Application of Perceived Family Support Scale to Individuals with Special Needs

Mehmet CELİK[1], Yunus Emre AYNA[2]

aPsychological Counselor, Toros University, Turkey
bPsychologist, Dicle University, Turkey

Abstract:

Objective: This article aims at having data on emotions which individuals with special needs feel during interactions with their families, as well as testing family social support scores for those individuals, and testing the applicability of Perceived Family Support Scale to them. **Method**: The Perceived Family Support Scale was applied to 127 hearing-impaired individuals who attend a vocational high-school, a secondary school or a rehabilitation center. The scale consisted of socio-demographical questions and a 20-point Perceived Family Support Scale. The participants were asked to make a selection and a sorting among those points according to the importance level of their preference by using sign language. The data were analyzed by SPSS 16 software. **Findings**: Out of 127 individuals participating in the study, 72 were male (56.7 of the population) and 55 were female (43.3% of the population) and their ages ranged between 10 and 20. The average score of the perceived family support was found to be 26 points for all individuals in a scale of 40. The family support perceived by the female participants was found to be higher than that of the male participants. While such factors as participants' ages, whether their parents are alive and number of siblings have inconsistent impacts on the scores of perceived family support for the participants, the study revealed that whether they live with their biological parents, having parents with high levels of education, having high income levels of the family and participants' having disabled siblings increase the participants' perceived family support scores. **Result**: The study aimed at gathering data on experiences and emotions which individuals with special needs have during interactions within their families, testing perceived family support they receive, testing the applicability of Perceived Family Support Scale on such individuals. It can be said that the perceived family support scores for individuals with special needs due to their hearing impairment is lower than average scores for normal individuals, which were obtained in previous studies. When we analyze the socio-demographic input and the perceived family support scores of the participating individuals with special needs due to their hearing impairment, we see that living with biological parents, parents' high levels of education, high income levels of the family and having disabled siblings increase the scores of the perceived family support. Therefore, it is thought that supporting and strengthening those individuals in terms of such characteristics may increase the level of perceived family support.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90532-488-6011

E-mail address: mcelikram@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

One of the factors facilitating adaptation of people with inefficiencies is provision of support services that help to meet the needs of the child and the family. In another saying, those services help to diminish problems about inefficiency and help individuals to cope with those problems. In addition to support services that individuals with inefficiencies get from experts or institutions, the services they receive from people around may also facilitate them to adapt to the current conditions in which they live. Although there is no consensus on what constitutes *social support*, it was observed that there are many definitions. While Sarason, Levine, Basham and Sarason (1983) state that *social support* is a concept which is about how much the individual is liked and respected by others, Cobb (1976 in Gallagher, Beckman and Cross, 1983), who is the author having proposed the most extensive definition, discusses that *social support* is the sum of information that makes the individual believe that he/she is (a) concerned about, liked by others, (b) important, (c) a part of the network of communication and necessities. For Gallagher et al. (1983), social support is a cure that may reduce negative effects of crises and changes in people's lives. Kaplan and Kilhlea defined social support as connections between people or groups which serve for improving adaptive adequacy to cope with short-term crises or transitions in lives, long-term difficulties, stresses and deprivation (Kaplan and Kilhlea, 1976, p.41 in Kazak and Marvin, 1984). Social support has many functions which could be summarized as follows: (1) They provide emotional easiness for people by supplying services and goods they need. (2) They provide people with ways to struggle against problems by guiding those people. (3) They provide feedbacks that improve individuals' performance. (4) They contribute to positive adaptation and self-development. (5) They protect people against negative effects of stress by providing connections among individuals during both daily lives and necessities and crises (Dunst and Trivette, 1986: Kazak and Marvin, 1984: Sarason et al, 1983).

As can be understood from its definitions and functions, social support has a multi-dimensional structure. Just as it is fed by different supportive sources, it also refers to the number of supportive sources needed for the family. We face with many types of support, such as informational, material, emotional, social togetherness, state of belonging, daily care. We can group those support types under two main categories as *emotional support* and *instrumental support* (Ailen, Ciambrone and Welch, 2000; Chen and Thang, 1997; Cohen and Wills, 1985; Dunst and Trivette,1986; Şahin,1999; Unsal,1996).

Emotional Support: Knowing people with whom one can speak about his/her personal problems and issues, or having a confidant, provides individuals with endurance against difficult situations generated by short or long term problems. It eases individuals by helping them to have the feeling that they are not alone, but important and valuable. By this way it contributes positively to their health. It reduces or blocks stress by satisfying the need to have close relationships and to be together with other people. Depending on the conditions, this type of support may frequently be as important as or more important than instrumental support.

Instrumental Support: Also called as *informational* or *material support,* this type of support includes being concerned, feedback, monetary or material aid, support about care and education, etc. It helps diagnosing, understanding and coping with problematic situations. It provides the individual with methods to overcome problematic situations by giving the individual information about services, institutions, resources and laws regarding the handicap. It reduces stress by offering direct solutions to material problems or providing more time for family members to relax and to join leisure-time activities more frequently.

It was alleged that emotional and instrumental support provided for individuals makes an effect on their attitude and behavior, obtains opportunities and models, by which means it influences individuals in a positive way (Dunst, 2000).

This particular study aims at providing data regarding emotions which individuals with special needs feel during interactions with their families, tests social support for individuals with special needs, and applies Perceived Family Support Scale to individuals with special needs.

METHOD

127 individuals with special needs between the ages of 10 and 20, who were being trained in a vocational high-school, a secondary school or a special training and rehabilitation center established exclusively for those people, were applied a 20-point Perceived Family Support Scale and they were asked to range their preferences among the points according to the importance they attach to them by using sign language. During the application of the Scale, every student was offered guidance in sign language by their teachers. The data collected during the study were analyzed using SPSS 16 statistical software, during which t-test and Scheffe Test were used.

Perceived Family Support Scale (PFS Scale): It was generated by Procidano and Heler and translated into Turkish by Sorias. The Scale is valid and dependable for the Turkish society. It consists of 20 questions to be answered "yes", "no" or "somewhat." Answers to questions 3, 4, 16, 19 and 20 are valued at (2) for "no", (0) for "yes" and (1) for "somewhat." Answers to other questions are valued at (0) for "no", (2) for "yes" and (1) for "somewhat." The evaluation of the scale is done according to the total score. The point received from the scale varies between 0 and 40. The bigger the point received, the more support the family provides. The dependability coefficient of the scale in this research is 0.86.