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Comparing the Perception of Social Support Among the Parents of Mentally Retarded Children

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to compare socio-demographic features and perception of social support among the parents of mentally retarded children. Parents of 135 mentally retarded children attending special education institutions within the borders of Konya composed the sampling of the research. Personal Information Form and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were applied in order to determine the socio-demographic features of the parents of mentally retarded children. SPSS software package was used for data analysis and t-test and one-way analysis of variance were used for independent samples in the course of analysis. According to the results of the research, there was a statistically significant relation between the social support perceived by parents of mentally retarded children and age, motherhood or fatherhood and income status.

Keywords: Mental Retardation, Social Support, Parent

1. INTRODUCTION

While families want to have a baby, they always expect to have a healthy baby. Being born with a deficiency or not being able to have a normal growth result in the differentiation of family's expectations and intensive anxiety and stress.

Child's not having a normal growth may result in the differentiation of family's expectations and intensive anxiety and stress (Sivrikaya and Tekinarslan, 2013).

Studies on the effect of children with disabilities on the family show that parents go through many stages until they adapt to this situation; they experience denial, shock, anxiety, anger and fear; they indicate that they consider themselves responsible for the status of their children and many parents feel guilty thereof.

These emotions naturally affect the behaviors of the family members and these negative experiences may disturb the normal development and functioning of the family (Morgan, 1988).

Some changes are observed in the life of the families upon the birth of disabled children. Upon the birth, families do not know what to do, where to go, what to tell, whom to tell and they start to get confused. They always encounter questions about how the disability occurred. In this case, families primarily have to inform their normal children if any, their elders in the family, close friends and neighbors about the situation. This is due to fact that sharing this situation with the people they always interact with will relieve the families and build their confidence (Mowbray, 200; Cited by Erdoğan, 2010).

Having a child with special needs is worrisome for the family. Families encounter various situations resulting from having children with special needs and they may face difficulties for meeting the needs of children with different growth characteristics, ranging from their care to their education. It is known that social assistance is important for parents striving to respond both the disability and needs of the child upon discovering the disability of their child (Lusting and Akey, 1999, Cited by Ersoy and Çürük, 2009).

Social support or perception of social support is important for sustaining the mental health of the families. Studies on emotional difficulties experienced by parents of mentally retarded children and their perception of stress frequently deal with perception of social assistance as an independent variable (Köksal and Kabasakal 2012).

The present research aims to reveal the perception of social assistance among the parents of mentally retarded children and to compare this perception according to some variables.

1.1. Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the research is to compare the perception of social assistance among the parents of mentally retarded children according to different variables. In line with this general purpose, the following sub-objectives will be tried to be achieved.

1. Is there any difference in social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of parents?
2. Is there any difference in social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to status of motherhood or fatherhood?
3. Is there any difference in social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to income level of the parents?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Model

The research model is descriptive, relational survey model. Correlational survey models are a research model that aims to determine the existence of a difference between two or more variables, and the degree of difference if any. In this model, no intervention is made to the variables. Correlational analysis can be carried out in two ways, the correlational type, and the relationship obtained by comparison (Karasar, 2012). This research was carried out with the correlation type relational survey model.

2.2. Population and Sampling

The sample of the study is composed of randomly-selected 135 people who have mentally retarded children who live in Konya. Random sampling method was used in the study.

The distribution of parents included in the sampling is as follows by their ages: 36 (26%) are 20-30 years of age, 64 (47%) are 31-40 years of age and 35 (32%) are 41 years of age and older.

The distribution of parents included in the sampling is as follows by their motherhood and fatherhood: 86 (63%) are mothers and 49 (37%) are fathers.

The distribution of parents included in the sampling is as follows by their income level: 64 (47%) earn 1000 TL and less; 57 (42%) earn 1001-2000 TL, 14 (10%) earn 2001 and more.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Personal information form prepared by the researcher and “Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support” developed by Zimet et al. (1988), of which validity and reliability were proven by Eker and Arkar in 1995 were used for determining the social assistance perceived by the parents.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): The scale was developed by Zimet et al. (1988). It is a self-assessment scale of 7-point Likert type ranging from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Totally agree” (7) which measures the sufficiency of the source of individual social support with 12 items. The minimum score of the scale is 12 and maximum score is 84. The higher the score is, the higher the perceived social support is. The scale was firstly adapted for Turkish language and culture by Eker and Arkar (1995). The reliability coefficients of the scale were high, ranging between 0.80 and 0.95 in the study of Eker and Arkar (1995).

