

Impact of Lockdowns and Home Confinement on Peer Relationships: Preschool Teacher's Perspective¹

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Abstract

In this study, the preschool children's peer relationships were examined according to the teachers' views after lockdowns and home confinement. Qualitative descriptive research was adopted. Eighteen preschool teachers from different preschools participated in the study. The participants were selected to represent maximum diversity. All teachers were female. Individual interviews were conducted with the teachers. Teachers were asked questions about their observations of peer relationships after the lockdowns and home confinement. Interviews were conducted via a cloud-based video conferencing platform. The content analysis method was used to interpret the interview data. All the teachers said that lockdowns and home confinement had both positive and negative effects on peer relationships. Teachers emphasized that they observed negative effects, especially in the domains of social and emotional development. In terms of positive effects, teachers emphasized that children developed a positive attitude towards school, made progress in their self-care skills, and showed greater interest in playing with their peers. Participating teachers also said that they made different special arrangements to improve peer relationships. Especially in the beginning, they structured their activities to include less contact and allocated more time for outdoor activities. They focused more on encouraging children to share and teaching hygiene rules. They also received more parental support in improving peer relationships.

Keywords: Peer relationships, young children, preschool teacher, COVID-19, lockdown, home confinement.

Introduction

The first social experiences of children in their lives are the relationships established with their parents. However, relationships with families may be insufficient in terms of their social development in the later years of their life (Gültekin-Akduman, 2012). The next socialization process begins to take shape during preschool when they communicate and interact more with their peers and other individuals (Uysal, Aydos, and Akman, 2016). Children starting preschool leave the familiar environment limited to their families, meet the concept of school and friends for the first time, and have the opportunity to socialize with their peers.

The peer can be defined as individuals who are equal or more or less equal in terms of their age, developmental levels, education levels, social status, or similar characteristics, sharing their adopted lifestyles and values continuously (Erwin, 2000; Gülay Ogelman, 2018; McDevitt and Ormrod, 2002; Morgan, 2009). Preschools are especially important in terms of first peer experience (Wood, Cowan, and Baker, 2002). In this environment, children reflect or transfer the knowledge and skills they have gained from their families to their peers. Likewise, their development continues as they internalize

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what they have learned from their peers (Gülay Ogelman, 2018). According to Hartup (2000), children need to form two different types of relationships, vertical and horizontal, to maintain their development in a healthy way. The vertical relationship defines the bond that children form with an adult with whom they feel stronger socially. The horizontal relationship is defined as the bond that children establish themselves with a peer with whom they are developmentally identical (Gülay Ogelman, 2018). Thus, while the relationship that children establish with their parents and teachers is vertical, the relationship they establish with their peers is horizontal.

Starting from the pre-school period, children can be positively or negatively affected by their relationships with their peers (Rubin et al., 2013). In terms of positive effects, children can make sense of the outside world, adapt to their environment, and obtain information from their peers through peer interactions. Children continue to shape their self-perceptions thanks to the feedback and evaluations they receive from their peers (Rowley et al., 1998). Peer relationships enable children to acquire various skills in all domains of development, including personality development (Gülay Ogelman, 2018). Healthy communication and interactions with peers determine the psychological well-being of children (Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost and Wainright, 2005). Children who are loved and accepted by their peers increase their self-confidence, develop a sense of belonging to the school and their peer group, and increase their academic success (Denham, 2007; Doll, Murphy and Song, 2003; Estell et al., 2008; Klima and Repetti, 2008; Ladd, 2006). Children who are rejected, disliked, or excluded by their peers may experience anxiety, depression, loneliness, behavioral problems such as aggression, introversion, and communication problems (Leve, Fisher and DeGarmo, 2007; Schneider, 2000; Prinstein, Cheah and Guyer, 2005).

Early peer relationships are a key developmental task for the coming years (Bryan, Puckett, and Newman, 2013). Children who have negative experiences in their first peer relationships are more likely to drop out of school and be involved in crime in the following years (Choi and Kim, 2003; Hay, 2006; Ladd and Burgess, 2001). Mastow (2004) emphasizes that the basis of social skills acquired in adulthood is based on peer relationships in childhood, and peer relationships continue to be important for the individual even though their functions change with age. For this reason, it can be said that the quality of peer relationships in preschool is the determinant of peer relationships in the following years (Ladd and Troop-Gordon, 2003). Thus, in the long term, children who experience positive peer relationships in the preschool period become adults who are more resilient when they face psychological and sociological problems (Hay, 2005; Walker, 2004).

