

Determining the characteristics of new generation children of 3-6 years old

3-6 yaş grubu yeni nesil çocukların özelliklerinin belirlenmesi

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study was aimed to determine the characteristics of the new generation of 3-6 years old children.

Method: The study was planned as a descriptive study. The study was conducted between April and July 2023 with parents of 3-6-year-old children living in Türkiye who accessed the online data collection form. The data were collected using the descriptive characteristics form and the New Generation 3-6-Years-Old Children's Characteristics Assessment Form. The data collection forms were sent online from the parents, and the data were collected using the snowball method. Data were evaluated by descriptive analysis (percentage, frequency). Ethics committee permission was obtained to conduct the study.

Results: A total of 202 parents participated in the study. Mothers constituted 98% of the parents who participated in the study. The mean age of the mothers was 33.97±4.133, and the mean age of the fathers was 33.75±6.850. The average age of the children in the study was 4.52±1.087, and 57.9% of the children (n=117) were girls. The developmental characteristics of new generation 3-6-year-old children were categorized into three categories: individual, emotional, and social.

Conclusion: It is essential to develop and support the existing potential of children who are emotionally sensitive, intuitive, fond of freedom, and quick to recognize and learn the changes that occur around them. The results obtained in this direction will help determine the developmental characteristics of the new generation of 3-6-year-old children and exhibit the appropriate approach.

Keywords: Care; child; new generation; nurse; pre-school

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma, 3-6 yaş grubu yeni nesil çocukların özelliklerini belirlemek amacıyla planlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Çalışma tanımlayıcı tipte tasarlanmıştır. Araştırma, Nisan–Temmuz 2023 tarihleri arasında Türkiye’de yaşayan ve çevrim içi veri toplama formuna erişen 3-6 yaş grubu çocukların ebeveynleri ile yürütülmüştür. Veriler, Tanımlayıcı Özellikler Formu ve Yeni Nesil 3-6 Yaş Çocukların Özelliklerini Değerlendirme Formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Veri toplama formları ebeveynlere çevrim içi olarak iletilmiş ve veriler kartopu örnekleme yöntemiyle elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın yürütülebilmesi için etik kurul onayı alınmıştır.

Bulgular: Çalışmaya 202 ebeveyn katılmıştır. Katılımcı ebeveynlerin %98’ini anneler oluşturmaktadır. Annelerin yaş ortalaması 33.97±4.133, babaların yaş ortalaması ise 33.75±6.850’dir. Çocukların yaş ortalaması 4.52±1.087 olup %57.9’u (n=117) kız çocuğudur. Yeni nesil 3-6 yaş grubu çocukların gelişimsel özellikleri bireysel, duygusal ve sosyal olmak üzere üç kategoride ele alınmıştır. Duygusal özellikler arasında çocukların duygusal duyarlılıklarının (%78.2) ve sezgilerinin (%56.9) yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bireysel özellikler açısından, özgürlüklerine düşkün oldukları (%75.6) ve ayrıntılı sorular sordukları (%71.8) saptanmıştır. Ayrıca sosyal özellikler kapsamında çocukların çevrelerine mutluluk verdikleri (%74.8) ve hayvanlara karşı aşırı duyarlı oldukları (%68.4) tespit edilmiştir.

Sonuç: Duygusal açıdan hassas, sezgileri kuvvetli, özgürlüğüne düşkün, çevresindeki değişimleri hızla fark eden ve öğrenen bu çocukların mevcut potansiyellerinin geliştirilmesi ve desteklenmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu doğrultuda elde edilen sonuçlar, yeni nesil 3-6 yaş grubu çocukların gelişimsel özelliklerinin anlaşılmasına ve onlara yönelik uygun yaklaşımın sergilenmesine katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bakım; çocuk; hemşire; okul öncesi; yeni nesil

Introduction

In a changing and developing world, the advancement of technology and changes in living conditions can cause differentiation in the developmental characteristics of individuals. Development, which is the functional and physiological maturation process of the individual, is a maturation process that continues throughout life and has periodic differences (Törüner & Büyükgönenç, 2017). It is seen that children growing up in the 21st century show similar characteristics among themselves and show differences from previous generations.

