

Attachment Theory and Child's Perception of God at 4-6 Ages

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Abstract

Attachment theory has been studied in numerous researches since it was put forward by Bowlby who had that all infants were born with biological and emotional needs toward their mothers or caregivers. Since Bowlby's attachment theory has been taken part in several fields beside Psychology, such as Psychology of Religion in which especially the attachment to God is tried to be understood, Pathology which does give attachment theory wide coverage to explain some mental disorders derived from unsecure attachment. After the birth, the relationship between child and caregiver shapes perspective of child toward religion and God and gives him/her perception of God. The attachment patterns that children gain in their childhood form the attachment to God that they gain afterwards in their life, in that to understand children's attachment to God, it is substantial to understand the primary attachment patterns of children. Perception

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Article Types: Research Article

Received: 14 December 2019

Accepted: 26 August 2019

Published: 26 August 2019

Cite as: Ayşe Aydar - Behlül Tokur, "Attachment Theory and Child's Perception of God at 4-6 Ages", *ULUM* 2/1 (2019): 51-74, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3376960>

of God shapes not only individual's religious life, but also his/her behaviors toward his/her social environment and individual's sense of self. For this reason, it is very essential to understand the attachment and how the attachment forms child's perception of God. The problems of the study are how the attachment occurs, what it is affected by, and how the attachment pattern occurring between child and caregiver shapes child's perception of God. In this context, the study aims to understand children's perception of God on their attachment patterns they have acquired as well as providing scientific information for religious educators and religious education institutions. For the study, 5 main and 8 deeper questions aiming to find out children's perception of God have been asked a study group consisting 13 children at the ages of 4-6 in Yeşil Elma Kinder Garden in Ankara by using interview technique. Interviews have been conducted with one student and one interviewer at a time regarding children's psychological conditions. This study is a qualitative research, and the collected data have been interpreted by using descriptive analysis. According to findings of the study, it has been noted that the questions were answered with some sentence patterns which they might have heard from their families regarding that the kinder garden is mostly preferred by conservative the families, and that the children have positive-love based God perception, beside that they have a concrete God image accordingly their ages.

Keywords

Psychology of Religion, Psychology, Attachment, Perception, God, Child

Bağlanma Teorisive 4-6 Yaş Arası Çocuklarda Tanrı Algısı

Öz

Bağlanma teorisi, tüm bebeklerin annelerine ve bakım verenlerine karşı biyolojik ve duygusal olarak bazı ihtiyaçlarla doğduklarını iddia eden Bowlby tarafından ortaya atıldığından beri birçok araştırmaya konu olmuştur. Bowlby'den itibaren bağlanma teorisi Psikoloji alanının yanı sıra özellikle Tanrı'ya bağlanmanın anlaşılmasına çalışıldığı Din Psikolojisi alanında ve güvensiz bağlanma sonucu ortaya çıkan bazı ruhsal sıkıntıları açıklamada geniş bir yelpaze sunan Patoloji alanında çalışılmaktadır. Çocukların bebeklikten itibaren geliştirdikleri bağlanma tarzları sonradan edindikleri Tanrı'ya bağlanma tarzlarını şekillendirir bu da göstermektedir ki çocuğun Tanrı'ya bağlanma tarzını anlamak için çocukta ki ilk bağlanma tarzlarını anlamak önemlidir. Doğumdan itibaren çocuğun bakım veren ile geliştirdiği ilişki, sonrasında dünyaya, dine ve Tanrı'ya olan bakış açısını da şekillendirir ve ona bir Tanrı algısı kazandırır. Bireyin edineceği Tanrı algısı sadece dini yaşantısını değil, bireyin kendilik algısını ve sosyal çevresine karşı davranışlarını da şekillendirmektedir. Bu sebeple bağlanma ve bağlanmanın çocuktaki Tanrı imgesini nasıl şekillendirdiğini anlamak oldukça önemlidir. Bu araştırmanın ele aldığı problemler çocuklarda bağlanmanın nasıl ortaya çıktığı, nelerden etkilendiği ve sonrasında da bakım veren ile çocuğun arasında gelişen bağlanma modelinin Tanrı algısını nasıl şekillendirdiğidir. Bu bağlamda çalışma, çocukların edindikleri bağlanma deseni ile alakalı olarak Tanrı'ya bakış açılarını anlama, bunun yanı sıra din eğitimcilerine ve din eğitimi veren kurumlara bilimsel bilgi sağlama amacındadır. Araştırma için, Ankara'da bulunan Yeşil Elma Anaokulunda öğrenim gören 4-6 yaş arasında 13 kişilik öğrenci grubuna, çocukların Tanrı algılarını saptamayı amaçlayan

5 ana, 8 de yardımcı soru mülakat tekniği kullanılarak sorulmuştur. Çocukların psikolojik durumları esas alınarak mülakatlar bir görüşmeci ve bir katılımcı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu araştırma yöntem bakımından nitel bir araştırma olup, elde edilen veriler klasik anlamda betimsel içerik analizi yapılarak yorumlanmaktadır. Araştırmanın bulgularına göre, kreşin muhafazakâr ailelerce tercih edildiği göz önüne alındığında sorulan soruların bir kısmının aileden duyulan kalıp cümlelerle cevaplandığı, çocuklarda olumlu ve sevgiye dayalı bir Tanrı algısının var olduğu, bunlarla birlikte yaşları dolayısıyla zihinlerinde somut bir Tanrı imgesi olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Psikolojisi, Psikoloji, Bağlanma, Algı, Tanrı, Çocuk

INTRODUCTION

All human beings are born in needs. These can be some basic needs such as nourishment and safeness. However, all humans are also born with needs of loving and being loved. Responding those needs exactly creates attachments. These attachments occur after birth and babies start to show some reaction toward their care givers. Attachment mostly occurring between mother and baby is not only confined with childhood period, but it also has affects during whole of life and sets a precedent for a child's all future attachments. During the whole life, people experience attachments and those attachments appearing in post period of life are mostly affected the primary attachments which occur between babies and care givers. The theory put forward by Bowlby especially is dealt by Lee Kirkpatrick and seen that attachment occurring at the beginning of the life has similarities with feelings like attachment to a religion and God, acting like wishing help from God, finding peace and relief. The effects of the primary attachment of children are seen in their perception of God from 0 age to 6 ages beside the thoughts which children have as a natural process of cognitive development such as egocentric and anthropomorphic thoughts. This study has tried to show that children perceive God by using their attachment background forming between children, their care givers in their natural childish thoughts.

The study begins with theoretical considerations, then goes on to the method of the study. While explaining attachment to God in the terms of attachment theory, some other triggers which form children's perception of God at certain ages such as imitation, animism and anthropomorphism appearing and disappearing in time according to a child's cognitive development have involved in the study in which several early researches were interpreted, dictionaries and relevant books were searched and studied and finally a qualitative study test has been applied to children in order to understand the issue's essence.

