

## EXAMINATION OF CHILDREN'S OBJECT RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROJECTIVE TESTS ACCORDING TO TRAUMA STATUS

### TRAVMA DURUMLARINA GÖRE ÇOCUKLARDA NESNE İLİŞKİLERİNİN PROJEKTİF TESTLERLE İNCELENMESİ

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#### Abstract

It is emphasized widely in the trauma literature that exposure to traumatic events causes significant emotional problems in children. For this reason, in the present study, the purpose was to examine the object relations of children with and without traumas with the Beier Sentence Completion Test, which is a projective test, and the Draw Family Test. The sample of the study consists of 38 children between the ages of 11-14. The data obtained in the study showed that the participants who underwent traumas had higher negative scores in the Beier Sentence Completion Test, and the participants without traumas had higher positive scores in the Beier Sentence Completion Test. In this respect, it can be argued that participants with trauma have higher objects and self-image, and aggression than children without trauma. Similarly, it was also determined that children with trauma used devaluation defense mechanisms, and those without trauma used glorification defense mechanisms. As a result, it is considered that the perceptions and experiences of children with and without traumas are different from each other, and uncovering this difference with projective tests will make an important contribution to the literature.

**Keywords:** Object Relations, Beier Sentence Completion Test, Projective Test, Draw Family Test

#### Öz

Travma, kaza, istismar, doğal afet gibi travmatik bir olaya verilen duygusal tepkinin yanı sıra bireyin fiziksel veya duygusal olarak tehdit edici bir olaya maruz kalması sonucu verdiği tepkidir. Travmatik bir olaya maruz kalmanın çocuklarda önemli duygusal sorunlara yol açtığı travma literatüründe yaygın olarak vurgulanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışmada travması olan ve olmayan çocukların nesne ilişkileri projektif bir test olan Beier Cümle Tamamlama Testi ve aile çiz testi ile incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırmanın örneklemi, 11-14 yaş arası çocuklardan oluşmaktadır. Toplam 38 öğrenciden oluşan bu örnekleme Çocuk ve Gençlerde Travma Sonrası Tepki Ölçeği ve Beier Cümle Tamamlama Testi ve Bir Aile Çiz Testi uygulandı. İnceleme sonrası elde edilen veriler, travması olan katılımcıların beier cümle tamamlama testinde anne ve babaya karşı tavırlarda negatif puanları daha yüksek (negatif cümleleri pozitif cümlelerden daha fazla) iken travması olmayan katılımcıların beier cümle tamamlama testinde pozitif puanları daha yüksek olduğu görüldü. Diğer yandan travması olan katılımcıların travması olmayan çocuklara göre nesne ve kendilik imgesi, agresyonun daha fazla olduğu söylenebilir. Benzer şekilde travması olan çocukların değersizleştirme savunma düzeneklerini kullanırken, travması olmayanların yüceltme savunma düzenekleri kullandıkları tespit edilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, travması olan ve olmayan çocukların nesne ilişkilerine dair algı ve deneyimleri birbirinden farklı olduğu, bu farkın projektif testlerle ortaya koymak literatüre önemli bir katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nesne İlişkileri, Beier Cümle Tamamlama Test, Projektif Test, Aile Çiz Test,

#### Introduction

Trauma can be characterized in many ways, from a single event to a chronic condition, from natural disasters to damage from a significant other to conflicts from earlier in the life cycle, to neglect or abuse. Children, families, and communities have paid and continue to pay huge

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psychological, social, physical, and financial costs following such events. Trauma is the external and internal reflection of the psychological pain that an individual cannot digest, in other words, it is the failure of the individual's holistic capacity. By using Jung's Theory of Archetypes of trauma and focusing on the client's inner world, Kalsched (1996) defined trauma as follows. *When trauma touches the developing psychological structure of a child, it produces a "fragmentation of consciousness" in which different "fragments" organize themselves according to certain archetypal and typical patterns. Here, part of the ego regresses to the infantile stage (in my opinion, this regression results in a splitting mechanism) and the other part grows rapidly and adapts to the outside world.*