2.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data obtained as a result of the research was made by using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 data analysis program. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between variables. It is also used in descriptive statistics such as arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

3. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Anova test was applied in order to determine whether there is any difference in social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of parents, the first sub-aim of the research. Numeric data about this process is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of anova test regarding the age of parents of mentally retarded children

Age of Parents of Mentally Retarded Children		N	X	SS	F	P	Difference
1. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) standing by me when necessary apart from my family and my friends.	20-30 years of age	36	3.2143	1.62569	1.022	.198	
	31-40 years of age	64	2.7727	.42893			
	41 years of age and older	35	3.7429	1.78791			
	Total	135	3.5625	1.65112			
2. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) to share my happiness and sadness apart from my family and my friends.	20-30 years of age	36	3.2815	1.68688	1.213	.126	
	31-40 years of age	64	3.0714	.82874			
	41 years of age and older	35	2.5364	.78954			
	Total	135	2.8571	.65722			
3. My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help me.	20-30 years of age	36	2.0625	.30211	2.145	.004	1-3
	31-40 years of age	64	2.7111	.65182			
	41 years of age and older	35	3.5714	1.22250			
	Total	135	4.2727	1.95623			
4. I receive the emotional assistance and support I need from my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings).	20-30 years of age	36	6.6571	.63906	1.040	.187	
	31-40 years of age	64	6.8750	.62994			
	41 years of age and older	35	6.2593	1.39810			
	Total	135	4.5714	.93761			
5. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) really putting my mind at rest apart from my family and my friends.	20-30 years of age	36	4.3182	1.32328	2.045	.013	1-2
	31-40 years of age	64	5.0857	.28403			
	41 years of age and older	35	4.9531	.57541			
	Total	135	4.8444	.78099			
6. My friends really try to help me.	20-30 years of age	36	5.4286	1.50457	1.555	.076	
	31-40 years of age	64	5.9545	1.36198			
	41 years of age and older	35	4.4286	1.46098			
	Total	135	4.0156	1.20175			
7. I can rely on my friends when the situation deteriorates.	20-30 years of age	36	4.5852	1.50811	1.811	.054	
	31-40 years of age	64	5.8571	.77033			
	41 years of age and older	35	6.2727	1.03196			
	Total	135	6.1143	.90005			
8. I can tell my problems to my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings).	20-30 years of age	36	6.6719	.85551	1.325	.108	
	31-40 years of age	64	6.3778	.92934			
	41 years of age and older	35	4.9286	2.05555			
	Total	135	5.2727	2.14214			
9. I have friends to share my happiness and sadness.	20-30 years of age	36	5.4857	1.22165	2.243	.002	1-2
	31-40 years of age	64	5.4857	1.22165			
	41 years of age and older	35	5.4857	1.22165			
	Total	135	5.4857	1.22165			

	31-40 years of age	64	3.4063	1.25633			
	41 years of age and older	35	4.2519	1.56796			
	Total	135	4.3143	1.68379			
10. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) to care about my feelings apart from my family and my friends.	20-30 years of age	36	2.2727	1.27920	2.005	.016	1-3
	31-40 years of age	64	3.8571	1.08852			
	41 years of age and older	35	3.9375	1.63178			
	Total	135	3.9926	1.78089			
11. My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) is willing to help me in making my decisions.	20-30 years of age	36	4.2857	.46881	1.755	.066	
	31-40 years of age	64	4.0455	1.91429			
	41 years of age and older	35	3.2571	.44344			
	Total	135	3.7188	.84457			
12. I can tell my problems to my friends.	20-30 years of age	36	3.7111	1.04286	1.835	.048	
	31-40 years of age	64	5.7857	.69929			
	41 years of age and older	35	5.5909	.66613			
	Total	135	5.8571	.42997			

P<0.05

According to Anova table, there was a statistically significant difference in “question 3 and 9”. There was not any significant difference in other items.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 3 “*My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help me*” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of parents [$F = 2.145$, $p < .05$]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who are 41 years of age and older ($X=3.57$) held more positive opinions about this item.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 5 “*There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) really putting my mind at rest apart from my family and my friends.*” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of parents [$F = 2.045$, $p < .05$]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who are 31-40 years of age ($X=5.48$) held more positive opinions about this item.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 9 “*I have friends to share my happiness and sadness*” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of parents [$F = 2.243$, $p < .05$]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who are 20-30 years of age ($X=5.48$) held more positive opinions about this item.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 10 “*There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) to care about my feelings apart from my family and my friends.*” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of parents [$F = 2.005$, $p < .05$]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who are 41 years of age and older ($X=3.93$) held more positive opinions about this item.