The first COVID-19 case was detected in December 2019 and afterward, it became a global pandemic quickly. The pandemic has had an impact on many aspects of daily life. Many governments throughout the world have taken various efforts to prevent the disease from spreading. In March 2020, the Turkish government announced the closure of preschools, schools, universities, and social and sports activities. In April 2020, a curfew has been imposed for individuals under the age of 20. Lockdowns were followed by a home confinement process. This process has taken away the socialization opportunities of preschool-aged children. It's evident that the lack of these opportunities will have detrimental effects because peer interactions have a nurturing effect on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Cameron and Tenenbaum, 2021). The detrimental effects of the lockdowns and home confinement on children's friendships and familial ties have already been documented by Li et al. (2021).

The impacts of lockdowns and home confinement have been the subject of numerous research in the literature. Among the studies on the effects of the pandemic were those on preschoolers' perspectives on the pandemic and its effects (Gökçe et al., 2021), their experiences during quarantine (Arı Arat and Gülay Ogelman, 2021; Döğler and Kılınc, 2021), and their psychological resilience (Gülay Ogelman, Güngör and Göktaş, 2021). However, no study addresses young children's peer relationships based on the teachers' perceptions. In this regard, the goal of this study was to uncover teachers' perceptions of the impact of lockdowns and home confinement on preschool children's peer relationships. The

lockdowns and home confinement have reduced children's social encounters with their peers and other adults, thus limiting their opportunities to engage with their peers. The literature on the factors influencing the development of children's peer relationships will benefit from knowing how this exceptional experience affected their relationships with other children.

The research questions were as follows;

1. What are teachers' observations about the effects of lockdowns and home confinement on children's peer relationships?
2. What are teachers' practices to support peer relationships following the lockdowns and home confinement?

Method

Research Design

In this study, teachers' opinions on children's peer relationships after lockdowns and home confinement were explored using a qualitative descriptive research approach. Qualitative descriptive research is used to characterize and describe people's experiences, ideas, and perspectives on a certain phenomenon (Willis et al., 2016).

Participants

Participants of the study were 18 preschool teachers from 18 preschools for three age groups: 3-year-olds (n=6), 4-year-olds (n=6), and 5-year-olds (n=6). Participating teachers were selected using maximum variation sampling, one of the purposeful sampling procedures. The teachers ranged in age from 23 to 36. The professional experience of the teachers ranged from three to fifteen years. All the teachers were female with bachelor's degrees in preschool education.

Data collection and analysis

The third researcher interviewed all the teachers individually via a cloud-based video conferencing platform. After the approval of the ethics committee, the teachers were contacted via telephone and informed about the purpose of the research and how the interviews would be conducted. All the teachers contacted via telephone stated that they agreed to participate in the study voluntarily. Thereupon, an appointment was made with the teachers and interviews began. The data collection process was completed in March 2022. The interviews lasted 20 to 35 minutes. All the interviews were audiotaped with the consent of the teachers. The third researcher transcribed the audiotapes shortly after the interviews finished. The first and the second researchers checked the transcriptions against the audiotapes. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. To assure reliability, the first and the second authors simultaneously coded and identified themes and categories. The researchers then compared notes on their interpretations of the primary themes. When the researchers couldn't come to a consensus, they went back to the data. This procedure was repeated until a consensus was reached.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba's (2007) concept of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was used to establish the trustworthiness of the study. The degree to which the researchers are conveying a truth formed from the standpoint of the participants is referred to as credibility. To assure credibility, the researchers sought the expert opinions of three faculty members from their university's preschool department. After the expert opinions were solicited, the interview questions were edited accordingly. Afterward, two pilot interviews were conducted with two preschool teachers who were not among the study participants to ensure that teachers were interpreting the

questions as intended and the questions were refined accordingly. Furthermore, as recommended by Joffe (2012), the first and the third authors separately coded the data and identified themes and categories. The researchers then compared notes on their interpretations of the primary themes. When the researchers couldn't come to a consensus, they went back to the data. This procedure was repeated until a consensus was reached. After the first and the third authors finished their coding, the second author went through all the themes and categories with a fresh look. The applicability of findings in other contexts is referred to as transferability. For transferability, the participant teachers were selected from among preschool teachers working in different schools in Istanbul. Utmost attention was paid to having an equal number of teachers working with three, four, and five age groups. The repeatability and consistency of the findings are referred to as dependability. To ensure dependability, the researchers discussed the codes with an expert who is an experienced teacher education researcher. The degree to which findings arise from data rather than the study team's experiences or bias is known as confirmability. To ensure confirmability, member checking was utilized. member checking. The findings were shared with the participants for confirmation.