In psychology, much of the trauma literature is based on the classical psychoanalytic formulation, and the following developments continued with contemporary psychodynamic approaches focused on object relations school and interpersonal psychoanalysis (Ringel & Blandell, 2012; van der Kolk et al., 1996). In psychodynamic theory, trauma was defined as a freezing effect on the individual's corporeality requiring a psychological motivation resulting in a distinct but polymeric psychological disorder (Halewood, 2017). In this respect, it is considered in the Psychodynamic Theory that healthy development in childhood depends on safe and stable interpersonal and object relations shaping the individual's intrapsychic dimensions and relational capacities. For this reason, it is emphasized that traumatic experiences experienced over object relations have the unique feature of interfering with children's natural development potentials, in other words, their ability to feel safe in their psychosomatic selves and to create their own emotions in human relations (Athanasiadou-Lewis, 2019).

It is assumed that there are two main reasons why exposure to traumatic events causes significant emotional and interpersonal problems in children. Firstly, children have fewer resources to cope with traumatic experiences, and secondly, children lack positive perceptions of one another to access social support and facilitate the capacity for emotional regulation (Lieberman et al., 2011; Szymanski & Springer, 2014). Children who have difficulty in coping with post-traumatic psychological pain, and for this reason, with impaired object images and self-images may need supportive object relations in particular. However, it is important to learn how such children perceive object relations and especially the internal representations of each other regarding establishing positive object relations.

It is stated in the Object Relations Theory that traumas experienced by a child in the early period disrupt the development of understanding "the other" as a whole, a separate entity (all object relations) (Buhl, 2002; Solomon, 2004). This results in incomplete psychic separation of the

subject (the child himself/herself) from the mother/an important other (object). An unhealthy separation results in idealized or devalued self and object representations (Kernberg, 1984; Masterson, 1981). Self and object representations are stable and internalized representations of the self, the object, and the emotion that connects the two, derived from the child's early relationship experiences with the primary caregiver. For this reason, the representation of the internalized object relations may include a weak and helpless self, a protective object and fearful when there is no object, and a happy but anxious affect when the object is present (Kernberg, 1985; Masterson, 1976).

In brief, it is important to conceptually understand the function of the Object Relations Theory, the association between objects or the object and the self at the level of affection. This importance increases even more, especially in the face of traumas. In this context, although there are many theoretical studies on children's object relations, no study was found on examining the object relations of children with or without traumas using projective tests. In this context, traumatized children are particularly vulnerable to traumatic stressors and carry risks that will put them under serious pathologies in the future. No study was found investigating the perceptions and experiences of traumatized children towards one another (object), especially traumatized children whose relations between self and object serve such a critical regulatory function, with projective tests (Beier Sentence Completion Test and Draw Family Test). It is considered that the present study will fill this gap in the literature. In this context, the purpose of the present study was to evaluate the object relations of children aged 11-14 with and without traumas.

### **Method**

The titles of the study model, study group, data collection, and data analysis are given in this part of the study.

### **Model of the Study**

The Convergent Parallel Design was used in the present study. Qualitative and quantitative methods are applied separately and with equal priority over the same period, and the data obtained are analyzed separately in this design (Karagöz, 2019). After the analysis, the results are combined while making a general interpretation. Object relations of children with and without trauma were examined with projective tests in the present study, and qualitative interviews were performed while applying the scale to the participants during the study process. The object relations of the participants were determined by comparing and combining the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative data.

### **Participants**

The sampling of the study consisted of children who were aged 11-14. In this regard, a total of 38 children who were between the ages of 11-14 were reached in an official school of the Ministry of Education. Two criteria were determined for the participants. The first one was that they were between 11-14 years old, the other one was that they had a score of 12 and above on the Child and Adolescent Post Traumatic Response Scale for those with trauma, and a score of 11 and below for those without trauma.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Parents provided informed written consent; children provided assent. The study was approved by Bingöl University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee.

### **Data Collection Tools**

Information on data collection tools is given below.