1. ATTACHMENT THEORY

All human beings are born in needs such as nourishing and harbouring. Beside these physical needs, most people need to love and to be loved to live. When people are born, they require attaching to the persons taking care of and showing intimacy toward them.

The fundamental hypothesis about attachment theory basically was put forward by John Bowlby as an alternative theory against object relation and psychoanalytic theories. Since then, it has made rapid progress and become one of the irreplaceable theories in psychology.

Attachment; developed between twosome, appearing with the seeking of affiliation of the child and becoming clear especially in stressful occasions is described as consistent and constant emotional bond between a child and a caregiver.¹ Attachment in infants includes patterns of emotions and behaviours entirely such as positive reaction to initial caregivers, orientation toward them, seeking them and relief right after the perception of existence among them This attachment mostly occurring between mother and child is not only confined with childhood period, it also has affects during whole life and sets a precedent for a child's all future attachments.

The main functions of this theory about coming up mother-child relationship in early period are like these: Infants showing too much or too little awareness to their caregivers give social signs which will affect these kinds of behaviours such as cuddling and crying. When those foreseen functions develop as expected, that state formulates secure attachment of children towards their mothers who symbolize protector and a security. According to this theory, the secure attachment relationship enables children to explore safely and comfortably all the world under normal circumstances. To the researchers of this theory, mother serves for a child as a remover child from danger to provide child's basic trust. In this attachment relationship, child's aim is not only to have physical intimacy but also to feel secure in the process of exploration of environment.²

Preservation of intimacy is a supplementary feature of attachment and the main function of attachment is security from danger. There is a relationship between attachment behaviour and exploration behaviour. The main characteristics of attachment are;

- i. Humans are born with the ability to ease attachment,
- ii. Preservation of intimacy responds the need of intimacy of the other one,
- iii. After having experience during his/her childhood, child makes of the world and himself/ herself then generalizes it and formulates internal working models.³

The period of attachment, if divided into phrases, which develops right after the birth accordingly to the nature of human beings reveals itself as seeking for breast, turning head, sucking breast and finger,

¹ A.Sermin Kesebir et al., "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar* 3/2 (2011): 321-342.

² Akif Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 4/12 (2006): 30.

³ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 326.

catching, moving toward mother, and anticipation of feeding time. The first sign of attachment appears in 8th week on a child's paying much more attention to mother than anyone else. In this phase, a child distinguishes mother from others, smiles at her, sounds more to her than others and feels more comfortable when with her mother than with anyone else.⁴

With the 7th month, infants start to understand the patterns of their environment. Before that month, mother is not that much important but from this month infant pays almost all attention to mother, abstains and fears from strangers. In this time, interval attachment develops itself seeking for intimacy and in case of separation from caregivers uneasiness and tension reveal. Infant, right after birth, directs attachment behaviour to someone whom he/she can reach. But only 6 months old, most of infants direct this attention to someone they want to get closer according to their choices.⁵

While being responded the need of a child wholesomely develops attachment, not being responded of the needs unsatisfactorily brings about co-dependency. Attachment is a normal process which is expected to develop every human being but co-dependency is a pathological. This process not only hinders for a person's self-realization but also in the event of having the source, it causes deprivation in person. And these deprivation symptoms point out co-dependency. Co-dependency in the first instance might be satisfactory but then starts to turn into obsessive thought and droning behaviours. Compassionate co-dependency is a tendency to foster some feelings such as trust and compassion from different sources since those feelings have not been supplied before. In compassionate co-dependency, person put forward others instead of himself/herself. People trust others to deal with problems and avoid from pain and fear passive.

By the units of personality (id, ego, superego), Freud explains attachment of a child to the mother with this. According to the psychoanalytic theory, mother is an object and the first interaction to the world of an infant is via his/her mother breast orally. While breast feeding responds a child's need of nutrition, it also functions as a sexual stimulation in erogenous zone. So, a child attaches to the breast, he thereby attaches to the mother through urges of pleasure and famishment. The object means internal represents which are important and precious things or someone's gaining a seat in the internal world in the psychoanalytic terminology. The first important object, generally, is mother. According to urge theory, each urge has its own goal and object. The main goals of the urges are to take pleasure and urges use objects to fulfil this aim.

That World Health Organization (WHO) invited Bowlby to London to study on mental hygiene of homeless children, which was a starting point for Bowlby to introduce attachment theory. Bowlby, in his study, stated stress on effects of mother deprivation over children's later life after they drew apart from their mothers. Despite being effective and being confirmed, the report had a lot of deficiency such as why and how early mother deprivation led to such horrible effects which were not able to be explained. Bowlby's psychoanalytic background provided an advantage him to see inadequacy of psychoanalytic theory to explain this kind of situations. Psychoanalytic theory sustains the idea that children fondle their mothers so that they establish a relation between their mothers to be fed. But to Bowlby, this could not totally explain

⁴ Soysalı, "Bebeklik Dönemindeki Bağlanma Sürecine Genel Bir Bakış", 89.

⁵ Soysalı, "Bebeklik Dönemindeki Bağlanma Sürecine Genel Bir Bakış", 89.

the situation of children who were still depressed and anxious although their needs were supplied by caregivers at a home environment.⁶

According to Bowlby, all infants are born with biological and emotional needs supplied with their mothers or caregivers.⁷ These needs have a very important place in human life. After birth, infants need to be provided their requirements to survive so they take their first breath with the help of a caregiver. Between caregivers (mother, father, a relative or a babysitter) and infants, an interaction occurs, and this interaction forms a bond between twosome gaining strength in time. If infants experience caregiver close and respondent and feel themselves in secure and comfortable, they exhibit social and exploratory behaviours but if infants perceive caregiver indifferent, far away or threat for him/ her, infant feels anxiety and exhibits antisocial behaviours.

To Bowlby, provided that infants achieve healthy attachment to caregiver and to be responded of their need, they undergo accurate progress while growing up. Infants conceive themselves worthiness to be loved and reflect this sense to others. The children who have appropriate communication between their caregivers and have secured bond character, which is open to communicate with others, feel themselves precious, social and consistent. If not so, some unfavourable circumstances such as unhealthy relationship and lack of social aptitudes are observed in children. Bowlby concluded this early attachment affected other attachment behaviours forming over adulthood and the attachment developed during childhood and lasted during the whole life but then falsifiability of this idea has been asserted.

Ainsworth was a Canadian psychologist who studied with Bowlby and tried to explain Bowlby's findings with some experiments. Ainsworth observed children and their mothers more closely by visiting their houses with her students. Through *the Strange Room Test* improved by her, Ainsworth had an opportunity to study on Bowlby's theory and aimed to activate children's attachment system/ attachment behaviours during the test. In the experimental method named *The Strange Room Test*, 12-18 month- old infants are separated from their mothers for short breaks and left with a strange and then got together with their mothers again. After this test, Ainsworth concluded that with attachment patterns and then divided them into three groups: secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant.⁸

Children who had secure attachment pattern when left in the room by their mothers showed some uneasiness but did not get panic during the test. Without any signs of tension, they tried to seek for their mothers but even their mothers were not around, they continued exploring the room and after they came together with their mothers, they easily smoothed. Children who have secure attachment pattern/patterns do not experience any tension in their intimacy with their families. They always feel certain that their mothers are with them and ready for help when they need them. To develop this attachment pattern, it is significant that child has a consistent, coherent, sensitive caregiver.⁹

⁶ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 325.

