately, using videos which contained interaction between the parents and the children. Parental interaction behaviors were rated by the researcher and by two observers using Parental Behavior Rating Scale-Turkish Version (PBRs-TV; Diken, 2009). The obtained data were analyzed by means of a statistical program.

Results

According to the initial sub-purposive findings of the study, it was noted that mothers scored 12.16 while the fathers scored 9 as being sensitive-responsive at the subscale of the Turkish Version of Maternal Behavior Rating Scale (TV-MBRS). It was also noted that the mothers scored 14.41 while the fathers scored 12.16 at the subscale of being emotional expressive. And finally at the subscale of being success focused and router, the mothers' average score was 11.91 while the fathers' was 11.50.

According to the second and third sub-purposive findings of the study; in terms of the probability of ASD in children, we may say that there is no remarkable difference between the scores gained by mothers and fathers at the subscale of being sensitive-responsive, and the scores gained at the subscale of being emotional expressive and also the scores at the subscale of being success focused and router. We may also say that there is no remarkable difference between the scores gained by mothers and fathers at all of three subscales in terms of the gender of the children. And finally, there is no remarkable difference between the mothers' and father's scores at all of three subscales in accordance with the level of education of the mothers.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, it was aimed to find out the level of interaction behaviors of mothers and fathers who have children with ASD between 36-72 months and to determine whether the interaction behaviors of mothers and fathers in mother-child and father-child interactions differ according to gender of child, likelihood of ASD in child, and educational status of the parents. For this general aim of this study, the scores of PBRs-TV subscales were first examined to determine the level of interaction behaviors of parent-child pairs. Firstly, when looking at the being sensitive-responsive subscale scores which is the first subscale of PBRs-TV, it was seen that the mothers received average of 12.16 points and the fathers received an average of 9.00 points. The highest score is 20 that can be taken from this subscale (Diken, 2009). If the score taken from this subscale is how much higher, the parents are so sensitive to their children's play preferences and the activities they initiate or play, and are more motivating in responding to the child's behavior and at the same time more exhibiting a consistent responsiveness. On account of this it could be said that they obtained scores which can be categorized as "low" compared with the highest score. In other research studies on interaction of parents with children with ASD (Diken, 2012; Töret, Özdemir and Özkubat, 2015), the results indicate that parents can face difficulties in starting a conversation and sustaining it and exhibit a low level of responsiveness. In addition, it can be said that when mothers and fathers' average scores on the subscale of sensitivity-response were compared, mothers displayed more sensitive-responsive interaction behaviors than fathers. In other words, it can be said that in the context of sensitive-responsive interactive behaviors, mothers are more motivated by their children's play preferences, initiated or played activities, and their children respond more actively and consistently to their behaviors than their fathers. This is also stated in similar studies done with families with children with ASD that mothers are more responsive than fathers (Karaaslan, 2016a, 2016b).

The highest score that can be taken from the being emotional expressive subscale, the second subscale of the PBRs-TV, is 25 (Diken, 2009). The higher the score on the being emotional expressive subscale of PBRs-TV, the more likely it is that the parent demonstrates energetic and enthusiastic interaction during the events, showing

children their warmth and enjoyment of interaction (Mahoney and MacDonald 2007). In this study, it was seen that the mothers got 14.41 points from this subscale and the fathers got 12.16 points. In other words, they obtained low points when evaluated according to the being emotional expressive subscale. In similar studies (Diken, 2012; Lemanek, Stone and Fishel, 1993), it was also concluded that parents with children who have ASD show low levels of acceptance, enjoyment, warmth and emotional expression during their interaction with their children. Therefore, that parents need support at being emotional expressive is avowable. In addition, it can be said that when the average scores of the emotional expressive subscale of the parents were compared with the scores of the mother, the emotional expressive interaction behaviors of the mothers were higher than fathers'. The higher the average of emotional expressive behavioral behaviors of the mothers than the fathers, does not mean that the mother-child interaction is qualified and adequate. However, interactions that fathers have with their children can result in less interaction with their children than with mothers, less expression and less enjoyment in terms of gestures and mimics.

The highest score expected from the subscale of being success focused and router, is 9, which is the last subscale. If the points of parents exceed 9, it means that the parents are highly success oriented. The items of the subscale of being success focused and router are actually negative items when compared to the items of other subscales, i.e., they are inversely proportional to the interactive behaviors of qualified parents (Diken, Topbaş and Diken, 2009). Parents who score high on these items are interpreted as non-qualified interacting parents. In this study, it was found that the average score of the mothers from the subscale was 11.91, which exceeded the upper limit of this scale, and that of the fathers was 11.50 points. Success-focused parents are parents who are trying to teach the child every minute of the moment, going forward in their own desires, ignoring the child's wishes, and thus being extremely high in their interaction rates (passing quickly to another activity, etc.). In this study, it can be considered that both mother and father's high level of being success-focused is due to our cultural characteristics, that is, parents are trying to protect and direct their children as a common feature of Turkish parents. This is also indicated by Maviş's (2004) study of Turkish parents aiming to determine the way they interact with their children during early language development. As a result of the research, Maviş described mothers and fathers as behavioral regulators, over-controlling, and directing. Topbaş, Maviş and Özdemir (2003) also examined the interactional behaviors of the parents of six children who showed normal development and of eight children who had delayed speech and language skills. The children were between the age of 1.5 and 3. Similar to the previous work, as a result of the research, they found that the interaction behaviors of the parents in both groups were more directive and more demanding. Hence, parents need support for being less successful focused and less directive during interaction.