Ethical Information

Before data collection, Ethics Committee approval (Date:02.03.2022, No: 2022/02) was obtained from the university to which the second and third authors were affiliated. Then each participant received a consent document that explicitly stated that the interviews would be audiotaped, that their identity would not be published anywhere, and that they could withdraw at any time during the study. All interviews were conducted after obtaining the consent of the teachers.

Findings

The research had two main questions. The findings from the interviews with preschool teachers are shown below, organized by research questions.

Findings on the first research question: The impact of lockdowns and home confinement on children's peer relationships

The first question of the research was aimed at revealing what preschool teachers' experiences were regarding the effect of the lockdowns and home confinement process on peer relationships in children. The responses to the study's first question were grouped under two themes: positive and negative effects. Preschool teachers mentioned that the process had both positive and negative effects on children's peer relationships.

Positive effects of lockdowns and home confinement on children's peer relationships

Under this theme, teachers frequently referred to the effects of children's longing for play and peers, improved family-child relationships, and improved self-care skills on children's peer relationships.

The participating teachers stated that children's longing and desire for school and teachers increased.

One teacher working with 4-year-olds expressed this as follows:

"The positive effect of the pandemic was that children needed friends, teachers, school, and spending time at school. This year, I observed that they came to school with much more enthusiasm. They were very happy to be at school, to spend time at school, to play with their friends."(HE)

Another teacher working with 3-year-olds expressed this as follows:

"They experienced the physical and mental satisfaction of both spending time with their peers at school and sharing. This caused them to adapt to school more quickly and to miss it more quickly. Sometimes some children cannot come to school due to illness, we make calls on Fridays. Parents frequently say that children miss school and want to come during these phone calls. It was a little difficult for them to leave school when they enjoyed playing with their friends."(BM)

Since children spent a long time at home, they were mostly with adults, and their encounters with their peers were very limited, they missed spending time with their peers and playing games. This had positive reflections on peer relationships. Teachers indicated that children loved spending time with other children, and they were more open to cooperation and communication with each other than in the previous years. Additionally, teachers stated that the children's emotional fulfillment was visible when they were playing with their peers. Furthermore, the teachers reported that the children learned the games quickly and that they could guide one another without the assistance of a teacher, and that they were role models to each other. The teachers also noticed that the children's games/play lasted longer and that they were more willing and careful to follow the rules (taking turns, patience, etc.).

One teacher working with 3-year-olds expressed the joy that children experience when they make new friends:

"Since friendship relationships are not formed, they have a new taste in the concept of making friends. That's why it's much more exciting and discovery-oriented. They constantly ask about their friends; they talk about their friends. They put effort to make friends and establish good relationships with their friends."(ÇT)

Another teacher working with 5-year-olds stated this joy as follows:

"Being alone and lonely at home led them to be fond of being with their friends, and they were very happy because of this."(BN)

Another issue that attracted the attention and was underlined by the teachers was the relationship between the child and the parent. According to the teachers, the fact that children spend a lot of time with their parents contributed to the parent-child attachment relationship. The relationships they established with their parents and siblings, if any, reflected positively on their peer relationships in the classroom environment. This relationship prepared the children for friendship. They stated that especially those who have siblings had lesser problems in establishing peer relationships.

One teacher working with 3-year-olds expressed this as follows:

"If she has a brother or sister, of course, we observed positive effects in peer relationships. They can communicate with the family, the teacher, and the children, share and enter the social environment." (SM)

Another positive effect that teachers emphasized was related to self-care skills, especially hygiene. Teachers stated that with the effect of the pandemic, children are much more conscious and careful about hygiene and that they both guide and model their peers in this regard. One teacher working with 4-year-olds said:

"The kids were very conscious about cleanliness when they arrived. We worked very hard on this issue last year. This year, we focused on this subject, of course, viruses, masks, and hand washing. But this year, cleaning habits settled more. There are conversations among the children saying, 'I washed it, you should go and wash it too.'"(ÖD)

Negative effects of lockdowns and home confinement on children's peer relationships