**Post-Traumatic Response Scale for Children and Adolescents:** The scale that was developed by Pynoos et al. (1987) is used to evaluate the trauma symptoms of school-age children and adolescents when faced with traumatic events. The scale, which consists of 20 items, was found to have a criterion validity of 94% and Cohen Kappa Coefficient of .878 in two evaluations made one week apart. The 7th, 12th, and 15th items of the 5-point Likert-type scale are scored reversely.

**Beier Sentence Completion Test:** It is a semi-structured projective test designed by Beier (1960) to help understand the general behaviors of individuals, level of insight, uncertainty about their past, anxiety, and fears about the future, the way they communicate and interact with their environment, and their unconscious reflections on their behaviors (Doğan, 2015).

**Draw Family Test:** It is a projective picture test that was developed by Maurice Porot (1952) based on psychoanalytic data. Its main purpose is to uncover the child's conflicts with the family. It is a projective technique that provides the opportunity to understand how the child evaluates his relations within the family, where he sees himself in the family, and his relations with other family members (Anzieu & Chabert, 2011).

### **Analysis of Data**

**Analysis of Quantitative Data:** The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare the scores of children with and without trauma according to the positive and negative attitudes towards parents in the BCTT.

**Analysis of Qualitative Data:** After the scales were applied to the participants, the thematic analysis procedures of Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed for the analysis of the data.

Firstly, all data were read without any coding and for familiarization with the data. Secondly, the dataset was read again and the themes related to the responses of the participants to the Beier Sentence Completion Test were formed. On the other hand, the Draw Family Test applied to the participants was analyzed and the compatibility of the drawings with the themes that were created as a result of the data obtained from the Beier Sentence Completion Test was analyzed. Finally, common themes were created by combining the data obtained from the Beier Sentence Completion Test and the Draw Family Test.

## Results

The quantitative and qualitative data obtained as a result of the study are given in this part. The findings were analyzed in terms of trauma, object relations, Draw Family Test, and attitudes towards parents in sentence completion.

### Quantitative Data on the Study

The comparison of the scores of children with and without trauma according to the positive and negative attitudes towards their parents in the BCTT was made with the Mann-Whitney U Test, and the results are given in Table 1.

Table 1. *The Mann-Whitney U Test Results on the Comparison of the Scores of the Students with and Without Trauma according to the Positive and Negative Status of the BCTT*

Variable	Trauma Status	n	Mean	Total	U	P
BCTT Negative	With traumas	19	23.47	446.00	105.00	.026
	Without traumas	19	15.53	295.00		
BCTT Positive	With traumas	19	15.53	295.00	105.00	.026
	Without traumas	19	23.47	446.00		

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there were significant differences between the mean negative scores ( $U=105.00$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and positive scores ( $U=105.00$ ;  $p<.05$ ) regarding the attitudes of children with and without trauma in the Beier Sentence Completion Test. The table also shows that the differences in children's attitudes towards mother and father in the Beier Sentence Completion Test, both negative and positive, are in favor of those without trauma. In this context, it can be argued that the object relations of children without trauma are healthier

than those with trauma. In other words, it can be argued that the object relations of children with trauma are more impaired than those without trauma.

### **Qualitative Data on the Study**

As a result of the thematic analysis in the study, three themes were identified. Object and Self-Image, Libidinal and Aggressive Attitudes, and Defense Mechanisms.

#### **Theme 1: Object and Self-Image**

Self-image is the structures created by the individual about himself/herself at any time by using perception, thinking, sensations, and other functions. The object image, on the other hand, is the structure created by the perception of the sensations, thoughts, and feelings emerging in the ego about the object, depending on this special relationship, in the relationship of the self with the object in a certain condition and moment. When the attitudes of both traumatized and non-traumatic participants towards the mother and father in the Sentence Completion Test and the Draw Family Test were analyzed, it was found that the participants with trauma had higher negative scores in their attitudes towards their parents. When the relations of the traumatized participants (in the Beier Sentence Completion Test) and object relations were evaluated in the context of the content, it was found that the subject focused on both the object and the self-image theme. The response below that belongs to a traumatized participant in the Beier Sentence Completion Test is significant in this respect.