The relationship between parent-child interaction and the child's development have been examined by many research studies and it has been concluded that in the child's early life, the environment she/he lives, parental characteristics and the child's individual characteristics and temperament (Aslan, 1996; Gander and Gardiner, 1993) is highly related to the development and hence the future characteristics of the child. Depending on these, it is also considered that these characteristics affect parent-child interaction. For this reason, in the second and third sub-problem of the study, it was examined whether there is a meaningful difference between parents' interactional behaviors and their educational situation, the sex of their children and the possibility of autism in their children. According to the findings obtained under the second sub-problem of the research, it was seen that there is no significant difference between the scores gained by mothers in all of the PBRS-TV subscales (being sensitive-responsive, being emotional expressive and being success focused and router) in terms of the mother's educational status, the probability of ASD in children, and gender of their children. In the literature, unlike these research findings, it was found that the findings that the high probability of autism seen in children is to be a factor that significantly influence the interaction behaviors of the parents. Töret et al. (2015) also found in their comparison study that mothers were more passive during the interaction with their children with severe ASD. In their study, the research sample consisted of thirty mothers and their children with ASD diagnoses. Therefore, it is thought that different results may have been obtained because the sample size is different.

According to the findings obtained under the third sub-problem of the research, it was seen that there is no significant difference between the scores gained by fathers in all of the PBRS-TV subscales (being sensitive-responsive, being emotional expressive and being success focused and router) in terms of the father's educational status, the probability of ASD in children, and gender of their children. The interaction of the father with the child has a very important place for the general development of the child and the family structure. However, a very limited number of studies also attended by fathers were found in the domestic literature (Karaaslan, 2016a, 2016b, Küçük, Ceber-Bakkaloğlu and Sucuoğlu, 2001, Maviş, 2004, Taşkın and Erkan, 2009). In the literature, in the studies examining the participation of the father in the child's life, it has been indicated that the interaction of the father with his child is directly related to the child's cognitive and social development (Fagan, and Iglesias, 1999; Nugent, 1991; Rusell and Rusell, 1987; Taşkın and Erkan, 2009); that as father's level of education increases, he sees himself as sufficient about child development and communication with the child and takes more responsibility (Coltrane, 1995; Model, 1981). In addition, it has also been stated that the gender of the child affected father-child participation; the father was more involved in the life of his son and took more responsibility (Harris and Morgan, 1991); he touched to son more (Parke and O'levy, 1976); he offered more stimulus (Parke, 1981); he established more communication and played games more (Marsiglio, 1991). For these different results, it is considered that more work needs to be done on the factors affecting the father-child interaction.

Determination of the interaction behavior as a priority in order to give qualified support to the family and intervention programs must be implemented accordingly. There are a number of studies in the literature that indicate that the interventions made by determining the nature of the parent's interactive behaviors have a positive effect on the interactional behaviors of both the parents and the children (Gürel-Selimoğlu, 2015; Karaaslan, 2010; Karaaslan, Diken and Mahoney, 2011; Karaaslan, Diken and Mahoney, 2013; Kim and Mahoney 2004, 2005; Küçük et al., 2001). When looking at these studies, it is seen that were studies with a range of working groups, ranging from mothers of children with normal development to children with mothers of different disabilities including Down syndrome (Karaaslan and Mahoney, 2013), intellectual disability (Ceber-Bakkaloğlu and Sucuoğlu, 2000), developmental disability (Karaaslan et al., 2011; Küçük et al., 2001) and ASD (Ceyhun, Özdemir, Töret and Özkubat, 2015; Diken and Mahoney, 2013, Doğan et al. 2016, Gürel-Selimoğlu, 2015, Töret et al., 2014, 2015). However, it seems that these studies are usually conducted with mothers and that there are a very limited number of studies (Karaaslan, 2016a, 2016b; Küçük et al., 2001; Maviş, 2004; Taşkın and Erkan, 2009) which simultaneously examine the interaction behaviors of parent diads. Therefore, it can be said that there is a need to examine the interactions of both mothers and fathers with their children with ASD and to develop intervention programs for the interaction.

The limitations of the research should be taken into account when examining the research results. The greatest limitation of the study is the size of the sample. Since the number of volunteer parents participating in this study reached only twelve mothers and twelve fathers, non-parametric tests were conducted in the study. Therefore, in a study with a larger sample group, it is thought that in the interaction between mother-child and father-child, there may be different results in the research in terms of educational status of parents, sex of children and likelihood of autism in children. According to the results of the research, the following suggestions can be made for further research studies and applications:

- a. It may be suggested to examine the parent-child interaction levels in a larger sample group so that the results of the research can be generalized and the variables affecting the parent-child interaction can be determined.
- b. It may be suggested to examine parent-child interactions with children and parents in different diagnostic groups at different age levels than in this study.
- c. Except for mothers and fathers, interactions between people such as siblings, caregivers, grandparents, and so forth who are in close relationship with the child with special needs may be examined.
- d. Training/early intervention programs can be prepared and implemented according to the needs of the parents and children.

- e. By providing such intervention programs to families, especially early education providers, the quality of parent-child interaction can be increased and the development of individuals with special needs can be supported.