

HOPELESSNESS LEVELS OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH THEIR PARENTS OR IN AN ORPHANAGE

NIHAL ÖREN
Akdeniz University

Turkish children in the second grade at primary school who were either living with parents or living in an orphanage were surveyed using the Hopelessness Scale for Children (Beck, 1974) to assess their feelings of hopelessness. Participants were 130 students (66 girls and 64 boys) living in the province of Erzurum, Turkey. When data were analyzed the findings showed that the hopelessness level of children living in an orphanage was significantly higher than that of children living with their parents.

Keywords: hopelessness, orphanage, children.

The basic condition required for a child to develop a healthy personality is the presence of a warm environment providing her/him with love, support, and understanding.

In her research on the effects on children of divorce and mother's absence Bilen (2004) reported that divorce or the mother's death during the early childhood years disturb the child and a sense of hopelessness becomes more intense compared with when the child's parents divorce or the mother dies when the child is older.

Kılıççı (1992) reported that children who live in an orphanage experience feelings of fear, despair, and insecurity, and stressed that anxiety levels in these children were much higher than anxiety levels of children who were living with their parents. Bıyıklı (1982) found that children living in orphanages were behind their peers in terms of mental development, integration, socialization, responsibility, language development, and independent activities compared to

Nihal Ören, Department of Education (Counseling and Guidance), Akdeniz University.
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Nihal Ören, Department of Education (Counseling and Guidance), Akdeniz University, Campus Antalya, Turkey. Email: noren@akdeniz.edu.tr or deniz-eng@hotmail.com

children living with their parents. He also emphasized that this backwardness in the general development of children growing up in orphanages results from their spending the first years of life loveless and that living conditions in the orphanages reinforce these negativities. Undoubtedly changes in family structure, divorce, and families being fragmented or scattered are factors that affect children's psychological development to various degrees. Day by day, in Turkey the number of children is increasing for whom adequate care and support is not being provided, such as children who are born out of wedlock or whose parents die or desert them when the children are very young or where the child's family lives in adverse social or cultural conditions (Koçkesen, 1992).

Many studies have been conducted in which researchers have examined the effects that parental absence has on a child. The death of parents has been identified as one of the most traumatic experiences a child can undergo. This situation leads to more losses for the child. In the past, children who have lost their mothers before the age of 5 or 6 years have been found to experience depression, despair, and suicidal tendencies (Bowlby, 1971; Pişkin, 1990).

These experiences lead to feelings of hopelessness, insecurity, and intense anxiety in children. Furthermore, the child's inability to get many of the situations with which he/she is faced under control, may lead to the development of learned helplessness behavior. Seligman (1992) emphasized the importance of the past life and the environment in the emergence of learned helplessness and observed that individuals who constantly have no means of controlling their environment develop learned helplessness more easily in the face of failure. Seligman and Peterson (1984) found that learned helplessness negatively affects the individual's life, self-perception, and world perspective, and that individuals showing learned helplessness may also display symptoms of depression.

Depression is one of the most important risk factors for suicidal behavior particularly in children and adolescents (Eğilmez, 1988). Beck (1974), who has carried out important research on suicidal behavior, found that hopelessness looms large as a cause of depression. Beck, Steer, Kovacs, and Garrison (1985) emphasized that hopelessness relates to an individual's negative expectations about the future, that there is a close relationship among depression, suicide, and despair, and that hopelessness is an important cognitive variable in suicidal behavior. Melges (1969) and Barut and Balcı (2000) identified the main cause of depression as hopelessness and reported its concomitant concepts as worthlessness, helplessness, indecisiveness, inability to take action, school failure, and feelings of guilt. Individuals who feel helplessness or despair often attempt suicide as a way out. Researchers have reported hopelessness, despair about the future, and feelings of loss in children raised in orphanages to examine crime trends, anxiety, self-confidence, and self-esteem. For many reasons, the

number of children in Turkey who are accommodated in orphanages and who need protection is increasing day by day.

In this study, therefore, I examined the hopelessness levels of children in the second grade at primary school who were either living with their family or in an orphanage.

In this research, I assumed that hopelessness levels of children living in an orphanage would be more pronounced than would the feelings of hopelessness of children living with their family.

Because I found that children in orphanages were sent to a number of different schools instead of being concentrated in a particular school, I also looked at whether the hopelessness level varied according to the sociocultural level of the schools.

I assumed that there would not be any difference between the hopelessness levels of children living with family compared with those living in orphanages according to sociocultural level.