⁷ Soysal, "Bebeklik Dönemindeki Bağlanma Sürecine Genel Bir Bakış", 90.

⁸ Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", 36.

⁹ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji".

Children having anxious-ambivalent attachment pattern felt intense tension. Anxiousness and anger were also observed in them, when their mother left the room. Even after their mothers were back, they did not easily smooth, and they rejected to explore environment. Although their mothers were in the room with them, they denied leaving their mothers. Children who have this attachment pattern show unfavourable behaviours and fail at relationships for the reason that they have not been sure that their caregivers would respond them when they have been in need. These mothers are not consistent with their responds and they threaten to abandon their children with the intent of controlling them. These are mostly aggressive, nervous, maladaptive children.¹⁰

During the test, children having avoidant attachment pattern remained unresponsive when their mother left the room. Similarly, when their mothers were back to the room, they kept their distance from them by remaining unresponsive and they kept searching the room instead of being interested in their mothers.¹¹ Children having avoidant attachment pattern do not rely on their mothers to respond their needs. They do not accept their mothers as a safe haven. Those children's mothers turn their children's needs down consistently or reject them. These children generally have difficulties to have relationships for later. It is observed that these children cannot control and express their anger and they also try to manage people around them.¹²

Children having de-organized attachment pattern, which was added to the attachment patterns later, do not demonstrate organized and appropriate behaviours. Frozen or slow of movements are seen and these children's mothers are ones who abuse children physically or neglect them and they generally have highly psychiatric disorders, or they have still unsolved problems with their own attached objects. It is stated that the reason of this attachment pattern is the fear derived from caregiver.¹³

The fact that attachment patterns are unchangeable, as the phrase goes from the cradle to the grave, should not be supposed; even in children who have the most secure attachment pattern, peaks and troughs might be seen.¹⁴ Unsecure attachment patterns might evolve into secure attachment patterns in a child's future life. While experiences in their future might affect these pattern changes, disposition effect is also significant too. Disposition that is believed to be an inherent feature is a formation which emerges from birth and determines behavioural patterns.¹⁵ It is important to regard characteristics of a child as much as quality of responds of caregiver.

A child develops internal working models about other people according to whether or not his/her emotional and physical needs are responded during on-going experiences. These models include self-

¹⁰ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 94.

¹¹ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 94.

¹² Soysal, "Bebeklik Dönemindeki Bağlanma Sürecine Genel Bir Bakış", 96.

¹³ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 327.

¹⁴ Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", 367-38.

¹⁵ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 334.

worthiness, relying on others and intimacy in relationships.¹⁶ When it is responded for the needs of a child wholesomely and supported by caregiver, he/she forms a secure bond, perceive herself/himself worth to be loved and additionally, he/she relies on others by developing favourable models, while not responded by the caregiver for the needs of them or is responded in an aloof and negatory way develops unfavourable models. This child believes others are not reliable, worth to love and even she/he is not worth to be loved. These internal working models formalize and lead one's way of life from beginning to end. These models form many predictive factors such as expectations from others in the future and perception of a romantic partner in adulthood. Bartholomew and Horowitz studied attachments over adulthood by basing on Bowlby's internal working models and introduced the quart attachment patterns.¹⁷

i. *Secure Attachment*: People having secure attachment pattern develop some representations such as 'I'm precious and worth to be loved' and perceive others reliable since their physical and emotional needs are responded wholesomely. They have healthy personal structures and when left or rejected, they can quickly handle with it.

ii. *Obsessive Attachment*: They do not assume themselves to be worth to be loved yet, they assume others are precious and valuable. Their most distinct feature is the lack of confidence. In their relations, they have exaggerated dependent attitudes towards others and also express their emotions turgidly. They cannot accept being rejected or left and when it happens, they cannot handle with it. They are the ones who are obsessive in their relationships.

iii. *Dismissive Attachment*: They are keen on their freedom and they avoid from attachments. However, unlike people who have fearful attachment, they do not keep their distance from others because of anxiety. Instead, they have this distance because they do not value others and do not want to experience abandonment.

iv. *Fearful Attachment*: They always experience problems of trust and avoid from being rejected or left they keep their distance in their relationships. As they do not perceive themselves to be worth to be loved, they also do not perceive others to be loved or trustworthy.

There might be disunity between a mother and a child, and it is known to have harmful effects on child. In babies who were separated from their mothers after birth for research, retardation of development and unfavourable behaviours like social withdrawal were observed. Bowlby has believed that maternal deprivation has some consequences such as dwarfism (retarded growth), aggressiveness, dependency, anxiety, social maladjustment, affectionless, psychopath (showing no feelings for others), depression and delinquency.¹⁸

One of the pathological disorders in childhood is infancy depression. Studies on babies, which were hospitalized and could not see their mothers for this reason, showed that while a child was healthy and

¹⁶ Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Baęlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", 36.

¹⁷ K. Bartholomew - L.M. Horowitz, "Attachment Styles Among Young Adults: A Test of Four-Category Model", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61/2 (1991): 227-228.

¹⁸ Mokhtar Malekpour, "Effects of Attachment on Early and Later Development", *The British Journal of Development Disabilities* 53/105 (2007): 86.

cheerful at the beginning, however as time passed by, loss of appetite, joy and weight were observed in the child. Another one is separation anxiety disorder which causes a great anxiety when a child is separated from attached person. Also, child is substantially afraid of getting lost or never reaching to his/her parents again, so they reject going to school or leaving home. When they have to face these situations, they might show various somatic symptoms such as stomach or headache, nauseating and dizziness. The other one is reactive attachment disorder that usually starts before the age of 5 and becomes characterized by a child's showing unexpected attachment patterns. Children might not keep their distances from strangers and may build close relations with them in any way. The reasons of this situation are mostly the neglect of a child or non-responded needs.¹⁹

As anxious-ambivalent attachment which is one of the unsecure attachment patterns is related with anxiety disorder, de-organized attachment is noted to be related with dissociative disorders.²⁰ Many disorders such as depression, agoraphobia, borderline disorders which occur in adulthood are related with the separation anxiety disorder.²¹ Also to Bowlby, the source of phobias in adulthood has a background in childhood and phobic people are ones who have been abused, neglected or witnessed loss of one of their parents.²²

2. Child's Perception of God at 4-6 Ages

The concept of God is discussed under two headings as cognitive and relational.²³ While it is difficult to distinguish the two from each other firmly, cognitive explanations hold that the image of God emerges in accordance with the mental development of the individual, while the relational explanations hold that the image of God is formed by the interaction of the individual with the environment. The theory of attachment explains the concept of God with relational explanation.²⁴ The emotional-based relationship between child and caregiver affects the individual's future relationship with God. But this image is not shaped only under the influence of the parent figure. Experiences and crises of the individual also shape the perception of God.

