TÜRKİYE'DEKİ İLKÖĞRETİM ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN YALNIZLIK DÜZEYLERİNİN ARAŞTIRILMASI

Investigation Of Primary School Students' Loneliness Levels In Turkey

Ayfer Tezel[1], Ayşe Gürol[2], Hava Özkan[3]

[1]PhD, Associate Professor, Ankara University, Faculty of Health Science, Department of Nursing, Ankara, Turkey

[2]PhD, Assistant Professor, Atatürk University, Health Services Vocational School, Department of Dialysis, Erzurum, Turkey

[3]PhD, Assistant Professor, Atatürk University, Faculty of Health Science, Department of Midwifery, Erzurum, Turkey

Ayfer Tezel, Associate Professor, Ayşe Gürol, Assistant Professor, Hava Özkan, Assistant Professor,

İletişim:
Hava Özkan
PhD, Assistant Professor,
Atatürk University, Faculty of Health Science, Department of Midwifery,
Erzurum, Turkey

Tel: +90 442 236 09 83

e-mail:
havaorhan67@hotmail.com

ÖZET

Amaç: : Bu çalışma, bir ilköğretim okulundaki öğrencilerin yalnızlık düzeylerini ve yalnızlık düzeylerini etkileyen faktörleri araştırmak amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Mateyal metod: Tanımlayıcı tipte olan araştırmanın evrenini Erzurum'da bir ilköğretim okulunda öğrenim gören 155 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Çalışma, verilerin toplandığı gün okulda bulunan 129 öğrenci ile tamamlanmıştır. Araştırmaya katılım oranı % 84.22'dir. Veriler, öğrencilerin tanımlayıcı özelliklerini içeren bir anket formu ve UCLA ölçeği ile toplanmıştır.

Bulgular: Öğrencilerin, % 58.9 erkek, % 62'si kendilerinin başarılı olduğu, % 98.4' ünün en az bir arkadaşının olduğu, % 79.8 'i kendilerini yalnız hissetmediklerini ifade ettikleri belirlenmiştir. Öğrencilerin yalnızlık puan ortalamaları 39.98±9.98 olarak bulunmuştur. Düşük yalnızlık düzeyi olan öğrencilerin (% 85.3), ortalamaları 36.10±7.59, yüksek yalnızlık düzeyine sahip olan öğrencilerin (% 14.7), puan ortalamaları 55.68±3.83 olarak belirlenmiştir.

Sonuçlar: Öğrencilerin; ekonomik düzeylerinin, arkadaşının olması, yalnız hissetme, okulda yardım alma gibi durumların yalnızlık puan ortalamasını etkilendiği bulundu.

Anahtar kelimeler: Adölesan, Yalnızlık, Okul Sağlığı Hizmetleri, Hemşirelik

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this work is to investigate the loneliness levels of students in a primary school and factors which affects the loneliness level.

Materials and Methods: The study consists of 155 students in a primary school of Erzurum. The study group comprised 129 students who were at school in the day in which the research had been carried out. 84.22 % of the students participated in the research. The data have been collected with a questionnaire including the descriptive properties of students and the UCLA-Loleliness Scale.

Results: 58.9% of study population was male, 62% expressed themselves as successful, 98.4% had at least one friend and 79.8% did not feel alone. The average point of loneliness of the students was 39.98±9.98. The students with low loneliness level (85.3%) had an average point of 36.10±7.59 and the other students who possessed a high loneliness level (14.7%), had an average point of 55.68±3.83.

Conclusions: The average of loneliness point of students was influenced from economic level, having a friend, feeling themselves alone and getting assistance in school.

Key words: *Adolescence, Loneliness, School Health Services, Nursing*

INTRODUCTION

Loneliness is an undesirable and unpleasant experience accompanied by anxiety, anger, sadness and a feeling of being different from other people (1). Peplau and Perlman (2) consider loneliness on the basis of human relationships and define it as a feeling arising from the condition that a person's existing relationships fail to meet his/her demands (3).

Adolescence is a period when loneliness is felt intensively. In this developmental stage, individuals go through unavoidable and important phases, such as physical change and identity and personality development, and they prefer to be alone especially after their physical transformation. It is noted that adolescents in this stage feel loneliness at an intense level and exhibit some typical signs of loneliness (4-6).