Preschool teachers explained that the lockdowns and home confinement negatively affected children's social and emotional development. The main reason for the negative effects on social development is the decline in social skills. Signs of social inadequacy were observed in children such as communication problems, difficulty in playing games, obeying the rules of the game, sharing toys, helping each other, reconciling when problems arise, and apologizing. These problems had a significant negative impact on the peer relationships of the children. One 4-year-olds teacher expressed this as follows:

"How to talk, how to communicate, how to start a conversation, how to meet, even these were very difficult. The child, who has always played with the adult, always wants what he wants, and cannot adapt to the situation when his peers insist. Since they have not experienced such a situation before, because they do not share, because they do not have the same equal status, children do not wait in line, they insist."(HE)

Teachers also stated that there was an increase in children's level of egocentrism and their desire to be the focal point. The teachers attributed this increase to the fact that the children were always the center of attention of the family during the lockdowns and the home confinement.

One teacher working with 3-year-olds explained this as follows:

"The fact that children were always alone and were the only point of interest at home, affected them in terms of sharing. When they first came, they wanted to be the focus like at home, it's an egocentric period for their age anyway. Since they have everything at home by themselves, there was the thought that I should have everything here as well. In the first week or two, they didn't know how to share, how to play, or how to communicate."(SM)

Additionally, teachers emphasized the increase in physical and verbal aggressive behaviors such as hitting, pushing, taking away from one's hands, using slang words, and calling nicknames in peer relationships. A teacher of 3-year-olds put this as follows:

"They tend to hit and push without knowing how to conduct friendship. In any case, children cannot solve their problems without our support. Actually, they don't know. In this process, physical contact in a bad sense was very intense. There are problems in creating and sharing games, they do not know how to make games."(ÇT)

Teachers also drew attention to gender differences in aggressive behaviors and indicated a greater increase in aggressive behavior in boys compared to girls. They especially observed that boys bully girls. A teacher working with 5-year-olds exemplified it this way:

"The boys come together and trip the girls, drop them to the ground, use slang words, push each other. In the past, such acts of violence did not occur so often."(HB)

Teachers also emphasized the negative effects of lockdowns and home confinement on children's play behaviors. Children frequently asked adults to solve the problems encountered during play. They tended to complain about everything and verbal communication among the children was very limited. One teacher working with 5-year-olds talked about her observations as follows:

"They had a very difficult time communicating. They don't know the names of their friends while playing. Instead of asking each other's names, they started using terms like a blonde-haired girl, and a boy with glasses. There was no way of addressing, and there was no play setting, no directing, no continuing the game, no sharing."(ZÇ)

According to the teachers, the lockdowns and home confinement process negatively affected children's emotional development, which was reflected in their peer relationships. The children were shy, uneasy, and anxious. One teacher, working with 4-year-olds, expressed how the anxiety caused by the pandemic reflected on peer relationships as follows:

"One of my students paid so much attention to hygiene in this process that the child would open the door with a napkin when entering the classroom, there was a very high level of anxiety. Now, seeing that his other friends are not like this, he started to relax a bit, but still, peer relationships were a big problem for this kid, because he couldn't get close to his friends. After all, other kids were paying less attention."(EG)

Another teacher working with 3-year-olds shared her observations as follows:

"Since they spent this period at home, they stayed away from everything with their instincts to protect themselves and we had children who experienced anxiety. They were very eager to play with other children, but they were also anxious. They were isolating themselves and just watching."(SM)

Findings on the second research question: Teachers' practices to support peer relationships following the lockdowns and home confinement

The second question of the research aimed to reveal the practices of preschool teachers to support peer relationships of children who had stayed at home during lockdowns and home confinement periods with limited socialization opportunities.

After the lockdowns and home confinement process, they made different arrangements and practices to support peer relationships than in previous years. These arrangements and practices of teachers were gathered under the headings of arrangements of activities, aims of activities, and parent-school communication.

Arrangements of activities

A prominent theme in the teacher interviews was how the activities targeting peer relationships were arranged differently. They reported that they arranged the activities in different ways from other years to address the pandemic conditions. Individual or small group activities were preferred over large group activities, especially in the early days. While some teachers took a stepwise approach and moved from individual activities to group activities gradually, some teachers aimed to develop peer relationships within no-contact group activities directly. A teacher of 5-year-olds put this as follows:

"Personally, I did not want the children to come into contact with each other at the very beginning. I did activities to improve peer relationships, but at first, I preferred individual activities. In group games, I chose games where they would not touch each other." (HB)

Additionally, almost all teachers reported that more time was allocated for outdoor activities. One teacher working with 4-year-olds exemplified this situation as follows:

"Even if the weather was cold, we went to the park. We took them out so that they can get fresh air. We allow them to be out in the open air, so that they were able to play, interact and get closer freely with their peers."(NY)

Aims of activities

The participating teachers mostly emphasized the difference in the number of activities targeting sharing and teaching hygiene rules included more than in previous years. Teachers said that since children did not have the opportunity to meet with other children, they had difficulties in sharing. Thus, they devoted a lot of time to activities that encourage sharing. One of the teachers working with 4-year-olds exemplified this as follows:

"Children learn to share by sharing. These kids couldn't come together with their friends and play so they couldn't learn to share. This year, I have observed that the number of children having sharing problems has increased. I increased the number of activities that accustom children to sharing." (ZÇ)

As in all areas of life, the issue of hygiene has come to the fore in pre-school classes. Although the development of self-care skills is one of the main aims of pre-school education, it was seen that teachers handled the hygiene issue more carefully in this process. A teacher working with a 3-year-old group explained her practices regarding hygiene as follows:

"We did activities on sharing. Even at these events, we washed and disinfected our toys and materials because they would be shared. Our children were also very careful in this regard. All of them entered carefully, even as they entered the bathroom."(BS)

Parent-school communication

One of the different practices of preschool teachers after lockdowns and home confinement was the amount of communication with parents. In this process, teachers started to communicate more to reduce the concerns of families. This increased communication has helped teachers to foster peer relationships among children. Teachers were able to act together with parents in improving peer relationships. One of the teachers working with 4-year-olds said:

"Not only us and the children, but also the parents were worried. I increased my communication with the parents. I talked to them on the phone almost every day. Parents also helped us. They continued at home what we did at school. I received support from the parents, especially in teaching sharing. They talked to their children at home."(DS)

The teachers asked for support from the parents, cooperated with them, and solved the problems in a short time by acting in harmony. A teacher working with 5-year-olds shared her experience as follows:

"In the past years, we did not get this much support from parents. Our communication was not that intense. We didn't expect anything from them, anyway, they weren't doing it either. It's been better this year. As we got to know each other better, they saw that our purpose was the same as theirs. For example, their support at home on hygiene was reflected in the classroom. Everything was easier with the support of the parents." (SB)

Discussion and Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to discover the impact of lockdowns and home confinement on peer relationships among young children. According to the teachers, this process both positively and negatively impacted the children's peer relationships. According to teachers, the negative impacts occur most frequently in social and emotional development domains. Longing and displaying interest in school, play, peers, positive relationships with family, and competency in self-care abilities are examples of the positive impact of the lockdowns and home confinement process on peer interactions. However, the findings of this study indicated that the negative effects of this process on peer relationships are more pronounced than the positive effects. Furthermore, the teachers reported that they used several ways to strengthen peer interactions after the lockdown and home confinement process.

The pandemic process has affected all people around the world with varying intensities. The obligation to stay at home, keep social distance, and pay maximum attention to hygiene during the pandemic has increased many people's loneliness, anxiety, depression, fear, and stress levels (Islam et al., 2021). Preschool children are among the groups most affected by the pandemic process. This study is remarkable in that it reveals that this process has negative and positive effects on children's peer relationships. The general stress brought on by COVID-19, especially the prolonged separation of children from their peers, has had various reflections on children's social relations in the new normal. When the studies are examined, it is seen that the process has many effects on children. In their study with children and adolescents, Duan and colleagues (2020) found that lockdowns and home confinement increased mobile phone and internet addiction which paved the way to an increase in depression and anxiety levels among these populations. Jiao and colleagues (2020) stated that the most intense negative reflections of the COVID-19 process on children are asking fearful/anxious questions about the pandemic and health, sleep, eating problems, distraction, and attachment problems. On the other hand, Prime, Wade and Browne (2020) found that stress and anxiety in children increased greatly in their study with families in Canada. Pointing out that there was also an increase in the stress level of parents as well as children in this process, Spinelli and colleagues (2020) showed that the increase in the stress levels of Italian parents was related to the behavioral and emotional problems of the children. One study from Turkey examining the school adjustment of first

graders Çoban and Yazıcı (2022) revealed that both positive and negative peer relationships were encountered during the school adjustment process with the effect of pandemics. As the aforementioned studies revealed, young children around the world have been adversely affected by the process, both due to the pandemic itself and the measures taken due to the pandemic. Considering the findings of these studies, it is not surprising that children experience problems in peer relationships after lockdowns and home confinement. Due to the long duration of COVID-19, some children started preschool education later, and the preschool education process for some was interrupted. Children, like other people, have passed through a very difficult process.