Childhood period is considerable importance in the terms of forming a basis of one's future life and the formation of character by developing behaviours which formulate one's whole life. In fact, some psychologists claim that %90 of formation of character occurs in the first 6 years of childhood.²⁵ It can't be

¹⁹ Esen, Eylem Özge, "Bağlanma Kuramı ve Psikopatolojiyle İlişkisi", 10.

²⁰ Kesebir, "Bağlanma ve Psikopatoloji", 321.

²¹ Özge, "Bağlanma Kuramı ve Psikopatolojiyle İlişkisi", 11.

²² Özge, "Bağlanma Kuramı ve Psikopatolojiyle İlişkisi".

²³ W.J. Ruchgy, "The Relationship of Mental Representantation of God to Levels of Mercy", (Michigan, 2004): 78-79.

²⁴ Akif Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru".*Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi* 4/12 (2006): 31.

²⁵ Mustafa Köylü, "Çocukluk Dönemi Dini İnanç Gelişimi ve Dini Eğitimi", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 11/2 (2004): 137-154.

thought that religious life develops independently from childhood period in which a child transfers to concrete operational period from preoperational period and starts to get used to social environment out of family with regards to psycho-social and a child's intelligence level peaks.²⁶ Someone's perceptions of God, his/her attachment pattern to God, sensitivity to worship are the formations which are based on childhood. For Harms, childhood religious development has 3 stages and the ages of 3-6 are in the stage of fairy tales stage in which individual religious experience starts to root.²⁷ A child's education and habits determine the way he/she perceives religion in the future. For instance, the celebration of religious holidays with family is known as significant in the terms of forming a special bond with family and ideas/thoughts about religion in the future.

Freud, here states that religion is nothing but a reflection of the dynamic conflicts between ego, id and superego. He claims that there is no essential need than father protection in childhood, and also feelings of weakness and helplessness rooting from childhood cause occurrence of the idea of God so as to replace the image of the father in adulthood. Even if one is an adult anymore, he/she still needs help. For this reason, he/she sustains the idea of God as his/her father. Because a child wants to return to memory of the image of father; and father, in Freud's view, is the model of all humanity's God.²⁸

Following Freudian tradition, Erikson does not put notion of fear in the centre of religious thoughts unlike Freud. According to him, the main emotion creating religious thought is the feeling of 'security'. He states that security forming in childhood takes shape from the relationship between a mother and a child. A child who has secure attachment to caregiver seeks for the same attachment pattern and the same feelings in God in such a way that he/she has experienced during childhood, and so religious thoughts take shape. According to Erikson, in all universal religions, there are some attributions and behaviours which are similar with behaviours and attributions developing between a mother and a child such as a creator granting to His creatures, childish submitting, incapable behaviours, appealing, evolution of goodness into common faith.²⁹

From a child's birth, a child develops ambidextrously. Mental development is also observed in child correspondingly with his/her. While growing up, a child's social skills and learning capacity develop more when compared the former years.

Piaget's cognitive development theory deals with successive stages in which each of them has more complicated and advanced content/contents. In some researches, religious thoughts have not been considered separate from cognitive development and have studied together. Although the studies of Freud, Erikson and Kohlberg are frequently benefited, the most-cited theory undoubtedly belongs to Piaget. In

²⁶ Mustafa Doğan Karacoşkun, "Okul Öncesi Çocuklarında Dua", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9/1 (2005): 121.

²⁷ Ernest Harms, "The Development Of Religious Experience in Children", *American Journal Of Sociology* 50/2 (1944): 116

²⁸ Ali Ayten, *Psikoloji ve Din* (İstanbul: İz, 2017), 55-60.

²⁹ Cemil Oruç, "Okul Öncesi Dönemde Dini Duygunun Kökenleri ve Gelişimi", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 10/3 (2010): 84.

Piaget's theory, it is seen that God and religious thoughts occur as a cognitive need.³⁰ However, in his theory, it is not understood whether the idea of God is inborn, and God is a parent that responds mental needs.

The first stage sensor motor stage includes 0-2 ages in which infants use inborn reflexes such as crying and sucking. They show and repeat behaviours which they find out by trial and error. With occurrence of separation from the nature, they perceive there is a world out, so they start to explore the world by trial and error or imitation. It is also seen of the starting of acquisition of object permanence, in children. Until the 4th month after birth, children do not reveal any awareness about object permanence but then, they are aware of a toy which has been taken away does not get lost and they should look for it around where it has been taken. Infants who cannot obtain object permanence when an object goes missing in field of view, they only assume it disappears. They do not understand anything but what their senses perceive, and they have egocentric thoughts.²⁸

The second stage in cognitive development is preoperational stage which includes duration from 2-6 ages. In this stage, children learn how to use a language properly and they still have egocentric thoughts. They think since they exist, others exist. They can categorize objects according to a dimension, and what is more, children in this stage have the idea that goings-on have magical and supernatural features. They have animism understanding so they assume that all objects possess a spirit and they are able to reason, think and live as children do. They develop symbolizes for objects they cannot see by attributing them their own symbols. And they cannot make a distinction between reality and imaginations.

Before dealing with the how the perception of God in these periods, it will be helpful to mention how to develop perception of God over time. From the 2nd month until the 6th month, infants develop self-perception and they start to be conscious of that they and their mothers (or another caregiver) are separate. 2-year-old children grow jealous that addresses consciousness developing in children.³¹ Upon the age of 3, sovereignty of a language is observed in children and they comprehend themselves as communicators to others. The age of 4 is a period in which children's imagination gains straight and some time they are not able to distinct between reality and fantasy. So mostly they say something which they made up in their minds as if they are real, and parents who are not aware of this might accuse their children of lying.³²

Whether belief of God is inborn or not has been dealt with and put forward many arguments by most philosophers. For example, whereas some thinkers such as Descartes, W. James, and Spancer upheld that the belief was inborn, others such as Berkeley, Freud, Dewey and Hume claimed vice versa.³³ Religion of Islam also declares that humans are born with the disposition of faith so they are ready to accept religion

³⁰ Cemil Oruç, "Erken Çocukluk Dönemi Dini Gelişim Teorileri Bağlamında Din Eğitimi", *Turkish Studies-International Periodical For the Languages Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic* 8/8 (2013): 973.

³¹ W. H. Clark, "Çocuklukta Din", Trans. Adil Çiftçi - Murat Yıldız, *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 10 (1998): 186.

³² Mustafa Öcal, "Okul Öncesi ve İlköğretim Çocuklarının Allah Tasavvurları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13/2 (2014): 63.