**If my mother** *“gets angry with me more, discriminates against me, I cut off communication with her”.*

**If my father** *“becomes more aggressive and angry with me, I cut off communication with him”.*

**A bad father** is *“my father, smoking addict, yelling at me, discriminating between his children”.*

**I like my mother, but** *“She yells at me and blames me when my siblings misbehave”(Participant 13 with trauma). In the Draw Family Test of the same participant, the participant drew a picture and wrote the following: There is a constant chaos in our family, and my father and mother always use violence against me.*





(Figure 1: The Draw Family Test of the 13th Participant with Trauma)

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** As seen in both the Sentence Completion Test and the Draw Family Test in Figure 1, the participant had negative attitudes toward their parents. It can be argued that the participant had a worthless, inadequate, unloved image as the object image, the violent father, the sadistic mother who did not satisfy his needs, and the participant's self-image. The structures of the individual's internal systems (if there is trauma if he has been subjected to violence) determine how the person will perceive both himself and his parents. In this context, it can be argued that both the trauma of the participant and the fact that the desires he needed from his parents were not satisfied caused him to have a worthless and groundless self-image.

Participant 15 with trauma answered the 13th item (Attitudes towards mother) of the Beier Sentence Completion Test, which supported the statements of the 13th participant, as follows: "I love my mother, but sometimes she annoys me and makes me angry. She even puts a lot of pressure on me." On the other hand, the same participant answered item 53 of the Beier Sentence Completion Test as follows: "My father and I do not get along at all, he gets angry with me, he does not allow me to play, constantly puts pressure on me." Similarly, in the Draw Family Test, this participant drew himself away from his mother and father and reflected on the pressure he saw in the picture. He even wrote the following under the picture: "Once upon a time, there was a small child in a small family. This boy was under a lot of pressure from his family. His brother, mother, and father all made this child worse and bored."



*(Figure 2: The Draw Family Test of the 15th Participant with Trauma)*

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** *As in Figure 2, it can be argued that ignoring the child in the family and not covering his/her needs cause the object image to be negative, and therefore, the self-image to be negative. A child, who is not approved by his/her parents and whose desires are not satisfied, is likely to exhibit negative attitudes toward himself and his/her parents. Because in the face of the cruel behavior of the parents, the child considers himself/herself a worthless and unloved child. On the other hand, looking at the child's picture, the child drew himself away from the family and transferred the behaviors s/he was exposed to. When the pictures of the parents were evaluated, it was seen that the child reflected an aggressive attitude (eyes and head are heavily drawn and hands pointing accusingly) rather than a libidinal attitude.*

Participant 8, who had no trauma and had positive object relations, expressed the positive atmosphere of the family in the answers to the Beier Sentence Completion Test as follows:

**I love my mom, but** *“sometimes I make her angry. But no matter what, I love both my mother and father very much”.*

**My father and I,** *“We are very compatible and good”.*

**Best of fathers,** *“He is my father”.*

**The best of mothers is** *“She is my mother”.*

Similarly, the answers given by the 3rd Participant in the Bier Sentence Completion Test, who had no trauma and had positive object relations, are as follows:

**My father and I** *are very happy.*

**The best of fathers** *is like my father.*

**The best of mothers** *is my mother.*

On the other hand, it is seen in the Draw Family Test of the 8th participant that family members are in close contact with each other and show a libidinal attitude. It is also seen that family members have full limbs and attention is paid to details. Also, the story of the participant in the



Draw Family Test is noteworthy: *We are a happy and agreeable family. My father is calm and quiet, but a very good father. My mother is a smiling and good person. I am like my mother, but I also have similar aspects to my father. My father is a shy person, so I resemble him. I love my sibling, too.*



(Figure 3: The Draw Family Test of the 8th Participant Without Trauma)

