Volume 2 (1) Page 1 - 17

https://doi.org/10.29329/ijcae.2023.575.1

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Social Emotional Problems Causing Stress in Gifted Students*

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Abstract

When the relevant literature on the social adaptation and emotional development of gifted individuals

is analyzed, it is stated that gifted individuals are more prone to social adaptation and emotional

problems than their peers. In order for gifted children not to experience problems due to differences in

developmental characteristics compared to their peers, it is necessary to be aware of these problems

that children experience and to show an appropriate approach to the problem. The approach to be

applied should be addressed before children experience problems and should be implemented in a way

that contributes to the effective manifestation of their potential. For this purpose, this review will

present social-emotional problems such as simultaneous development, perfectionism, loneliness,

suicide profiles, unexpected failure, friendship relations, self-esteem, and social exclusion experienced

by gifted children based on the relevant literature.

Keywords: Social Adaptation, Emotional Development, Gifted

Received: 09.04.2023 – **Accepted:** 15.06.2023 – **Published:** 30.06.2023

* This article was produced from the doctoral thesis of the first author under the supervision of the second author, titled "The Effect of Creative Drama-Based Stress Coping Program on the Stress Coping Skills of Special Talented Students".

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INTRODUCTION

When analyzing the relevant literature on the social and emotional development of gifted individuals, it is suggested that these individuals are more prone to experiencing social and emotional problems compared to their peers. Hollingworth (1942) proposed the theory of optimal intelligence, stating that individuals do not have problems adapting to daily life and acquiring certain life skills until they reach a certain level of intelligence, but they experience difficulties in these areas once their intelligence surpasses a certain threshold. Kaur (2017) argues that gifted students experience higher levels of stress than their normally developing peers. Stuart and Beste (2008) state that gifted individuals are more sensitive than their peers and struggle to communicate with others due to their emotional sensitivity, which makes them more introverted. Koçal et al. (2009) express that gifted students require guidance in communicating with others for their social development, and that their teachers may find it difficult to communicate with these children. However, some studies in the relevant literature have found that gifted individuals are not prone to experiencing social and emotional problems.

In order to prevent gifted children from experiencing problems due to differences in their developmental characteristics compared to their peers, it is important to be aware of the problems they face and to approach them appropriately. The approach applied should be proactive, enabling children to effectively demonstrate their potential before problems arise. Therefore, based on the relevant literature, this review will address social and emotional problems that gifted children experience such as concurrent development, perfectionism, loneliness, suicide profiles, unexpected failure, peer relationships, self-esteem, and social exclusion.

Asynchronous Development

In humans, all developmental areas tend to progress at the same level and speed. Asynchronous development, on the other hand, refers to the situation where individuals' development characteristics do not progress at the same rate or level. Saranlı and Metin (2012) indicate that the degree and pace of intellectual, social-emotional, and psychomotor development in gifted children occur at different levels. Therefore, the asynchronous development observed in gifted children can lead to some problems in their interpersonal relationships and social-emotional lives.

An analysis of the relevant literature reveals that asynchronous development has negative effects on the social adjustment and emotional development of gifted students. In their study on gifted children in early childhood education, Hatc and Johnson (1988) found that due to their asynchronous developmental characteristics, these children tend to excessively rely on their imagination, have

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difficulty in relating to their peers, prefer playing alone, have difficulty joining peer groups, and exhibit behaviors such as constantly expecting invitations or attention from others.

Ataman (2003) notes that a 5-year-old gifted child may have a reading level equivalent to that of a primary school student, but may exhibit negative developmental characteristics such as having trouble tying their shoes or sucking their fingers. In response to this situation, parents may resort to applying pressure or punishment to their children. Children who cannot meet their parents' expectations may exhibit more depressive behaviors due to their lack of self-confidence. Additionally, due to their asynchronous developmental characteristics, these children may form friendships with people older than themselves, which can lead to older individuals having to deal with problems they experienced at a younger age. For example, a 10-year-old child who befriends an 18-year-old may encounter issues such as substance use, sexual relationships, and driving, which are typically experienced by individuals in their late teens.

Perfectionism

In the relevant literature, it has been determined that gifted children exhibit more perfectionist behavior compared to their normally developing peers. Gifted children put more effort into making everything they do perfect. However, this situation negatively affects their social and emotional development (Akarsu & Mutlu, 2017). Excessive perfectionism in gifted individuals has been found to cause an increase in social anxiety and stress levels, energy loss, sleep and appetite problems, exam anxiety, negative self-image, depression, and suicidal tendencies (Adelson, 2007; Akarsu & Mutlu, 2017; Silverman, 2007; Taşdemir, 2003).