Method

Participants

A total of 130 children (66 girls and 64 boys) in the second grade at primary schools in Erzurum, Turkey, constituted the sample for this research. The children were either living with their family or living in an orphanage (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Children in the Study*

School	Children living in an orphanage		Children living with their family		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Kültür	9	34.62	17	65.38	26	20.00
K.Karabekir	12	34.29	23	65.71	35	26.92
S.Demircioğ	7	18.42	31	81.58	38	29.23
M.AkifErsoy	13	41.94	18	58.06	31	23.85
Total	41	31.54	89	68.46	130	100.00

Instruments

The Hopelessness Scale for Children (Beck, 1974) was used to assess the students' hopelessness levels. This scale consists of 17 items with 1 point scored for each item. A negative answer yields a point on some items, a positive answer is required to score on other items. Higher scores indicate greater hopelessness and a more negative view of the future. The first validity and reliability study of the test in Turkey was conducted in 1993 by Seber Baysal, Kaptanoglu, Ture, and Tekin with 100 children, of whom 50 had previously been diagnosed with

psychiatric disorders and 50 had no known psychiatric disorders. A significant difference was found between score averages obtained from the children with psychiatric disorders and the normal children ($t = 5.178$). The correlation validity between a depression scale and the Hopelessness Scale for Children was investigated and the relationship between the two scales was calculated as $r = .547$ ($p < .001$). In a validity study conducted by Durak (1994), the correlation of validity for the Beck Depression Inventory was $r = .69$ ($p < .001$). The results of both studies were parallel with results of other studies conducted using this scale.

Data Analysis

In this current study analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t test were used to analyze data via Minitab Statistic Release version 8:01.

Results

Hopelessness levels of children living in an orphanage and with family are given in Table 2.

Table 2. *Hopelessness Scores of Children*

Living circumstances	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SS</i>	Observed (<i>t</i>)	Table (<i>t</i>)	<i>p</i>
Orphanage	41	6.32	2.27	1.70	1.64	< .05
Family	89	5.67	2.18			

Note: *SD* = 128.

As can be seen in Table 2, the difference in level of hopelessness of children living in an orphanage and children living with family was found to be significant, with children living in orphanage having a higher level of hopelessness.

Findings relating to the hopelessness levels of children according to sociocultural environment are given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Hopelessness Levels of Children In Different Schools*

Schools	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Kültür	26	6.31	1.87		
K.Karabekir	35	5.71	2.49	1.49	> .05
S. Demircioğlu	38	5.37	2.22		<i>ns</i>
M.Akif Ersoy	31	6.23	2.1		

Notes: *SD* = 3, Table *F* = 2.67, *ns* = nonsignificant.

As can be seen in Table 3, no significant difference was found between hopelessness levels of children according to the sociocultural level of the school. This result supports my hypothesis that there is no difference between the hopelessness levels of students studying in schools in different sociocultural settings.

Boyras (2003) researched learned resourcefulness levels of adolescents aged between 16 and 20 years in two different sociocultural environments (living in orphanages or with family) and found that there is no facilitator effect in developing individuals' learned skills in orphanage environments. In this respect, there was no difference between the two groups.

Discussion

In this study I found that hopelessness levels of children living in an orphanage were higher than were the hopelessness levels of children living with family.

Oztürk (1997) carried out a study with 294 adolescents aged between 15 and 18 years, 223 living with family and 71 in orphanages. He found that hopelessness levels of adolescents in orphanages were higher than hopelessness levels of adolescents living with family. This conclusion supports my findings. Similarly, Gürsoy and Yıldız-Bıçakçı (2005) found that anxiety levels of adolescents who lived in orphanages were higher than anxiety levels of those who did not.

Tümkiye (2005) also found that hopelessness levels of adolescents living in orphanages were higher than for adolescents living with their families.

Aral, Gürsoy, and Yıldız-Bıçakçı (2005) found that there was a meaningful difference between the score averages for the self-conception levels of female adolescents who lived in orphanages compared with the scores of those who do not ($p < .05$), with the self-conception scores of the female adolescents who lived in orphanages being lower than the scores of those who do not.

In his study, Kutlu (1992, 2005) reported that the loneliness levels of adolescents living in an orphanage were statistically significant according to whether or not their parents were separated, age of admission to the orphanage, whether or not they had a sibling in the same orphanage, length of residence in the orphanage, whether parents visited and if so how often, whether there were staff to help with loneliness when needed, and other factors such as the adolescents' academic performance at school, expectations for the future, and perceptions of the attitude of orphanage staff. Koçkesen (1992) stated that the adjustment level of children in an orphanage was lower than that of children who were living with their family. The findings in all of these studies support the findings in my study.

Uğurlu (1994) found that the assertiveness scores of those living in orphanages are lower than assertiveness scores of those living with family. In her study relating to despair and loneliness in children aged between 10 and 13 years,

Oztürk (1988) observed a significant difference according to sociocultural level. This conclusion does not support my findings. However, according to Jersild (1954), “Socioeconomic status or sociocultural classes are often dealt with as a constant independent variable. Doubtless, this attitude is not true. This element varies depending on the combination of many factors existing generally in life. The socioeconomic or sociocultural situation in which the child is raised is shaped as a result of chance, choice, tradition, heredity, heritage, economic opportunity, educational opportunity and more many factors”. No matter what affects the formation of these factors, these will bring the individual certain outcomes.