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** *As in Figure 3, each object image is associated with a self-object, which is accompanied by an emotion determined by the dynamics of the individual. In other words, it is considered that there is an emotional flow between the object image and the self-image. It can be argued that the harmony between the object image of the participant and the self-object is reflected both in positive attitudes towards the mother and father and in the libidinal attitude in the drawn family picture. On the other hand, it can be argued that the participant internalizes the care given and the projected object relations (parents) (details in the picture, liveliness, size, location, and close contact between family members). Also, if the child's parental object image is positive, the self-image may be positive.*

## Theme 2: Libidinal and Aggressive Attitude

Parents' welcoming their children with a smile, a pleasant look, and interest is called a Libidinal Attitude, and if they greet their child with a hateful, unfriendly, mocking, or offensive attitude, it is called an Aggressive Attitude. In this context, the approach of parents who approach their children with a harsh and angry facial expression or attitude reveals negative object relations. The answers given in the Beier Sentence Completion Test of the 7th Participant, who had a bad relationship with his parents and also suffered from violence, are as follows:

**I wish my mom** *was a good person but she's not because she's a bad mom.*

**My mom** *always starts fights at home.*

**My dad and I,** *we're just father and son.*

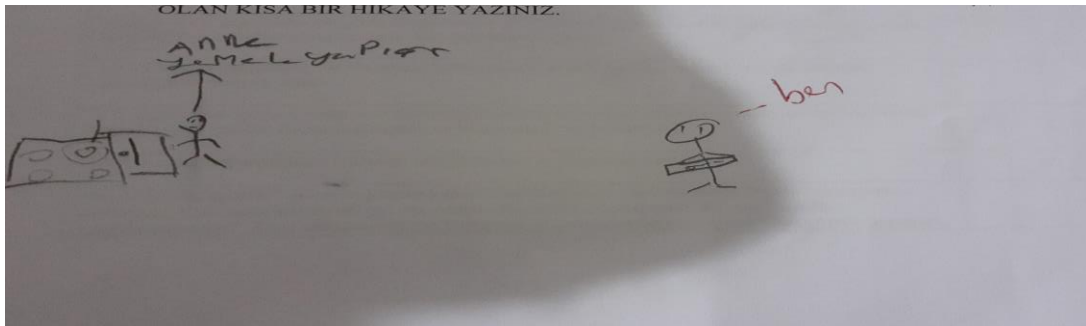
**I love my mother,** *but I do not love her.*

On the other hand, the same participant drew himself away from his mother and alone in the Draw Family Test. The sentences written by the participant in the Draw Family Test are very meaningful: “At home, everyone is addicted to technology, and so am I. We fight a lot because of these technological devices, then my mother comes and gets angry with us and uses violence”. The responses of the following participants with similar trauma to the Beier Sentence Completion Test are as follows.

**I wish my mother** loved me as she loved my brother; **I love my mother, but I do not know if she loves me** (Participant 11 with trauma)

**I love my mother, but she is very angry and angry** (Participant 11 with trauma)

**A bad father is my father** because he beats me (Participant 4 with Trauma).



(Figure 4: The Draw Family Test of the 7th Participant with Trauma)

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** As in Figure 4, a child who is not loved and neglected by the mother and father appears as a child who cannot hold on to life and does not use his libidinal energy. Because the parent who does not exhibit a libidinal attitude is considered to cause the child to use aggressive energy. Where there is no life energy, death and extinction appear. Love and attention are as important as the basic food that the child takes. For this reason, it can be argued that the aggression-laden attitude and the introjection of the body language cause the emergence of a negative object relationship between the child and the parent, also causing the formation of traces of traumatic memories in the child.

However, the answers of the 2nd Participant, who had no trauma and used libidinal energy with the attention, love, and support received from the parents, and also had positive object relations, to the Beier Sentence Completion Test are as follows:

**The best of fathers is my father, he always loves, protects, and guides me.**

**My father and I get along very well**

**My mother** is very kind-hearted, loves me very much, cooks very well, and is very beautiful.

When the Draw Family Test of the same participant is examined, it is seen that they are together in close contact and smiling at each other.