³³ Ali Kuşat, "Bilişsel Gelişim Açısından Din-Fıtrat İlişkisi", *Erciyes Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4/12 (2012): 36.

and God inborn. Friedrich Schleiermacher adopting the idea that humans are born with the faith of God claims that humans have holiness inborn and this is experienced as emotions.³⁴ W.H. Clark, in his article titled *Religion of Childhood*, expresses that child does not have religious feelings, and furthermore psychologists accept new born baby as an existence that is close to animals rather than a human.³⁵ He also examines how such a sophisticated issue might be inborn in children. At the present time, it is seen that a child learns how to speak religious development at the age of 3. However, since children do not have enough language skills before that age, whether children have these religious thoughts formerly is not known.

Piaget's cognitive development stages make a great contribution to understand how animism, artificialism and egocentric thoughts evolve to abstract thoughts in time. According to these stages, age of 3 is accepted as occurrence of religious thoughts and before 3 years of age, it is named 'pre-religious' period.

There are some limits in occurrence of religious thoughts. For example, a child is not able to think reasonably at the beginning of the childhood. Also, egocentric thought prevents him/her from understanding events correctly. A child having monofocal thought takes one approach to the events and this thought construction lasts until the age of 7 and 8.³⁶ The other reason is the limitation of the language. A religious language prevents children from drawing a reasonable conclusion about religious issues. Limited experiences, in the beginning, confine children from understanding life and religion.

Although children have religious thought inborn is still a matter of view, that seeking for caretaking of children is inborn is generally accepted. Seeking for protection is differential feature of childhood. After birth, a child is utterly in the need of caring, protection and uttermost defenceless. A child needs to be responded for physical needs, but the feeling that he/she is under protection creates on a child's world great pleasure.³⁷ Person on whom the child depends to satisfy the protection need is mostly parent. That need is indispensable, and it is essential as much as nutrition need for the child to survive.³⁵

Children's seeking for protection does not disappear or decrease in time. On the contrast, it continues during whole life and resembles feeling of taking refuge of God. So, inborn seeking protection provided by parents might be said to lead to believe in God in time. Whenever a child feels hopeless or wants to feel in safe, she/he havens to God on the purpose of seeking for help. When a child believes in God, he/she feels comforted and safe, so he/she tries to know God well and shows interest to worship.³⁸

Children in those ages want to feel themselves special and need appreciation. Some basic reasons for this situation are that child has grown up or new baby has joined family, so attention on child decreases,

³⁴ Kuşat, "Bilişsel Gelişim Açısından Din-Fıtrat İlişkisi", 38.

³⁵ Clark, "Çocuklukta Din", 184.

³⁶ Kuşat, "Bilişsel Gelişim Açısından Din-Fıtrat İlişkisi", 43.

³⁷ Clark, "Çocuklukta Din", 185.

³⁵ Clark, "Çocuklukta Din", 185.

³⁸ Celalettin İçemli, "Çocuklukta Dini Duygu ve Düşüncenin Gelişimi", *Konuralp Tıp Dergisi* 5/3 (2013): 65.

finally he/she tries to be the centre of attention again. In such a case, a child seeks for attention from God instead of family.³⁹

It is stated that perception of God is related with children's comprehension about their parents. While children perceive their parents omnipotent, their protectors from everything and absolute authority at young ages, later on they might start to explore that their parents are incapable of most issues. In progress of time, their parents are not absolute omnipotent anymore. Parents are not able to realize everything they wish and protect them from everything.⁴⁰

This causes a crisis in children. In this crisis, children start to discriminate their parents from God. All perceptions of around 5-6-year-old children about superiority of their parents start to tend towards God. According to Baldwin Theory, attachment of God steps in at this point. It is pointed that in the first step child completely focuses on his or her caregivers who respond child's need and the child does not sense metaphysical issues. In the second step, named intellectual stage, the child perceives his or her parents as problem solvers. In this step, attachment to God is occurred. Some other beliefs such as metaphysical or moral beliefs appear in later stages.⁴¹

There are some features occurring in children form children's perception and understanding. Despite their disappearance in time, during childhood period while they shape children's any ordinary thoughts, they also give a form children's religious thought. *Imitation* causes religious development in children so that children start to imitate what they see in their parents and their social environment. Children who observe parents praying imitate them, and although in the beginning they do not have any idea about the aim and meaning of what they imitate, they accustom to this habit in time, and when they are old enough, they understand the aim and the meaning of this worship. Also, another feature in this period is the need for approval. This feature reveals a full-court press over them to gain affection and approval. Children imitate their parents to be approved by them. The other one is *easy-credibility* which makes children encourage to believe easily anything that is spoken. Children cannot be thought that they can adopt any idea with reasonable arguments because of their limited experiences and perception skills; they do not have difficulty to accept their parents' beliefs. They do not question the religion they have adopted from their family until end of the preoperational period. *Ego-centric thought* is another qualification that leads children to evaluate everything in their point of views. They cannot predict that a person can look at the same object from a different perspective. They see themselves in the centre of the events and this belief affects their religious thoughts. For example, God is the creator of children and has given them families. God has bestowed them food and clothes. Everything around them exists to serve them. This belief of children leads them to believe a Supreme Being following and watching them. *Animism-anthropomorphism* makes children assume everything around them is alive. Stones, tables, toys are living creatures for them. Because of this belief it is hard to understand whether they play, or they really think toys are alive while they talk to their toys. This animistic view leads them to assume everything breaths, eats and feels as they do. With anthropomorphic

³⁹ Köylü, "Çocukluk Dönemi Dini İnanç Gelişimi ve Dini Eğitimi", 141.

⁴⁰ Oruç, "Erken Çocukluk Dönemi Dini Gelişim Teorileri Bağlamında Din Eğitimi", 975.

⁴¹ Faruk Karaca, *Dini Gelişim Psikolojisi* (İstanbul: Eser Ofset Matbaacılık, 2016), 58.

belief, children perceive God with concrete existence. Many studies show that children describe God with features which belong to humans and other living things. The most common ones are an old, bearded man or a king with a crown. As growing up, especially in formal operational stage, they start to understand God is abstract and cannot be defined and anthropomorphic thought decreases. But in preoperational and concrete operational periods, it is hard, almost impossible, to expect them to understand that God is not definable. The final feature is *sense of wonder*. Existing in the child inborn, this sense leads him or her to understand and give meaning of everything. They ask several questions such as 'What is it?', 'Who made this?'. With this sense, the children question about how everything around them, including themselves, exist when they are grown enough. No matter what parents' beliefs are, they face this question and have to give a clear answer regarding to their faith. Those given answers shape children's beliefs.⁴²

As it is mentioned in previous chapter, there are some children's features which are the basics that lead to perception of God such as animism, anthropomorphism, ego-centric thought etc. By taking them into consideration in this chapter, it is discussed how the perception of God appears in children according to the ages. These ages are classified in this work in the context of Piaget's cognitive development stages. Children until the age of 2 are ranked in sensor motor period and children aged 2 to 6 are classified in preoperational period.