The preschool period is critical for the child's current and future development. In the preschool period (3-6 years), children are entrepreneurial and value their freedom, their level of understanding and imagination develop, their ability to identify increases, and they begin to recognize the roles of adults in the near and far environment. In addition, during this period, children have the desire to stand up for the parent of the same sex in order to attract the attention of the parent of the opposite sex. In addition to psychosocial and psychosexual developmental characteristics, children show important cognitive developmental features during this period. Children frequently ask questions about their environment and the world, and their creativity is developed. Children also develop a sense of independence and begin to learn and follow rules. They are curious and interact with their peers (Ball & Bindler, 2006; Hockenberry et al., 2016; Kupers et al., 2019; Malik & Marwaha, 2018; Swider et al., 2023). This is the period when children can maintain the habits they have acquired. Parents need to be aware of the developmental characteristics of children in order to maintain positive habits in children.

The preschool period is an essential period in which the foundations of development are laid, including many critical periods. This is the stage when the brain's neural connections rate is the most intense. For this reason, the development of the individual is more susceptible to environmental stimuli than other stages. A child's development and learning in a rich, stimulating environment will be positively affected. In this framework, the environment can profoundly affect the child's developmental areas and learning motivation (Bodrova et al., 2013; Gedik et al., 2023).

Children and parents need to adapt to these developments, prepare themselves, and be healthy parents in the developing and changing world. Parents and pediatric nurses are responsible for ensuring children's development, systematically guiding them to acquire complex skills, and helping them find their potential in line with their differences by supporting their developmental areas (Breiner et al., 2016; Reticena et al., 2019). Areas of development affect each other, and a problem in one area will also affect others. Therefore, the appropriate approach created for the child should provide an appropriate environment for each developmental area, considering the principle of holism of development.

It is essential to develop, manage, and support these characteristics so that children curious about their environment are ready to explore. They are motivated to learn and think to carry in their existing potential. In this direction, it is thought that the study planned to be carried out will help determine the developmental characteristics of the new generation of 3-6 years old children and exhibit the appropriate approach. This study was planned to determine the characteristics of the new generation of 3-6 years old children.

Research Question

- What are the characteristics of the new generation of 3-6 years old children?

Methods

The study planned as a descriptive study, was conducted with parents of children aged 3-6 years in Türkiye. The study was conducted with parents of children aged 3-6 years living in Türkiye between April and July 2023 who received an online data collection form. The study sample consisted of 202 parents of healthy 3-6 years old children who met the inclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria: Having a healthy child aged 3-6 years, parental consent to participate in the study, living in Türkiye, and parents with phones, tablets, or computers.

Exclusion criteria: 3-6 years old child with health problems and parents who did not agree to participate in the study.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using the descriptive characteristics form and the New Generation 3-6 Age Group Children's Characteristics Assessment Form.

Descriptive Characteristics Form; The descriptive characteristics form consisted of seven questions about the age and gender of the parents, the age of the child, and the gender of the child.

New Generation 3-6 Age Group Children's Characteristics Assessment Form; The researchers determined the statements to be used in the form through a literature review. First, a pool of 40 items was created. Forty items were created. In order to determine whether the draft form had content validity, expert opinion was first obtained. In the developed form, the opinions of seven experts (One professor, five research assistants, and one specialist nurse) were obtained using the Davis technique. The form was restructured in line with the opinions. The total validity index of the form was found to be 0.91. According to the expert opinions, six items were removed from the form, one item was added, and the form was finalized as 35. Parents evaluated the characteristics of their children in the form of the items "Not a Feature I Observe," "A Feature I Observe Occasionally," "A Feature I Observe Frequently," and "A Feature I Always Observe." Parents were also asked to indicate the characteristics observed in children other than the items.

Data Collection

Data were collected from parents of 3-6 years old children using the snowball method. The online survey was developed using the Google Forms platform. To initiate the snowball sampling process, the digital link of the questionnaire was first shared by the researchers through professional and social networks, including WhatsApp and Instagram. Participants who completed the survey were then encouraged to forward the link to other parents within their social circles who met the study's inclusion criteria. This method facilitated reaching a broader and more diverse group of 202 parents across Türkiye. The average completion time of the forms was approximately 5-10 minutes. A pre-application was conducted with ten parents to test the comprehensibility of the questionnaires. Unintelligible items were not identified, and the application was started without making any changes to the form.

Statistical Analyses

The data obtained were evaluated using the SPSS 20.0 package program. Data were evaluated by descriptive analysis (percentage, frequency). The dependent variable of the study was the item score distribution of the New Generation 3-6 Age Group Children's Characteristics Assessment Form, and the independent variables were the descriptive characteristics of the child, his/her family, and the gender of the child.