T-test was applied in order to determine whether there is any difference in social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to status of motherhood or fatherhood, the second sub-aim of the research. Numeric data about this process is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of T-test regarding the status of motherhood or fatherhood

Kinship		N	X	SS	df	t	P
1.	Mother	86	3.5116	1.72008	133	1.45	.089
	Father	49	2.8776	1.56302			
2.	Mother	86	2.3140	.65550	133	1.60	.074
	Father	49	2.0061	.64205			
3.	Mother	86	6.7209	.69707	133	2.02	.014
	Father	49	5.4490	1.88261			
4.	Mother	86	4.9302	.39973	133	2.42	.000
	Father	49	3.4939	1.17622			
5.	Mother	86	4.4535	1.10248	133	1.00	.189
	Father	49	4.8163	2.02766			
6.	Mother	86	5.0023	.93393	133	1.46	.110
	Father	49	6.5102	.91566			
7.	Mother	86	5.0000	1.47129	133	1.13	.175
	Father	49	5.6939	1.64828			
8.	Mother	86	4.0581	1.69674	133	2.14	.003
	Father	49	2.6776	1.93254			
9.	Mother	86	3.8651	.94181	133	1.17	.162
	Father	49	4.1429	1.08012			
10.	Mother	86	5.6744	.86012	133	1.28	.154
	Father	49	5.6327	1.07420			
11.	Mother	86	5.3512	1.36784	133	2.10	.004
	Father	49	6.6735	1.06825			
12.	Mother	86	5.2326	.80695	133	1.80	.069
	Father	49	4.4184	.75930			

According to t-test table, there was a statistically significant difference in “question 4, 8 and 11”. There was not any significant difference in other items.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 3 “My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help me.” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the status of motherhood or fatherhood [$t(133)=2.02$, $p<.05$]. It may indicated that mothers ($X=6.72$) held more positive opinions about this item than the opinions of fathers.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 4 “I receive the emotional assistance and support I need from my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings)” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the status of motherhood or fatherhood [$t(133)=2.42$, $p<.05$]. It may indicated that mothers ($X=4.93$) held more positive opinions about this item than the opinions of fathers.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 8 “I can tell my problems to my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings)” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the status of motherhood or fatherhood [$t(133)=2.14$, $p<.05$]. It may indicated that mothers ($X=4.05$) held more positive opinions about this item than the opinions of fathers.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 11 “My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) is willing to help me in making my decisions” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the status of motherhood or fatherhood [$t(133)=2.10$, $p<.05$]. It may indicated that fathers ($X=6.67$) held more positive opinions about this item than the opinions of mothers.

Anova test was applied in order to determine whether there is any difference in social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to income level of the parents, the third sub-aim of the research. Numeric data about this process is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of anova test regarding the income status of parents of mentally retarded children