In sensor motor period (0-2 ages), children start to control their motor functions and intellection, and also exhibit primitive behaviour patterns to deal with objects.⁴³ They start to observe and explore environment incrementally and satisfy their sense of wonder by trial and error. In this stage if children develop secure and healthy attachment with their caregivers, which Erikson associates with feeling of security, their religious developments make a progress according to the attachment developed beforehand with caregivers.

While Piaget states that object permanence occurs with the 8th month after the birth, there are studies providing that it actually occurs earlier. Acquisition of object permanence is the basic for child to develop mental representations. Beside acquisition of this ability is accepted as a precondition for learning words moreover according to Bowlby, it is a provision for self-recognition and also a step to gather for later thoughts.⁴⁴

Children, in this stage, do not have track of time. For children, there are no concepts of the past, present or future. Furthermore, these children do not have any metaphysical conception and do not accept anything other than objects received by sensory receptors. They are not ready to understand intangible concepts such as God, heaven and hell. Above all in this stage children are not able to use language efficiently and make clear sentences to express themselves. So, it cannot be understood fairly whether they have religious thought.

⁴² Köylü, "Çocukluk Dönemi Dini İnanç Gelişimi ve Dini Eğitimi", 138-140.

⁴³ Kuşat, "Bilişsel Gelişim Açısından Din-Fıtrat İlişkisi", 47.

⁴⁴ Kuşat, "Bilişsel Gelişim Açısından Din-Fıtrat İlişkisi", 48.

In preoperational period (3-6 ages), children who acquire object permanence develop a great interest in things they are not able to see. Especially, this is why children in this period rummage around their houses with hope to find something hidden. Children also start to search representations by developing their language skills with symbols for things they can or cannot see. Similarly, after accepting the existence of God, child looks for representation for God. But in these ages, since abstract reasoning is not developed yet, child cannot comprehend God's essence and attributes in detail, although they start to develop an image of God and their faith begins to take a shape. However, they do not comprehend about life, religious etc. so deeply.

Child looking for an envisagement for God uses his/her dreams or observations to symbolize God. Because of animistic and anthropomorphic thoughts, child images a superhero, an old white bearded man or a king with a crown living on the clouds as God. After the age of 7, this thoughts start to evolve into abstract conception however, while children between the ages of 7-9 are observed that they still describe God as if He is on the clouds, after the ages of 10-12 idea that God is everywhere dominates in children (İçmeli, 2013:68). After these ages, they are able to think more reasonably since their notions enrich with their experiences. In the studies led by Mustafa Öcal, that while some 8 year-old children continue to comprehend God as an concrete existing, it has been noted that some are likely to think 'God who cannot be known how He is' and in the same studies, anthropomorphic God idea in 9 year-old children has hardly ever seen.⁴⁵

Mustafa Öcal and his students also have noted that children at the age of 4 mostly describe God as 'big'.⁴⁶ These children ask their parents about how God is and receive 'big' as an answer leads them to think that God is big as much as something they have seen around before, so for some of them God is big as much as a minaret or a mountain.

Anthropomorphic thought also may cause children to image their God as their fathers. So, when divine power is mentioned, children may perceive that God is powerful as much as their fathers. Children's inborn need of security primarily is aimed at their parents who are perceived by children as 'the most powerful'. Especially, his/her father is the most powerful figure but by the time of progress, children proceed to make out their fathers are incapable, cannot afford everything either. Also, by distinguishing their parents from God, children recognize that deficient superiority in their fathers when at the ages of 5-7.⁴⁷

Since children at these ages have ego-centric thoughts, they reason about God around this thought. For example, if a 5-year-old child is asked what God is, it is expected that he/she answers it like 'He created me'. According to this thought, God is the one who creates and gives him/her a family, food and toys. Children in this period exhibit a conception of God related with games and entertainment. God is associated with simple pleasures and answers children's dreams. While how God notion is expressed and described

⁴⁵ Öcal, "Okul Öncesi ve İlköğretim Çocuklarının Allah Tasavvurları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", 73.

⁴⁶ Öcal, "Okul Öncesi ve İlköğretim Çocuklarının Allah Tasavvurları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", 64.

⁴⁷ Antoine Vergote, "Çocuklukta Din", Trans. Erdoğan Fırat, *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 22/1 (1966): 318.

forms the perception of God, mostly children have an idea of favourable, friendly God perception. God is generally perceived as a playmate and relationship with God is amusing.⁴⁸

Children have also fiery, demonic God conception over these years. These children perceive God as a creator who behaves sadistically, cannot control His temper and causes disasters such as earthquake and flood, and as someone who does not have compassion and affection. The fear of God dominates children at these ages. Indeed, children do not have this fear naturally.⁴⁹ The reason why these children have this fear is that these children come from parents who are violence prone and are one sided parents.⁵⁰ It is also noted that these children are threatened and dismayed with God and as a result of this they have unfavourable God perception. When God is defined as a creator that is griever burning humans and children in hell, children are prone to run away from God and seek for a place in which God does not exist.⁵¹

3. Attachment to God

Attachment beginning with right after the birth contains some feelings and behaviours such as desire of spending time with someone who is attached, seeking for him or her when one fears or feels anxiety and relief occurring right after being felt existence of one who is attached.⁵² This theory put forward by Bowlby especially is dealt by Lee Kirkpatrick and underlines that attachment occurring at the beginning of life has similarities with some feelings like attachment to religion and God, wishing help from God, finding peace and relief.⁵³

Many researches in Psychology of Religion show that religion and especially God who is attached and interiorised relations are appropriate for secure attachment whose main functions are to provide secure base and safe haven.⁵⁴ Kirkpatrick, who indicates that in almost all religions, God is a secure attached to object, argues that religion is one of the main factors which help of stress and anxiety conditions. That pious people know God is omnipresence with themselves and protects them from any evil provides them relief and sense of security.⁵⁵

One's perception of God or religion does not form only with attachment in childhood. Beside this, his/her parents' manner of religion and God, social environment are also as much important as attachment. Two general hypotheses have been suggested and are seen as describing two distinct developmental

⁴⁸ Köylü, "Çocukluk Dönemi Dini İnanç Gelişimi ve Dini Eğitimi", 145.

⁴⁹ Öcal, "Okul Öncesi ve ilköğretim Çocuklarının Allah Tasavvurları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", 65.

⁵⁰ Köylü, "Çocukluk Dönemi Dini İnanç Gelişimi ve Dini Eğitimi", 145.

⁵¹ Öcal, "Okul Öncesi ve ilköğretim Çocuklarının Allah Tasavvurları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", 65.

⁵² Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", 34.

⁵³ Lee Kirkpatric, "Din Psikolojisinde Bağlanma Teorisi", Trans. Mustafa Koç, *Bilimname* 10/1 (2006): 140.

⁵⁴ Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", 42-43.