Ethical Consideration

Permissions were obtained from the Ethics Commission of Gazi University (E-77082166-604.01.02-654393). Parents were informed that the data obtained from the study would only be used for the research and that they had the right to leave the study at any time. The information on children and adolescents was protected during the study. The study was initiated after written informed consent was obtained from the parents of the children.

Results

The developmental characteristics of the new generation of 3-6 years old children were identified in three categories: individual, emotional, and social. The mean age of the children in the study was 4.52 ± 1.087 , and 57.9% (n=117) were girls. The forms prepared for the families were mostly filled in by mothers (98%). Parents mostly lived in the city (68.3%), and most had a bachelor's degree or higher (56.9%). More than half of the families had incomes equal to their expenses (57.9%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of 3-6 years old children and parents

Features	M±SD	Min-Mak
Child Age (Years)	4.52±1.08	3-6
Mother Age (Years)	33.97±4.13	24-48
Father Age (Years)	33.75±6.85	24-40
	n	%
Child Gender		
Girl	117	57.9
Boy	85	42.1
Parents Participating in the Study		
Mother	198	98.0
Father	4	2.0
Place of Residence		
Province	138	68.3
District	61	30.2
Village	3	1.5
Education Status		
Primary education	21	10.5
High school	65	32.2
Bachelor's degree and above	115	56.9
Income Status of the Family*		
Income less than expenditure	60	29.7
Income equal to expenses	117	57.9
Income more than expenditure	25	12.4

*The income status of the parent according to his/her declaration is indicated.

Emotional sensitivity, strong intuition, and rapid changes in situation were prominent among the emotional characteristics of the new generation of 3-6 years old children. It was determined that children had high emotional sensitivity (78.2%). More than half of the children had strong intuition (56.9%), and their emotions were affected in unfavorable environments (53.5%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Emotional characteristics of new generation 3-6 years old children

Emotional Characteristics	4	3	2	1
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Emotionally sensitive.	84 (41.6)	74 (36.6)	35(17.3)	9(4.5)
Intuition is strong.	38 (18.8)	77 (38.1)	68(33.7)	19(9.4)
Immediately affected by a negative environment (excessive restlessness, agitation)	44 (21.8)	66(32.7)	74(36.6)	18(8.9)
It is very fragile in one event	32 (15.8)	65(32.2)	68(33.7)	37(18.3)
It manages emotions like anger, resentment, and sadness.	25 (12.4)	43(21.3)	78(38.6)	56(27.7)
He/she is timid.	25 (12.4)	39(19.3)	84(41.6)	54(26.7)

Percentage calculations were made by taking row percentages.

4= A Feature I Always Observe 3= A Feature I Frequently Observe 2= A Feature I Occasionally Observe 1= Not a Feature I Observe

Among the individual characteristics of children, the most prominent characteristic was that they were fond of their freedom (75.6%). It was also found that most children ask detailed questions (71.8%). Among the individual characteristics of the children, it was found that they did not do something without being convinced (70.8%), had a solid memory (68.3%), did a task willingly without forcing (68.3%), learned quickly (68.3%) and expressed themselves well (67.3%) (Table 3).

It was determined that 76.8% of new-generation children are sensitive to the environment. It was also found that most children (74.8%) gave happiness to people. It was determined that 70.3% of the children made people laugh, 68.4% were overly sensitive to animals, and 65.9% noticed the details in the environment (Table 4).

In addition to the characteristics included in the form, parents reported that their children were more active, had a high sense of responsibility and trust, were more dependent on the parent of the opposite sex, and had sleep problems.