Income Status of Mentally Retarded Children	N	X	SS	F	P	Fark
1. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) standing by me when necessary apart from my family and my friends.	1000 TL and less	64	3.8813	1.45262	1.321	.167
	1001-2000 TL	57	4.2281	1.38896		
	2001 TL and more	14	4.0000	1.17670		
	Total	135	3.2815	1.68688		
2. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) to share my happiness and sadness apart from my family and my friends.	1000 TL and less	64	2.2344	.49577	1.413	.152
	1001-2000 TL	57	2.4035	.79865		
	2001 TL and more	14	2.2857	.61125		
	Total	135	2.3111	.65182		
3. My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help me.	1000 TL and less	64	6.5919	1.73941	2.145	.002 1-3
	1001-2000 TL	57	6.1265	.79865		
	2001 TL and more	14	4.4286	1.28388		
	Total	135	6.2593	1.39810		
4. I receive the emotional assistance and support I need from my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings).	1000 TL and less	64	4.7188	.96722	2.080	.004 1-3
	1001-2000 TL	57	4.2308	1.38000		
	2001 TL and more	14	2.7857	1.25137		
	Total	135	4.2444	.78099		
5. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) really putting my mind at rest apart from my family and my friends.	1000 TL and less	64	5.2031	1.59543	1.045	.256
	1001-2000 TL	57	4.3526	.87466		
	2001 TL and more	14	4.9286	2.05555		
	Total	135	4.8852	1.50811		
6. My friends really try to help me.	1000 TL and less	64	6.6563	.56957	1.123	.187
	1001-2000 TL	57	6.0702	1.04982		
	2001 TL and more	14	6.3571	1.33631		
	Total	135	6.3778	.92934		
7. I can rely on my friends when the situation deteriorates.	1000 TL and less	64	5.0000	1.96800	1.334	.178
	1001-2000 TL	57	5.5965	.75261		
	2001 TL and more	14	5.0000	1.79743		
	Total	135	5.2519	1.56796		
8. I can tell my problems to my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings).	1000 TL and less	64	4.8525	1.51054	2.225	.002 1-2
	1001-2000 TL	57	3.4649	1.59200		
	2001 TL and more	14	4.2857	1.48989		
	Total	135	3.9926	1.78089		
9. I have friends to share my happiness and sadness.	1000 TL and less	64	4.0156	1.29090	1.453	.120
	1001-2000 TL	57	3.7281	.42332		
	2001 TL and more	14	4.2857	.72627		
	Total	135	3.9111	1.04286		
10. There is a person (i.e. boy/girlfriend, fiancé, relative, neighbor, doctor) to care about my feelings apart from my family and my friends.	1000 TL and less	64	5.7500	.71270	1.007	.286

	1001-2000 TL	57	5.7719	.82413			
	2001 TL and more	14	5.2857	1.67233			
	Total	135	5.6593	.93970			
	1000 TL and less	64	5.7500	.64242	1.405	.136	
11. My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) is willing to help me in making my decisions.	1001-2000 TL	57	5.9298	1.53367			
	2001 TL and more	14	6.1429	1.83375			
	Total	135	5.9407	1.28808			
	1000 TL and less	64	5.1563	.40703	1.200	.226	
12. I can tell my problems to my friends.	1001-2000 TL	57	5.2281	.92616			
	2001 TL and more	14	4.5000	1.28602			
	Total	135	5.1185	.80160			
	1000 TL and less	64	5.1563	.40703	1.200	.226	

P<0.05

According to Anova table, there was a statistically significant difference in “question 3, 4 and 8”. There was not any significant difference in other items.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 3 “My family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help me” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to income status of parents [F(131)=2.080, p<.05]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who earn 1000 TL and less (X=6.59) held more positive opinions about this item.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 4 “I receive the emotional assistance and support I need from my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings)” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to income status of parents [F(131)=3.123, p<.05]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who earn 1000 TL and less (X=4.71) held more positive opinions about this item.

The results of the analysis show that there was a significant difference in question 8 “I can tell my problems to my family (i.e. my mother, father, spouse, children, siblings)” about social assistance perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to income status of parents [F(131)=2.225, p<.05]. Results of Tukey’s test which was carried out to detect the groups with the difference among the units may be interpreted in a manner that parents who earn 1000 TL and less (X=4.85) held more positive opinions about this item.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to present study which aims to research demographic profiles of parents of mentally retarded children and to compare perception of social support among the parents of mentally retarded children, it has been determined that there are differences as well as similarities in social support perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children.

It has been detected that scores obtained by parents from Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support differ according to socio-demographic features such as age, motherhood and fatherhood and income status of parents of mentally retarded children.

It has been detected that there has been a difference in the social support perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the age of the parents regarding the items that the family (i.e. their mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help them and they have friends to share their happiness and sadness.

A statistically significant difference has been detected in the social support perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to the status of motherhood and fatherhood regarding the items that they receive the emotional assistance and support they need from their family, they can tell their problems to their family and their family is willing to help them in making their decisions.

A statistically significant difference has been detected in the social support perceived by the parents of mentally retarded children according to income status of parents regarding the items that their family (i.e. their mother, father, spouse, children, siblings) really try to help them, they receive the emotional assistance and support they need from

their family, they can tell their problems to their family. Yılmaz et al. (2008) did not detect a statistically significant difference between income level and social support in a study on the university students.

Following recommendations have been developed according to the results of the present research:

1. Since parents of mentally retarded children need social support, new programs may be developed and implemented in order to enhance social support networks.
2. Family consultancy may be provided for parents by the experts working for the educational institutions of mentally retarded children according to score of social support perceived by parents.
3. Parents of mentally retarded children may periodically be joined in family groups and they may exchange their experiences about their children.

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