

## Research: Six- and Seven-Year-Old Children and Their Families

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Family is the most important factor of socialization for a number of reasons. It provides the settings for primary socialization and is responsible for accomplishing this process. Family provides the earliest human contact for an infant and has the responsibility of giving all the attention, love, and support a child needs.

### Theoretical Views

Paul Chalfont and Emily Labeff (1988) have written that in the family begins the process of socialization, and it is the first major setting in which the child interacts. Although parents are not solely responsible for the personality of a child—they are not sculptors able to create whatever they wish of the child—they do lay the foundation for the future of the child in direct and indirect ways. Without a secure family environment, or with a destructive or neglectful family environment, children face greater difficulties in both social and personal development (Chalfont and Labeff, 1988).

I chose to study 6- and 7-year-old children, because it is a very important period of a child's development. Rachel G. Ragland and Burt Saxon (1985) say that at the age of six, the middle childhood starts. They think it is a period of calmness between two less calm periods, early childhood and adolescence. Yet middle childhood has important developmental tasks. Educator Robert Havighurst has listed some of them, dealing with physical, cognitive, and social development:

- Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games.
- Developing fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating.
- Developing concepts necessary for everyday living.
- Building wholesome attitudes toward yourself as a person.
- Developing conscience, morality, and values scaling.
- Learning to get along with people your age.
- Developing attitude toward social groups and institutions.
- Achieving personal independence (Ragland and Saxon, 1985, p. 157).

In addition, I have to say that Bulgarian children start school at the age of seven, and they have to visit a preschool group at the age of six. Therefore, it is a very special period for them, because at the age of seven, they accept a new social role, that of a student.

This article aims to explore where 6- and 7-year-old children's place is in modern families. The research was conducted in September and October 2005. One hundred and eighteen children at the ages of six and seven took part in the research. Some of the children live in ordinary families (Figure 1). They visit part-time or daily preschool groups.

- 1 — first the child has drawn herself
- 2 — second the child has drawn her father
- 3 — third the child has drawn her mother

Figure 1: A picture of a child who lives in an ordinary family

Other children spend only their weekends with their families (Figure 2), because they visit weekly preschool groups.

- 1 — first the child has drawn his father
- 2 — second the child has drawn his mother
- 3 — third the child has drawn his younger sister
- 4 — fourth the child has drawn his elder sister

Figure 2: A picture of a child who visits weekly preschool group

Some of the children live at SOS Children's Village (Figure 3) and go to a preschool group, which is at the local

school.

- 1 &ndash; first the child has drawn himself
- 2 &ndash; second the child has drawn his elder SOS brother
- 3 &ndash; third the child has drawn his elder SOS sister
- 4 &ndash; fourth the child has drawn his younger SOS brother

Figure 3: A picture of a child who lives at SOS Children's Village Methods

For my research, I used a picture test ("Draw your family") and an interview with the children to discover how 6- and 7-year-old children feel in their homes. All the children drew their families on a white sheet of paper using color pencils.

The interview that was conducted with the children included five groups of questions:

- Describe your picture. Tell me who is who in your picture. Who have you drawn first?
- Who do you want to play with? Why?
- Is there a sad person? Who? Why?
- Imagine that your family is going out for a walk. Who would you ask to come with you? Why?
- Who would you prefer to resemble when you grow up? Why?

The "Draw your Family" test was analyzed according to its contents—a picture of a family, expressing how children accept their own families, how they feel at home, and whether they are among the other family's members. The test provides us with information about who is the most important person in the child's life and whether the child is ignored at home.

#### Analysis of Results

According to the results, 52.54% of the children live with their parents; 27.12% live with their parents and grandparents. Some of the children (about 14%) live without a mother or a father, and their grandparents look after them.

If we accept Korman's opinion that the child draws first the most important person (Korman, 2000, p. 105), we have to say that 33.90% of the children have drawn their father first, 32.20% of the children have begun their drawings with their mothers, and only 2.54% of the children have started their pictures with their sisters or brothers. About 20.34% of the children have pictured themselves first.

Thus, usually parents are the most important people in a child's life, because 66.1% of them begin their pictures with the mother or the father. The parents' importance is also shown by the children's pictures, because most of the children (52.54%) have drawn themselves next to their parents: 23.73% next to the mother; 18.64% next to the father, and 10.17% between the mother and the father. In addition, parents' influence is obvious by the answer of the fifth question, "Who would you prefer to resemble when you grow up? Why?" Most of the children (78.82%) say that when they grow up they would rather be like their parents: 44.07% point to the mother and 34.75% point to the father.

Brothers and sisters are important parts of the family, too. In spite of the fact that 11.87% of the children have forgotten to draw their brother or sister and only 5.08% would rather be like their sister or brother, 27.11% of them say that they would rather play with their brothers and sisters. Children want to play with a friend (17.8%) or a cousin (5.8%), too. To sum up, 50.71% of the children prefer playing with other children. Only 22.04% of the children prefer playing with their parents. So the group of peers begins to influence a child's life even at the age of six or seven. This fact is confirmed by the answer to the fourth question ("Imagine that your family is going out for a walk who would you ask to come with you? Why?"), because 33.90% of the interviewed children say that they would invite another child for a walk.

The results of the picture test also show some problems. First, in more than one third (34.75%) of the pictures, the children have forgotten to draw themselves. Second, 23.73% of the children say that they often play alone. Third, the interview shows that there are sad children in the drawings (5.08%).

These facts show that some children aren't accepted well in their homes and that sometimes they feel lonely.

If we try to analyze the results according to children's sex, we will discover some interesting facts. Equal numbers

of boys and girls have drawn themselves next to their mothers, but we can see that more boys have drawn themselves closer to their fathers (27.69%) than girls (7.55%). In addition, 47.17% of the girls have drawn their mothers first, and only 20% of the boys have done the same. But in 49.23% of the male pictures, the father has been drawn first, and only in 15.09% of the female pictures the father is drawn first. Also, 23.08% of the boys have forgotten to draw their mothers, but only 9.43% of the girls have forgotten to draw their mothers. Moreover, 79.25% of the girls would rather be like their mothers when they grow up, and only 5.66% of them prefer being like their fathers. But 58.46% of the boys would rather be like their fathers, and only 15.38% of them prefer being like their mothers when they grow up.

When we try to analyze the results according to the type of home in which the children grow up, we can see that they live in different surroundings. It is most obvious by the different percent showing how many sad members the children's families have. About 58% of the children who are visiting weekly preschool group say that there is a sad person in their families. Only about 23% of the other children mention the same. So we see that the families of the children who visit a weekly preschool group live in harder conditions. These families are usually very poor, and this is one of the reasons their 6- and 7-year-old children are in a weekly preschool group, where they receive not only elementary knowledge, but food and clean clothes. Because these children aren't at home all weekdays, they often expel themselves from their native families and forget to draw themselves as a part of their families (78.95%).

The children who live at SOS Children's Village grow up in a stranger situation than other children, because they are not in their native families. SOS mothers look after them. So they were asked to draw their SOS families. Maybe this is one of the reasons that 75% of them forgot to draw their SOS mothers. The rest of these children have drawn themselves far away from their SOS mothers. They have preferred being next to their SOS brothers or sisters. Moreover, 25% of SOS children mention that they are sad. The same percent of these children say their SOS mothers are sad, too. Only 25% of SOS children say that there isn't a sad person in their SOS families.

In conclusion, we can tell that a family picture and a set of questions can give us very interesting information, which shows that 6- and 7-year-old children who grow up in a different situation aren't able to accept their families in the same ways. Children's place at home is influenced by their surroundings. References

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