Table 3. Individual characteristics of new generation 3-6 years old children

Individual Characteristics	4	3	2	1
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
He/she is fond of freedom/independence	68 (33.7)	84(41.6)	48(23.8)	2(1.0)
He/she asks detailed questions.	58(28.7)	87(43.1)	53(26.2)	4(2.0)
He/she does not want to do something without being convinced.	54 (26.7)	89(44.1)	55(27.2)	4(2.0)
He/she has a strong memory.	58(28.7)	80(39.6)	59(29.2)	5(2.5)
He/she does it if he or she wants to, not if he or she is forced to.	58(28.7)	80(39.6)	61(30.2)	3(1.5)
Learns fast.	55(27.2)	83(41.1)	59(29.2)	5(2.5)
Has high self-expression skills.	63(31.2)	73(36.1)	54(26.7)	12(5.9)
Convinces / convinces the other party easily about what they want	44(21.8)	90(44.6)	64(31.7)	4(2.0)
They can easily use tablet computers and cell phones.	62(30.7)	69(34.2)	48(23.8)	23(11.4)
They have high creativity	40(19.8)	83(41.1)	66(32.7)	13(6.4)
Choose words carefully and use them at the appropriate time and place	38(18.8)	73(36.1)	76(37.6)	15(7.4)
Defends your rights	42(20.8)	73(36.1)	74(36.6)	13(6.4)
Sensitive to sounds.	52(25.7)	62(30.7)	63(31.2)	25(12.4)
Generates different solutions in a situation	35(17.3)	72(35.6)	72(35.6)	23(11.4)
Very impulsive.	31(15.3)	59(29.2)	76(37.6)	36(17.8)
Sensitive to smells.	46(22.8)	43(21.3)	54(26.7)	59(29.2)
It pays attention to one thing for a long time.	23(11.4)	64(31.7)	76(37.6)	39(19.3)

Percentage calculations were made by taking row percentages.

4= A Feature I Always Observe, 3= A Feature I Frequently Observe, 2= A Feature I Occasionally Observe, 1= Not a Feature I Observe

The findings regarding the differences in children's emotional, individual, and social characteristics based on gender and age are presented in the Table 5. No statistically significant differences were found between female and male children in terms of emotional $t=0.76$; $p>0.05$, individual $t=1.07$; $p>0.05$, or social $t=0.57$; $p>0.05$ characteristics. While no significant differences were observed in emotional $F=1.48$; $p>0.05$ and social $F=0.37$; $p>0.05$ scores, a statistically significant difference was found in individual characteristics $F=2.65$; $p=0.05$.

Table 4. Social characteristics of new generation 3-6 years old children

Social Characteristics	4	3	2	1
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
It is sensitive to its environment.	67(33.2)	88(43.6)	39(19.3)	8(4.0)
It gives happiness to people.	69(34.2)	82(40.6)	48(23.8)	3(1.5)
Makes people laugh	64(31.7)	78(38.6)	54(26.7)	54(26.7)
Shows hypersensitivity to events/animals, etc. in the environment	48(23.8)	90(44.6)	59(29.2)	5(2.5)
Notice details in the environment	68(33.7)	65(32.2)	61(30.2)	8(4.0)
Quickly recognizes the emotional state of others.	53(26.2)	78(38.6)	52(25.7)	19(9.4)
Quickly perceives differences in the environment	58(28.7)	71(35.1)	63(31.2)	10(5.0)
It determines its approach according to the characteristics of people.	37(18.3)	70(34.7)	66(32.7)	29(14.4)
Complies with house rules.	18(8.9)	83(41.1)	78(38.6)	23(11.4)
Defends the rights of others when they are in need.	29(14.4)	66(32.7)	77(38.1)	30(14.9)
Empathizes with the feelings of others	20(9.9)	71(35.1)	77(38.1)	34(16.8)
He thinks of others before himself.	6(3.0)	26(12.9)	82(40.6)	88(43.6)

Percentage calculations were made by taking row percentages.

4= A Feature I Always Observe 3= A Feature I Frequently Observe 2= A Feature I Occasionally Observe

1= Not a Feature I Observe

Table 5. Comparison of emotional, individual, and social characteristics according to children's socio-demographic variables

Sociodemographic Characteristic	Emotional Characteristics Mean (SD)	Individual Characteristics Mean (SD)	Social Characteristics Mean (SD)
Gender			
Female	15.46 (3,52)	47.70 (10.81)	32.28 (7.14)
Male	15.08 (3,45)	46.12 (9.76)	31.71 (7.05)
	$t = 0.76, p > 0.05$	$t = 1.07, p > 0.05$	$t = 0.57, p > 0.05$
Age (years)			
3	14.41 (3.00)	43.12 (9.44)	31.20 (6.51)
4	15.12 (3.64)	47.35 (10.12)	31.71 (7.03)
5	15.83 (3.69)	48.71 (9.79)	32.47 (6.60)
6	15.57 (3.41)	47.93 (11.40)	32.52 (8.13)
	$F = 1.484, p > 0.05$	$F = 2.651, p = 0.05$	$F = 0.376, p > 0.05$

Discussion

The preschool period is a critical stage for both the child's current development and future growth, as it lays the foundation for development and is based on the individual's process of functional and physiological maturation. In this study, conducted to identify the characteristics of the new generation of children aged 3–6, the children's individual, emotional, and social characteristics were examined.