There are studies conducted in our country on the relationship between loneliness and various personal variables such as age, gender, family's education level, and socioeconomic level (7, 8). Buluş (9) drew attention in his study on adolescent students that 17.3% of students suffered loneliness. Saraçoğlu (10) assessed the relationship between the loneliness levels of adolescent students and their academic success level, number of friends, number of siblings and socioeconomic level. Tan (11) investigated how the loneliness level of high school students are affected by variables such as family support level, gender, and parents' education level, family's economic condition, number of siblings, and grade level.

In other studies, reasons of loneliness experiences in adolescence are listed as family relationships, social environment, teacher relationship, school environment, friend relationships and problems experienced in adolescence (12-14).

Considered from cognitive, behavioral and psychological point of view, adolescence is an important developmental stage in which important changes are experienced. Since the changes that occur in this stage determine the adult characteristics of an individual, adolescence is a highly important stage for an individual's life. Evaluations on adolescent health carried out in this stage may reveal significant clues for planning school health services.

The objective of this study is to determine the loneliness level of primary school students and to investigate some factors that are considered to affect students' sense of loneliness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects
This descriptive study was conducted on 155 students at a primary school in the city centre of Erzurum. Sample selection was not applied in the research, and all students studying at the primary school were planned to be included in the study.

Students were informed about the objective and significance of the study and about the forms to be completed, and participation was based on the principle of volunteering. 129 students, who were present at the school on the day of data collection and who volunteered to participate in the research, were included in the study. Participation rate was 84.22%.

Data collection
Research data were collected during class time by using the questionnaire prepared by researchers and 'UCLA-Loneliness Scale'. Data collection lasted approximately 15 minutes.

The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions in total about children's descriptive characteristics (10 questions) and the concept of loneliness (6 questions). Students' economic conditions, success status, definitions of loneliness, friends at school, behavior of seeking help for loneliness, sensation of loneliness, and participation status in social activities were determined in line with their own expressions.

UCLA-Loneliness Scale was developed by Russell, Peplau and Ferguson (15); its validity and reliability in Turkey was established by Demir (16), and it included a total of 20 items (10 regular and 10 irregular). In the study carried out by Demir (16), internal consistency analyses of the scale were performed over 72 individuals and cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.96. The scale was scored as four-point likert type. The highest and lowest scores of the scale were 80 and 20, respectively. The items that include positive statements were scored as 'never feel' (4 points), 'rarely feel' (3 points), 'occasionally feel' (2 points) and 'often feel' (1 point); and the items that include negative statements were scored the opposite way as 'never feel' (1 point), 'rarely feel' (2 points), 'occasionally feel' (3 points) and 'often feel' (4 points). Higher scores indicate higher levels of loneliness. Individuals' loneliness degrees were assessed by giving cutoff scores. Cutoff score was determined by adding one point to the sum of sampling mean (X)

and standard deviation (SD). In this study, the cutoff score of UCLA scale was found to be 50.13. According to the cutoff score of the sample group, individuals with total scores below 50.13 in UCLA Loneliness scale were categorized in low loneliness level, and those with total score above 50.13 were categorized in high loneliness level. Cronbach's alpha value of the scale in this study was found to be 0.81.

Data Analysis
Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Software Program, version 11.5 for Windows was used in data analysis. Statistical analyses were based on percentages and mean±SD for demographics test.

Ethical considerations
This study was conducted upon the approval of the City National Education Directorship and explanation of its objectives to the principals, teachers, and students. Informed consent was verbally obtained from voluntary participants. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were advised not to write their names on the questionnaire and were told that their responses would be confidential.

RESULTS

58.9% of the students who participated in the research were male, 94.6% were in the age group of 12-14 years, the mothers of 35.7% were primary school graduates, the fathers of 45% were university graduates, and the economic status of 60.5% was good (Table 1). 62% of the students expressed themselves as successful, 98.4% indicated that they had at least one friend, and 79.8% did not feel lonely. In addition, 79.8% of the students defined loneliness as an unfavorable feeling (Table 1). Score means of students with low loneliness levels (85.3%) and high loneliness levels (14.7%) were found to be 36.10±7.59 and 55.68±3.83, respectively (Table 2).