⁵⁵ Kirkpatric, "Din Psikolojisinde Bağlanma Teorisi", 143.

pathways in religion-the compensation hypothesis and the correspondence hypothesis. According to correspondence hypothesis, the most important reason that attachment theory has been dealt in religion is that internal working models which develop through first relations in one's life develop basis for one to set models for God image and other religious issues.⁵⁶ Studies have showed that contrary to Freudian allegations, people perceive God as mother rather than father.⁵⁷ So if attachment figures are mother and father at the beginning, God is perceived as mother-father image. To this hypothesis, what affects one's piety is the attachment pattern developed in childhood. One who attaches to his or her parents in a secure way also attaches to God in the same way. When compared to ones who have "weak bonds" with their parents, ones who have secure attachment pattern are most likely to follow their parents' piety.⁵⁸ People whose parents are piety are noted to attach to God in a secure way, while people whose parents are non-believers are expected to follow their parents' views about religion. It is concluded that parents' piety affect children's future God perception.

According to compensational hypothesis, unwholesome and deficient attachment developed in childhood lead one to complete that lack of confidence and affection. These people attach to God to compensate their feelings and the deficiency in attachment. They experience relief and security bonding to God. Beside this argument, some studies about this issue have noted that absence of faith may be related with weak parents-child attachment, in addition atheism and agnosticism are considered to be consequences of avoidant attachment.⁵⁹ People having avoidant attachment pattern have 'I do not need anyone' perception and this perception may evolve into 'I do not need a God' perception.

4. Qualitative Study Test

In this study, to investigate of children's perception of God at the ages of 4-6, two different kinds of kinder garden have been supposed to be studied with. Beside a kinder garden in which religion education is given to children, a kinder garden in which religious education is not approved has not been also included. The second kinder garden in which religious education is not given has not approved to be asked questions to children about their perceptions of God because of the fact that families would not approve it assuming that this study and questions about God might harm children's cognitive development and create confusion in children. The kinder garden in which religious education is given since families' demand it accepted to be asked questions to children about their perceptions and what they know about God, however they have rejected children to draw God on the account of the fact that complaints might be received by families.

This study has been conducted with 13 students in Yeşil Elma Kinder Garden which provides religious lessons in Ankara. Qualitative research method has been used and 5 main, 8 deeper questions have been asked students by using interviewing technique. The reason why qualitative research method and interviewing technique has been preferred is that the children's age is too young, and they either don't

⁵⁶ Hayta, "Anneden Allah'a: Bağlanma Teorisi ve İslam'da Allah Tasavvuru", 42.

⁵⁷ Kirkpatric, "Din Psikolojisinde Bağlanma Teorisi", 150.

⁵⁸ Kirkpatric, "Din Psikolojisinde Bağlanma Teorisi", 160.

⁵⁹ Kirkpatric, "Din Psikolojisinde Bağlanma Teorisi", 159.

know how to read and write or know them little. The obtained data have been subjected to descriptive analysis and interpreted. Throughout the meeting that children have felt comforted and calm has been assured and any pressure has not applied.

Since our test has been applied to limited number of children it is hard to generalize their perceptions of God for all children at these ages. Besides, this test has been applied only to children who take religious classes in their kinder garden and have religious families, so perception of God of children who do not take those classes and are not familiar with religious concepts is not involved in this study. As their perceptions of God might be totally different from the children we studied with, they also might be similar too. It is also worth to note that specifically implementation tests about child's perception of God at certain ages are limited. These kinds of implementation tests have been hoped to be continued and allowed us to understand of children world and of their perspectives.

According to the findings of the study, although the questions refer to abstract concepts the children have not had trouble understanding the questions. In former studies⁶⁰ it was noted that children can perceive the concept of the hereafter and God. Similar studies were also conducted in China, and the same results were achieved⁶¹

4-6 AGES CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF GOD: QUESTIONNAIRE

GENDER:

AGE:

1) What comes to your mind while thinking about God?

- Do you know God?
- What do you know about Him?

2) What do you think of God?

- Who or what does He look like?
- Where is God?
- Do you think everything is created by God?

⁶⁰ H. Wellman, D. Cross, J. Watson., "Meta-analysis of theory of mind development: The truth about false belief", *Child Development* 72 (2001): 655-684.

⁶¹ M.A. Sabbagh, F. Xu, S.M. Carlson, L.J. Moses, K. Lee., "The development of executive functioning and theory of mind: A comparison of Chinese and U.S. preschoolers.", *Psychological Science* 17 (2006): 74-81.

- 3) What do you feel when you think of God?
 - How close do you feel to Him?
- 4) Do you pray? What do you demand while praying?
 - What do you think about realization of prayers?
 - Is there anything special you do for realization of your prayers?
- 5) Could you draw me a picture of God?

After the test, it has been seen that most of the children have answered the question, "What does it occur in your mind while thinking about God? by counting some religious motifs such as performing salaah, saving the extra food, creation and heaven. 4 of them answered this question counting some attributes of God such as 'powerful' and 'giver of everything we wish', adding to this only one of them counted some of God's names which occurred in his mind during the test. The students counting the attributes of God have been noted they do not have a full knowledge about the words they have used and have repeated them as they already heard from their social environment. Whereas 2 of them have not answered this question, however any unfavourable God image has not been noted. And while almost all children have stated that they knew God, only one of them has not answered the question, and one has said that she did not know Him. It is expected that God image exists in every person who has knowledge of God. In this respect, it is very surprising that the student answered question so, although she both has religious lessons in the kinder garden, and she is old enough cognitively to understand the concept of God. It is possible that the student has been bored or hesitated.

They have generally answered the question about the things they knew about God by saying that "God created us", "He gives toys", "He realizes our prayers" and "He loves children". Similarly, 2 of the students have said that they only knew God's names. Distinctly, one of the children have answered it by saying God is nonesuch and there is no like Him as he might have heard Him from parents or older people around him. That the students who are considered to be in concrete operational stage and have not gained abstract thinking skill yet have answered questions counting the attributes of God might be deduced that they repeat what they have heard from social environment or what they have been told. Although children are largely known to achieve acquisitions by imitation of parents, Bandura claims that children often learn through imitation rather than direct teaching, even though families often do not aim to teach directly⁶². The children are likely to have learned their answers from their parents or classes because their parents are considered conservative and they take religious lessons in their schools.

After the main and their helper questions, it has been seen that children have given answers to the questions according to knowledge they acquired from lessons in the kinder garden, families or parents.

⁶² Albert Bandura. "The Role of Imitation In Personality Developmen", *The Journal of Nursery Education* 18/3 (1963): 2.

Beside this, even some of them have not given any answer, there has not been observed any negative God perception in children's manner.

The second question, "What do you think of God?" has been mostly answered that He is good, beautiful, big, enormous and old one. While one of the children has not answered the question, one of them has stated that she did not know anything. Three of the children have stated that God looked like Prophet Muhammad; even one of them said that God's name was Muhammad. Also, one of them has pointed that God was one who was with Prophet Muhammad. While two of them have not answered the question, one said that she is not able to image Him, and one said that He is invisible (adding that she heard this from her mother). Some of them have said He was enormous, and also one of them has added that he dreamed about Him and told that He had enormous hands and His head touched to sky. And one of them has stated that God had a beautiful face and smelled like a rose. Variously, one of them has expressed that God looks like Himself.