According to Karakuş (2010), perfectionism in gifted individuals causes excessive fear and anxiety, leading to feelings of guilt and hindering them from making discoveries and establishing healthy relationships due to excessive selectivity in new friendships. Kornblum (2005) states that the feedback, critical attitudes, and high expectations that gifted children receive from their families lead to perfectionism in children. Similarly, Kawamura (2002) states that gifted children who realize that their parents have high expectations of them make a lot of effort to achieve their set goals and always fear making mistakes. This situation also leads to gifted children displaying behavior that is restless, anxious, Stubborn, and far from creative.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a personality trait that stems from not being able to derive sufficient satisfaction from social and emotional life and choosing to live in one's own world away from social interaction. Individuals who prefer loneliness have a high perception of feeling different from others, not being

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accepted by others, not belonging to a group, and not having anyone to share their feelings and thoughts with. Studies have shown that feelings of loneliness are associated with low self-esteem, social shyness, depression, and low peer acceptance (Brage et al., 1993; Parker & Asher, 1993; Qualter & Munn, 2002; Sletta et al., 1996).

Sak (2014) states that while some gifted children prefer to be alone, feelings of loneliness for some gifted children are a way of life stemming from feeling different from others. However, Sak argues that gifted children's feelings of loneliness are caused by their peers excluding them, gifted children boasting about their superiority and being unable to join other groups, and their inability to find suitable peer groups.

Boland and Gross (2007) state that gifted students' loneliness may result from various factors, such as differences in intellectual abilities, interests, and lifestyles. They also suggest that teachers and school staff can help gifted students cope with loneliness by creating opportunities for them to socialize with others with similar interests and abilities.

Suicide

Suicide is defined as an attempt by an individual to find a solution to the unbearable pain, weakened and distorted self (Shneidman, 1986). The suicide attempt is defined as an action or behavior by an individual that puts their own life in danger or has the intention to do so, while suicidal ideation refers to thoughts and behaviors that involve contemplating suicide without taking direct action to kill oneself (Arsel, 2010).

Analysis of relevant literature shows that common characteristics of highly gifted individuals who attempt suicide include perfectionism (Apistola, 2017; Hyatt, 2010), hypersensitivity (Cross et al., 1996), loneliness, lack of friends, unexpected failure (Reis & McCoach, 2000), and social exclusion (Cross, 2005; Dixon & Scheckel, 1996). Additionally, Chen et al. (2020) identify factors such as communication with family members, sleep, cognitive and psychological states as influencing the thoughts that lead academically gifted individuals to attempt suicide.

The emotional and sensitive nature of highly gifted individuals, combined with their difficulty in fitting in with their families and society, increases their risk of suicidal behavior (Sak, 2014). Trujillo (2018) argues that the asynchronous development of gifted individuals in areas where they are identified as superior leads to social adjustment and emotional stress, which negatively affect these individuals.

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Unexpected Failure in Gifted Individuals

Unexpected failure is defined as low academic achievement in gifted individuals, which is a significant problem they often face. The occurrence of low achievement in gifted individuals is usually surprising, given their existing intellectual potential (Neihart et al., 2002). According to Çağlar (2004), the failure of gifted individuals is an incredible and unacceptable situation, as they are expected to overcome any obstacle and succeed under any circumstance.

When the relevant literature on unexpected failure experienced by gifted individuals is analyzed, it is stated that the lack of appropriate education and training programs, undiagnosed learning difficulties, the influence of peer groups, and other emotional problems experienced by these individuals cause unexpected failure (Kerr, 1991; Peterson & Colangelo, 1995; Renzulli & Park, 2002).

Reis (1998) categorizes the unexpected failure experienced by gifted individuals into two groups: continuing and temporary. Temporary unexpected failure may disappear completely after a certain period, but may reoccur at specific times. Continuing unexpected failure is a long-lasting condition in which there are no interruptions in the failure. The individual experiences ups and downs in their failure, and has accepted the situation.

Friendship Relationships

Friendship relationships are important skills for individuals to engage in social interaction with members of their society, initiate communication with them, sustain it, and find solutions to the social problems they experience. Therefore, friendship relationships have an important position in acquiring interpersonal social skills. Relevant literature has found that friendship relationships have a significant impact on individuals' social adaptation, emotional development, and cognitive development (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002; Heiman, 2000; Shure, 200).

In the relevant literature, the reason for the social emotional problems experienced by gifted children is identified as difficulties in family and friendship relationships, setting hard-to-reach goals (Dixon et al., 2004), high expectations from parents and critical attitudes towards their children (Enns et al., 2002; Kawamura et al., 2002), and academic achievement pressures (Peterson et al., 2009), and all of these experiences have been found to negatively affect gifted children's friendship relationships and their interaction with the community they are in.

Gifted children may show some differences in their expectations regarding friendship relationships compared to their normally developing peers (Gross, 2002). Gifted children, due to their

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existing potentials, may be more popular and leaders in their peer groups, but they prefer to be alone due to their different interests and non-simultaneous development characteristics. This situation affects their friendship relationships.