Another finding of the study is the positive reflections of the process on peer relationships. The social isolation of children during the pandemic has increased their longing for their peers and school. The study by Egan and colleagues (2021) with Irish parents showed that this process led to children's loneliness. Children could not go to school and could not socialize with their friends. It's well established that young children's growth is aided by play (UNICEF, 2020). Through play, children progress in all developmental areas. Peers meet many emotional and social needs of children, as they provide the opportunity to play and have a pleasant time. Through these interactions, children become models and guide each other. Therefore, peers have an important place in children's lives (Perolli Shehu, 2019). Spending time with peers is a necessity for children. Undoubtedly, children's longing to spend time with their peers, observed by the teachers participating in this study, is related to this need.

While talking about the positive effects of lockdowns and the home confinement process on peer relationships, teachers also mentioned self-care skills. During the pandemic, parents showed extra sensitivity in terms of taking care of their own and their children's health and paying attention to their self-care skills (Jacobson, 2022). It can be said that the conscious attitudes of families about self-care have positive reflections on children's peer relationships. There is a reciprocal relationship between self-care skills and peer relationships. Since, peer acceptance levels of children with self-care skills are higher compared to children who have problems with self-care skills (Gülşay Ogelman, 2018).

According to the participating teachers, spending more time with their families had a positive reflection on children's peer relationships. Children who had the opportunity to spend more time with their parents and siblings had positive experiences for secure attachment and effective communication. In this process, the fact that children's emotional needs were met by their parents prepared the children for peer relationships. The study conducted by Aras Doğan and Kasımoğlu (2022), with a large sample of families in Turkey, shows that the communication level of parents who spend more than 3 hours a day with their children is better compared to families spending, and more than half of the participants spend more than 3 hours a day with their children. Aras Doğan and Kasımoğlu's (2022) study with families in Turkey showed the effect of time spent with families on child-family communication. The more time spent with the child, the higher the quality of communication.

The teachers summarized their practices in supporting peer relationships in their classrooms with the arrangements they made in the curriculum, activities, classroom management strategies, and communication with families. Schools are institutions that support not only learning but also socialization and emotional development (Fazel et al., 2014). For this reason, it is important to take measures in different dimensions such as teachers, families, programs, and classroom management in schools in cases of natural disasters such as pandemics. Schools are one of the first institutions to open following the pandemic (Overstreet, Salloum and Badour, 2010). A teacher who wants to support peer relationships should not focus only on children but should revise her behaviors, classroom management strategies, family involvement practices, and the curriculum accordingly (Gülşay Ogelman, 2021). It seems that the teachers involved in this study understood the important role of the school in this process and varied their practices accordingly. Preschool teachers participating in this study made arrangements in their programs and activities, updated their

classroom management strategies, and communicated with families more regularly to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 process on children. The COVID-19 process took longer than expected and affected all family members in different ways (Panchal et al., 2021). McDevitt and Mello (2021) stated that cooperation between teachers and families based on learning and teaching would be beneficial in reducing the effects of the pandemic on children. Within the scope of this study, it can be said that the teachers established effective strategies to address young children's peer relationships after the lockdowns and home confinement.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study, which investigated the impact of lockdown and home confinement process on young children's peer relationships, is limited to the observations of preschool teachers. Therefore, the findings reflect the experiences and subjective opinions of the teachers. Thus, it is important to carry out studies that examine children's peer relationships with objective tests. In this study, teachers from different schools and different age groups were contacted to provide variation. Although this diversity has strengthened the study, case studies that will allow a more in-depth look at schools will also be informative. In addition, quantitative studies with larger samples from across Turkey can provide us with a broader picture of the reflection of the social isolation process on the peer relationships of children from Turkey. Also, longitudinal studies will make important contributions to the literature in terms of evaluating whether this effect is permanent.

The study's findings make it abundantly evident that teachers' collaboration with families significantly supports peer relationships. Additionally, it would be desirable to implement individual, small, and large group activities in a regular and balanced manner to support both children's unique potentials and peer relationships. Teachers could be encouraged to use methods like sociometry and observation to analyze the social relationship profile in the classroom. In this way, problems with peer relationships can be identified early on before they escalate. It is important to establish social relations guidelines and explicitly define the rules for the class. Preschool teachers should create classroom management techniques that value consistency and compassion while treating all children equally and respecting their differences.

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