Generations are usually divided according to a person's birth year, attributing characteristic features and sociocultural traits to that generation, indicating fundamental differences between generations. Studies examining modern children in the context of the new generation suggest that they are pretty different, unique, intelligent, technologically literate, open to innovation, and ready to accept challenges (Malinauskiene, 2020). When the literature on the developmental characteristics of the study group is examined, it is seen that these characteristics are focused on parental attitudes, digital technology, home environment, and environmental stimuli (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Li, 2017; Hashim, 2022; Demirel & Çoban, 2023). Silkenbeumer et al. found that preschool is characterized in the same direction as emotional sensitivity and rapid emotional change when children coordinate different information to understand increasingly complex emotions (Silkenbeumer, 2016). Our study found that emotional sensitivity was the most prominent feature in children's emotional characteristics. At the same time, it is seen that social and emotional development is rapid in this period, and children experience rapid emotional change (Martinsone, 2022).

The changing social situation in the development of preschool children predicts the upbringing of individuals who are emotionally high, fond of freedom, curious, questioning every situation, and have high detail awareness (Xiaowei Li, 2017). Among the predicted characteristics, in the study we conducted, characteristics such as noticing the details in the environment, asking detailed questions, having a strong memory, and not doing something without being convinced were observed at a high rate. Technological progress and the formation of the digital world have made the new generation of preschool children increasingly connected to digital technologies. According to McCrindle (2019), these children are embedded in the digital environment from birth, surrounded by information and digital technologies, social networks, and online communication, and become active internet users from an early age. In our study, among the individual characteristics of children, the fact that they efficiently use tablet computers and cell phones and have a high predisposition to digital technology supports this situation. In addition, children were found to be sensitive to sounds as environmental stimuli. It has been stated that the new generation of children may have developmental characteristics such as a high sense of curiosity, asking questions, rapid learning, increased anxiety, and decreased self-confidence (McCrindle & Fell, 2019).

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this research is that it is the only recent study in the field. Limitations are that the study was conducted in a single culture; therefore, the data obtained cannot be generalized to all children, and the form

measuring the characteristics is not standardized as the researchers developed it. Although this study is limited by its reliance on parental reports, the findings offer a significant contribution to nursing practice by providing a digital framework for symptom assessment in the 3-6 age group; furthermore, it advances the nursing profession by demonstrating the potential of mobile health integration in enhancing pediatric care outcomes. In this direction, it is recommended to develop validity and reliability measurement tools to determine children's characteristics for new generations.

The snowball sampling method was utilized to efficiently reach a diverse group of 202 parents across a wide geographical area via social networks. While advantageous for accessing participants with shared characteristics in pediatric nursing, this method carries a risk of selection bias due to the referral-based nature of the sample. To mitigate this, the initial link was distributed across multiple digital platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram) to ensure a more heterogeneous participant group

Conclusion

In a rapidly changing world, protecting and promoting child health requires a deep understanding of contemporary growth and developmental milestones. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the evolving characteristics of the new generation of 3–6-year-old children. From the perspective of nursing practice, these results emphasize that pediatric nurses must move beyond traditional developmental models by integrating the heightened emotional sensitivity and intuitive nature of today's children into their care plans. Recognizing that these children are increasingly independent and ask sophisticated questions allows nurses to employ more effective, child-centered communication strategies and individualized approaches during clinical procedures.

Furthermore, regarding the nursing profession, this research underscores the necessity for nursing curricula and professional development programs to be updated with contemporary developmental data. While this study is limited by its descriptive design and reliance on parental reports, it serves as a critical foundation for future longitudinal and observational research. In conclusion, by adopting an appropriate pedagogical approach that supports the innate potential of this new generation, the nursing profession can play a leading role in fostering healthier developmental outcomes and establishing stronger, more resilient family-nurse partnerships.

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Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Ethics Commission of Gazi University (E-77082166-604.01.02-654393). The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from the parents of all participating children, and verbal assent was obtained from the children included in the study.

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