Anthropomorphic thought has become more distinguishable with this second question, and concrete God image has appeared. Because of the religious lessons and being told the name of the Prophet along with God's, it has formed a God image integrated with Prophet Muhammad. Children have given various answers for the question about where God is. While some of them have stated that He is in heaven, one has stated that He is in our hearts. There have been some children who have said that He is in Kabaa or in mosques. This is due to the children's anthropomorphic thought and also shows that children try to distinguish God from human beings.⁶³ 3 of them have answered it by saying they have not known. There have been also 2 children saying that He is everywhere.

Similar results were found in previous studies.⁶⁴ It can be said that the image of God of children who are still in the concrete period is generally dominated by the image of parents. Especially in the concrete period, the father figure is frequently seen in the image of God in the concrete period since father is considered to be stronger. However, no image of the parents has been noted in any of the answers during the interview. In another study⁶⁵ it was noted that children at the age of 4-5 attributed many false beliefs to God, but none of them were an image of a superhero

It has been seen that children mostly thought that everything was created by God. Almost each of child has given 'yes' as an answer when asked whether everything is created by God, although there are some who have not answered the question or who said they did not know. But one of them has told that God gave materials to humans and humans made them.

When children have been asked what they feel while thinking about God, most of them have said 'good' or 'happy'. While 2 of the students have not answered the question, rest of them have given different answers such as "I feel as if He is in Kabaa", "I assume He has given me a toy" (another has stated 'clothes'),

⁶³ Faruk Karaca. *Dini Gelişim Psikolojisi*. İstanbul: Eser Ofset Matbaacılık, 2016: 170

⁶⁴ Mustafa Öcal. "Okul Öncesi ve İlköğretim Çocuklarının Allah Tasavvurları Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13/2 (2014): 59-80;

⁶⁵ J.D. Lane et al. "Children's understanding of ordinary and extraordinary minds", *Child Development* 81/5 (2010): 1475-1489.

"I feel He has created everything", "I feel I love Him" or "I feel He is close to me". When children have been asked about their feelings about God, they often said positive things. Children's perception of God also shapes their emotional orientation towards God. The individual who considers God compassionate is expected to have a love-oriented perception of God. This positive or negative imagination is not only the product of the child's mind. The child develops a perception of God based on fear or love based on the parent's attitude. When the period between 7-12 years of Elkind's theory is examined, it is seen that the social life of children is important in shaping God's perception.⁶⁶

While the children mostly have stated that they have felt themselves so close to God (some added that they feel Him as if He is near them.), 3 of them stated that they have felt He is away from them. That these children feel God is away from them could be caused by either they do not favour to think that He is close to them or they understood the question as concrete closeness, so they have answered the question so. If it is because of the previous reason, that children have unfavourable God image may be considered.

Almost all children have stated that they pray when it has been asked whether they pray or not. It has been noted that children have personal demands in their prayers during the test such as a sister, book, money; protection for themselves and their families, toys, coke, gifts etc. making the general acceptance that ego-centric thought dominates children's wishes obvious. Also, it has been seen that most of the children thought that their prayers were realized. Furthermore, that some children have stated their answers for this question with examples has been noted. For instance, one of the children has said that she had lost her ring and she prayed to God to find it, and after getting in car she found her ring, so her prayer was realized. She has also said after putting her teeth under her pillow, she found candies under her pillow the next morning. Another one has stated that he asked his demands from parents at first and if they do not do it, then he asked from his brother, and then he and his brother can afford this. When they have been asked whether there is anything special they do for realization of their prayers, whereas some have answered that there was not any (2 of them have not answered the question), 9 of the students have stated that they performed salaah or ablution, prayed in holy days, recited Quran, also one of them have said that he played with his toys.

As a result of the test, it has been seen that while children answered the questions as they had been taught beforehand, they anyhow displayed anthropomorphic and ego-centric thoughts describing their images of God.

CONCLUSION

The image of God, as a psychological structure, is both a person's thoughts about how he feels about God, but also mental perceptions of how God feels about him.⁶⁷ The perception of God shapes not only the religious life of the individual, but also his absolute life, so it is an essential subject that needs to be examined. The individual's perception of God is decisive in his/her behaviours towards other people in

⁶⁶ David Elkind., "The Origins of Religion In The Child", *Review Of Religious Research* 12/1 (1970): 39.

⁶⁷ Christopher Grimes., "God Image Research: A Literature Review", *Journal of Spirituality In Mental Health* 9 (2007):12.

his/her social environment. Another important point is that the perception of God influences people's relations with the social environment as well as being influenced by them.⁶⁸ According to Attachment Theory, the relationship of baby with caregiver is the determinant element for his/her relationship with God in the future. It is important that children have positive self and secure attachment patterns for gaining positive God perceptions. Attitudes and perceptions of caregivers whom children spend the most time with shape child's mental and emotional world.

The study has been conducted in Yeşil Elma Kindergarten in Ankara in order to understand the perception of God of kindergarten students at the ages of 4-6. In the interviews with the students, the students have been asked 5 main and 8 deeper questions and tried to reach their perception of God. As a result, it has been noted that the students have the concept of God and have a positive perspective in general and that their ego-centric and anthropomorphic thoughts are dominant in their images of God.

In this study, attachment theory and development of perception of God have been revived; its related subjects and early studies have been researched by using different sources, and also comparing them with each other. Moreover, simple and short questionnaire of which results have showed that our study is supported by early research results has been applied on 4-6-year-old children. That some distinctive features in children such as easy-credibility, animism, imitation formulate children's perception of God have been revealed again. Although that it may be said that studies about both attachment theory and children's perception of God is not few, several works are available.

During the test, the children have answered questions about how they perceive God by quoting what they heard from others beforehand. However, since they still have some distinctive features which are obvious at these ages, they have also given answers according to their perceptive. These features, like anthropomorphism, have led children to perceive God as Prophet Muhammad or confused them to distinguish both figures from each other, adding to assuming He is huge and enormous. Also, it has been seen that children are tend to think God is in sky, heaven or in Kabaa. How children gave answers for God related questions has revealed that children's backgrounds, such as religious families or religious education, form their God and religious perceptions.

As a result of the children's religious backgrounds, they have been seen to tend to pray which they mostly verbalize their ego-centric wishes. While they wish money and toy, their wishes for protection for their families have also been noted.

Finally, any negative on/about God perception has been emerged during the test, even there are some children who have hesitated or have not answered some of the questions. It is noted that most of the children have favourable, friendly God perception and they have believed in a God as He was told.

⁶⁸ Leslie Francis, J.S. Craft, A. Pyke., "Religious Diversity, Empathy And God Images: Perspectives From The Psychology of Religion Shaping A Study Among Adolescents In The UK", *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 33/3 (2012): 293.

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