Table 1: Demographic Data of Students

Characteristics	n	%	UCLA score means
Gender			
Female	53	41.1	39.66±9.00
Male	76	58.9	38.51±10.64
Age			
12-14	122	94.6	39.06± 9.71
15-17	7	5.4	37.57±14.81
Mother's Education Level			
Primary School	46	35.7	41.71±8.47
Secondary School	17	13.1	40.11±11.99
High School	31	24.0	37.83± 9.83
University	35	27.2	35.85±10.25
Father's Education Level			
Primary School	20	15.5	40.30±9.06
Secondary School	17	13.1	43.58±8.28
High School	34	26.4	38.08±9.87
University	58	45.0	37.70±10.56
Economic Status			
High	78	60.5	36.60±8.73
Medium	47	36.4	42.78±10.65
Low	4	3.1	40.75±13.37
Success status			
Successful	80	62.0	38.02±9.85
Unsuccessful	49	38.0	40.55±10.10
Presence of friends			
Yes	127	98.4	38.01±9.23
No	2	1.6	45.35±12.51
Participation in social activities			
Yes	66	51.2	38.56±10.80
No	63	48.8	39.42±9.10
Definition of Loneliness			
Unfavorable	103	79.8	38.68±9.37
No idea	26	20.2	40.15±12.25
Status of being felt lonely			
Yes	26	20.2	44.30±11.20
No	103	79.8	37.64±9.23
Status of receiving help when feeling loneliness			
Yes	83	64.3	36.33±8.35
No	46	35.7	43.76±10.96

Table 2: The Mean Scores According to the Students' Level of Loneliness

Loneliness level	n	%	Mean±SD	Min.-Max.
Low (20-50.13 score)	110	85.3	36.10±7.59	21-50
High (50.14-80 score)	19	14.7	55.68±±3.83	51-67
Total	**129**	**100**	**38.98±9.98**	**21-67**

Loneliness score means were found to be 39.66±9.00 in female students and 39.06±9.71 in students between 12-14 years of age, and it was observed that loneliness level was not affected by gender and age (Table 3: t=.641, t=.264, respectively, p>0.05).

Education level of parents was not found to create any difference in students' loneliness levels (Table 3: t=2.596, p>0.05, t=1.759, p>0.05, respectively). Loneliness score means were found to be 36.60±8.73 in students with high economic status, 42.78±10.65 in students with average economic status, and 40.75±13.37 in students with low economic status (Table 1). A statistical difference was detected between students' economic conditions and loneliness levels (Table 3, t=6.148, p>0.05).

Loneliness score means were found to be 38.02±9.85 in students who considered themselves successful, and 38.56±10.80 in students who participated in so-cial activities. It was determined that students' loneliness score means were not affected by their participation in social activities and their level of success (Table 3: t= -1.400, p>0.05, t=-.492, p>0.05, respectively).

Loneliness score means were found to be 38.01±9.23 in students who had at least one friend, and 44.30±11.20 in students who felt themselves lonely. It was also determined that loneliness score means were affected by students' status of having friends and feeling loneliness (Table 3: t=-2.903, t=3.146, respectively, p<0.05).

Loneliness score means of students, who received help when they felt lonely, were determined as 36.33±8.35, and a statistical difference was found between the loneliness scores of students who did and did not receive help (Table 3, t=-3.995, p<0.05).

Table 3: Distribution of Loneliness Test Values According to Students' Descriptive Characteristics

Descriptive Characteristics	Test value	p
Gender	.641	.523
Age	.264	.801
Mother's education	2.596	.055
Father's education	1.759	.158
Economic status	6.148	**.003**
Success status	-1.400	.164
Presence of friends	-2.903	**.004**
Participation in social activities	-.492	.624
Loneliness	3.146	**.002**
Receiving help	-3.995	**.000**

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in order to determine the loneliness levels of primary school students and to examine the factors that are thought to affect loneliness. The relationship of students' perception of loneliness to variables like gender, age, economic status and success was investigated in the study.

14.7% of the students in the sample group had high levels of loneliness. This rate was reported as 17.3% in the study carried out by Buluş (9) with adolescent students.

It is considered that students' loneliness levels are affected by the tension and pressure caused by the exam which primary school students are required to take to pursue their secondary education as well as other similar proficiency exams.

When UCLA loneliness scores were compared, it was determined that gender did not have any effect on UCLA loneliness scores although female students had higher score means. Buluş (9) noted in his study on university students that 13.70% of female students and 17.92% of male students felt loneliness at a high level. Eskin (3) reported in his study that there was no significant difference between the UCLA loneliness scores of male and female students. Çeçen (17) also determined a similarity between the loneliness score means of male and female students. In the study conducted by Demirtaş (18) on primary school students, no significant difference was found between gender and the scores obtained from the loneliness scale. On the other hand, in their study, Öztürk et al. (19) reported a significant difference between the students' loneliness level and their gender and age. The results of these studies comply with the results of the present study. The literature survey also revealed findings that do not support the study results. Yalçın et al. (20) reported that students' loneliness levels differed according to gender and that the loneliness score means of male students were significantly higher.