Uğurlu (1994) found that children living in orphanages were anxious individuals who had negative expectations about the future, largely felt unsafe and abandoned, and experienced feelings of worthlessness. Undoubtedly, this outcome can only connect to the failure of the institution to nurture the children in its care. If it is taken into account that the period during which children live in orphanages is a period when they need parents, it could be considered that most of the children living in these institutions will have many psychological problems (Koçkesen, 1992). However, it cannot be said that the personnel currently employed in these institutions in Turkey have sensibility and competence to meet the emotional needs of the children in their care or to be a parent model for them.

To remedy these shortcomings, firstly, the physical structure of orphanages needs to be organized in a manner similar to the home environment. Psychological counseling and guidance services at orphanages should be improved, and the administration personnel, educators, and volunteers should have good psychological health. Schools where children from orphanages are enrolled should work in cooperation with the orphanages.

References

- Aral, N., Gürsoy, F., & Yıldız-Bıçakçı, M. (2005). Self-conception levels of adolescents who live in orphanages and those who do not [In Turkish]. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 21, 24-34.
- Barut, Y., & Balcı, T. (2000). *Effect on school achievement of personal and social adjustment levels of students living in an orphanage and with family*. Istanbul: Foundation for Children's Publishing.
- Beck, A. T. (1974). Thinking and depression. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 9, 324-333.
- Beck, A. T., Steer, R. A., Kovacs, M., & Garrison, B. (1985). Hopelessness and eventual suicide: A 10-year prospective study of patients hospitalized with suicidal ideation. *American Journal of Psychology*, 142, 559-563.
- Bilen, M. (2004). *Healthy human relationships in the family*. Ankara: Anı.
- Bryıklı, L. (1982). *Investigation of mental and psychosocial development of 7- to 11-year-old children coming from infant school to an orphanage*. Unpublished associate professorship thesis, Ankara University.
- Bowlby, J. (1971). *Attachment and loss* (Vol. I). Victoria: Penguin Books.

- Boyras, G. (2003). *Learned resourcefulness in adolescents living in orphanages and with family*. Counseling and Guidance Congress, Inonu University, Malatya.
- Durak, A. (1994). Beck Hopelessness Scale: Validity and reliability study. *Turkish Journal of Psychology*, 9, 1-11.
- Eğilmez, A. (1988). *Psychiatric diagnosis of adolescents who have attempted suicide: Depression, anxiety, and self-esteem*. 14th National Psychiatry and Neurological Sciences Congress, Ankara.
- Gürsoy, F., & Yıldız-Bıçakçı, M. (2005). A comparison of anxiety levels of adolescents who live in orphanages and who do not. *Contemporary Education Journal*, 323, 19-24.
- Jersild, A. T. (1954). *Child psychology*, New York: Prentice-Hall (trans. G. Günçe.). Faculty of Education Publications, Ankara University.
- Koçkesen, E. (1992). *Cohesion levels of students different social position studying in secondary education*. Unpublished master's thesis, Erzurum University.
- Kılıççı, Y. (1992). *Mental health in schools* (pp. 28-30). Ankara: Safak.
- Kutlu, M. (1992). *Some variables affecting self-esteem levels of students living in orphanages and with family*. Unpublished master's thesis, Inonu University.
- Kutlu, M. (2005). The loneliness levels of the high school students living in an orphanage. *Journal of Psychological Counseling and Guidance*, 24, 89-109.
- Melges, F. T. (1969). Types of hopelessness in psychopathological process. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 20, 690-699.
- Oztürk, M. (1988). *Psychological problems of childhood*. Ankara: Nurol.
- Oztürk, M. (1997). *Investigation in terms of some variables of despair and loneliness of children between 10 and 13 years*. Unpublished master's thesis, Middle Eastern Technical University.
- Pişkin, M. (1990). Childhood suicide. *Educational Sciences Journal*, 23, 450-453.
- Seber, G., Baysal, G., Kaptanoğlu, C., Türe, M., & Tekin, D. (1993). *Hopelessness Scale for Children: A validity-reliability study*. National Psychology Congress, Ankara.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1992). *Helplessness*. New York: Freeman.
- Seligman, M. E. P., Peterson, C. R., Kaslow, N. J., Tanenbaum, R. L., Alloy, L. B., & Abramson, L. Y. (1984). Attributional style and depressive symptoms among children. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 93, 235-238.
- Tümkeya, S. (2005). Comparison of hopelessness of adolescents living in an orphanage and with family. *The Turkish Educational Sciences Journal*, 3, 445-459.
- Uğurlu, U. (1994). *Comparison of adolescents living in orphanages and with family in terms of preesteem and assertiveness levels*. Unpublished master's thesis, Erzurum University.