Saranlı (2017) argues that non-simultaneous development is an important factor that affects gifted children's friendship relationships. Although gifted children have more advanced mental skills than their peers, their social and emotional development and psychomotor development occur at a lower level than their peers. Therefore, gifted individuals have difficulty establishing friendships with their peers.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem, defined as the evaluation and perceptions that an individual holds about themselves (Levent, 2014), refers to the beliefs of a person regarding their competence, significance, sufficiency, and worth (Bildiren, 2013). Research conducted on individuals with special talents often includes the concept of self-esteem. Studies have found that individuals with low self-esteem are associated with stress, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and lower life satisfaction. Colangelo and Davis (2003) showed that the self-esteem of gifted students decreases as their grade level increases. Additionally, the sensitivity of gifted students, high expectations from their families, and the belief that they cannot change certain situations in life negatively affect their self-perceptions.

Metin (1999) explains that due to the uneven development observed in gifted children, they may not perform at the same level in certain areas despite having the potential in specific fields. However, parents who overlook this situation may expect them to perform similarly in other areas, creating anxiety, stress, and pressure. These negative conditions lead to a decrease in the self-confidence and self-esteem of gifted children.

Ostracism

Ostracism is a concept that refers to individuals being ignored and disregarded by other people or groups, and it can occur in various settings, including social and work environments. When individuals experience ostracism, it can lead to psychological problems and maladaptive behavior. Studies have shown that young individuals who experience ostracism, often experience feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and depression, which can lead to negative social behaviors. Additionally, individuals who experience ostracism, may have lower levels of self-esteem and a weaker sense of belonging, which can result in increased levels of aggression.

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In the field of gifted education, studies have found that gifted children often have different social relationships with their peers compared to non-gifted children. Gifted children may prefer to socialize with peers who have similar intellectual abilities, and they may experience communication problems with both peers and teachers in learning environments. These social difficulties can result in gifted children feeling excluded from their social environments and can lead to feelings of loneliness and ostracism.

Clark (2014) suggests that gifted children adopt one of three strategies when faced with a lack of acceptance or recognition of their intellectual abilities: withdrawing from the group, seeking attention through disruptive behavior, or trying to fit in by conforming to social norms. Stuart and Beste (2008) argue that gifted children are often more sensitive and introspective than their peers, which may make it more difficult for them to communicate and form relationships with others. Bilgen and Yildiz (2016) found that gifted children may be excluded from their social environments due to feelings of jealousy and resentment from their peers. Overall, social exclusion can have significant negative effects on gifted children's psychological and social well-being.

Conclusion and Discussion

Due to the developmental characteristics of gifted children, it is necessary to be aware of the situations they experience and to take appropriate approaches so that they do not experience stress in their daily lives and cope with stress. Thus, it is thought that it will help special children to reveal their potential and to use it effectively and to prevent negative social and emotional problems that they will experience.

As the above-mentioned problems are known by families and teachers, these problems should be prevented from an early age. Güler (2012) states that the most important benefit of knowing the developmental characteristics of children is to determine which attitude will lead to more positive results in the face of the child's behaviors. At the same time, he argues that if families do not know the developmental characteristics of their children, they cannot determine how they can support them and what they should do. For this reason, parents and teachers should cooperate in order to create a learning environment suitable for the needs of gifted children. Because a teacher who receives the necessary data from the family observing their life at home will create a more effective learning environment at school that can meet the needs of the student. Supporting all children from an early age by their families and teachers will reveal their potential and prevent social-emotional problems.

It is seen that it is extremely difficult for a family who cannot receive support for special education to establish an enriched environment for the needs of their gifted child as well as their daily life (Akarsu, 2004). Children and their families must be supported in order to avoid the above-

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mentioned problems during the education process or to solve the social and emotional problems they experience. Within the scope of this support, educational programs for children and their families should be organized, and the social and emotional development of gifted children and possible social-emotional problems should be emphasized. In particular, these training programs will be beneficial before their problems arise and in helping families cope with the problems experienced more effectively.

Parents and teachers should make a joint effort to create a learning environment suitable for the needs of gifted children and to enable them to benefit from this environment. Studies to be carried out within the framework of cooperation with the families of gifted children can be handled in two parts, taking into account the characteristics and needs of the families. One of these is the implementation of family education programs for the developmental needs of children, and the other is the organization of activities for the educational needs of gifted and talented children. Yuen (2017) states that family education includes educational and supportive activities that enable parents to realize and understand their physical, social, emotional and psychological needs and the needs of their children. However, in order to create a differentiated and enriched learning environment, parents and teachers need to cooperate together. In early childhood, teachers should benefit from the observations of families in the process of creating a differentiated and enriched learning environment in line with the interests and needs of the student.

The contribution rate of the authors was determined as 50% Serkan DEMİR, 50% Ayça KONİK.

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

The authors declare no competing interest.

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