Although no statistically significant difference was found in the study between the students' age and level of loneliness, the scores of loneliness level were found to be lower in students with higher age average. In a research which investigated the effect of age on loneliness level (21), it was determined that loneliness level decreased with the increase in age. Similar results were obtained in other studies (22). In a study carried out with university students from different cultures (23), age was reported to have no effect on loneliness level. The findings of this study

are similar to the findings obtained from several studies on the relationship between loneliness and age in adolescents (24,25).

The study revealed no significant relationship between parents' education level and students' loneliness scores. Although Eskin (3) demonstrated that the education level of both the mother and father is associated with loneliness, students whose mothers had not received any school education had higher scores of loneliness compared to students whose mothers had higher education levels. Similarly, it was determined that loneliness scores were higher in students whose fathers had not received any school education or received only primary school education compared to students whose fathers were high school and university graduates. Öztürk et al. (19) found a statistically significant relationship between mothers' education level and students' level of loneliness.

In this study, level of loneliness was determined to be related to economical status. It was observed that having lower economical income was an important factor that affected loneliness. Similarly, Kılınç (26) noted in his research that there was a relationship between loneliness and the socioeconomic status of the family and that the students attending schools of lower socioeconomic level felt more loneliness. Özdemir and Tuncay (27) also reported a significant difference between the students' loneliness scores depending on the economic status of families. It was detected that students with lower economic status received higher scores from the loneliness scale compared to students with medium or higher economic status. These students are considered to participate less in social activities due to their economic insufficiency and therefore build weaker social networks. These findings reinforce the results of other studies that report a relationship between loneliness and monthly income and economic support.

On the other hand, Yılmaz et al. (28) did not detect any statistically significant relationship between economic status and loneliness, although the loneliness levels were found to be higher in students whose incomes were lower than their expenses.

In this study, no significant relationship was found between the students' academic success and levels of loneliness. It was reported in Demir's study that students with lower academic success received higher scores from the loneliness scale compared to students with medium academic success level (9,16). In the study conducted by Yıldırım (29) on the effect of some individual, social and familial characteristics on the loneliness levels of university students, it was concluded that students who were academically unsuccessful experienced more loneliness compared to academically successful ones.

The study also revealed a significant relationship between the status of having friends and the level of loneliness. This finding is comparable to the findings of other studies (9,30,31). No significant relationship was found between students' participation in social activities and their levels of loneliness. Adolescence is a very important stage in terms of mental as well as individual and social development. Thus, educational institutions should take a close interest in children's individual and social development besides their mental development. In today's living conditions which push children into loneliness, precautions should be taken to define, prevent and decrease loneliness whose prevalence is gradually increasing. One of the measures to be taken in this direction is to activate studies for improving students' social skills and relationships as well as their academic success, to prepare the environments required for this improvement, and to avoid suppressing the social relationships between students.

20.2 % of the students who participated in this study stated that they felt themselves lonely (Table 1), and it was determined that the difference between their status of loneliness and UCLA loneliness score means was statistically significant. Eskin (3) reported that 65% of the students felt loneliness and that female students felt lonelier than the male students. It was also noted that the students, who experienced moments of extreme loneliness, had higher levels of loneliness compared to students who did not have such experience. Öztürk et al. (19) found a significant relationship between loneliness and students' methods of coping with problems. They reported that the presence of people with whom students can share their problems helped to increase social support and decrease loneliness. One limitation of our study was the small sample size.

CONCLUSION

We conclude, that students with low socioeconomic status should be introduced to grant opportunities and provided with assistance to benefit from these grants; students should be encouraged to participate in social, cultural and sports activities to spend time with their peers; studies should be pursued within the scope of school health services in order to provide students with skills to cope with loneliness; the definition and meaning of loneliness, situations that cause loneliness and the ways of coping with loneliness should be included in the education programs to be prepared within the scope of school health services; loneliness levels of students should be assessed frequently by the personnel working at school health services; and the students who need help should be provided with skills to cope with loneliness. Future studies are needed.

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