*(Figure 5: The Draw Family Test of the 2nd Participant Without Trauma)*

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** *It can be argued that those who develop a positive object relationship with their parents or if parents provide this positive object relationship, and the child internalizes the behaviors of the parents identifying according to gender, reveals both the good mother and the good child theme. On the other hand, it can be argued that the child's facing his mother's libidinal Attitude reflects the child's positive inner world to the family drawing and provides both the development of positive object relations (the mutual feeding of the child and the parents) and the satisfaction of the desired needs as it can be seen in Figure 5.*

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### **Theme 3: Defense Mechanisms**

Since negative emotions and negative loads in our inner world are loaded with aggression or aggression energy, the system tries to exclude this negative energy, which is considered to cause splitting. Participant 3, who had a trauma and a negative object relationship, also had a split defense mechanism in his responses to the Beier Sentence Completion Test. For example;

**If my mother** fulfilled my wishes, it would be nice.

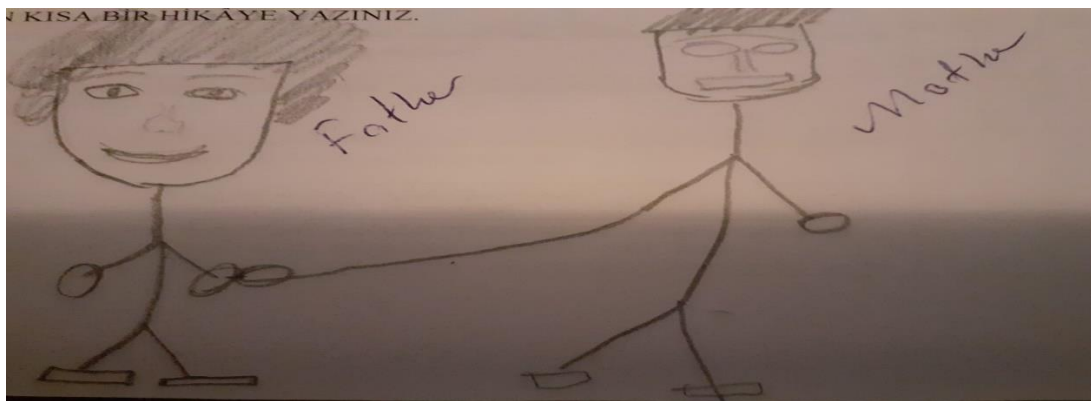
**If my father** fulfilled my wishes, it would be nice.

**I love my mother**, but now she's too boring and intrusive. For this reason, I do not love her anymore.

**A bad father** is not my father. My father is very good. I love him.

It is seen in the Draw Family Test that the same participant draws his father on the left and draws him fully (identifies with him and glorifies him), and draws the mother on the right but

incompletely (devaluing his mother). On the other hand, it can be argued that the fact that he does not draw himself in the picture is an indication of the denial defense mechanism. Similarly, in the responses of the 4th Participant with trauma to the Beier Sentence Completion Test, the statement “*the best of the fathers is my father, but the best of the mothers is the one who fulfills the wishes of their child, but my mother is not like this*” is consistent with the data in the Draw Family Test of the 3rd participant, who had trauma.



(Figure 6: The Draw Family Test of the 3rd Participant with Trauma)

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** On the one hand the 3<sup>rd</sup> participant's describing his father as a perfect father and making extremely positive references to him in his relationships is an indicator of idealization (here, the participant is aware of his own needs and seeks a close relationship that responds positively to these needs), on the other hand, the fact that he reflects his mother as a bad mother can be considered as a concrete example of devaluation. His father's being good and his mother's being bad show the division defense mechanism. Similarly, in the Draw Family Test, it can be argued that drawing the father on the left (which means the person he identifies with) integrates the object and the self or glorifies the object, and drawing the mother on the right separates the self and the object or devalues the object as it is shown in Figure 6.

However, the statements and data of the Draw Family Test of the 4th participant, who had no trauma and had positive object relations in the Draw Family Test and the Beier Sentence Completion Test, are as follows:

**The best of fathers** is my father.

**My father and I** are like friends.

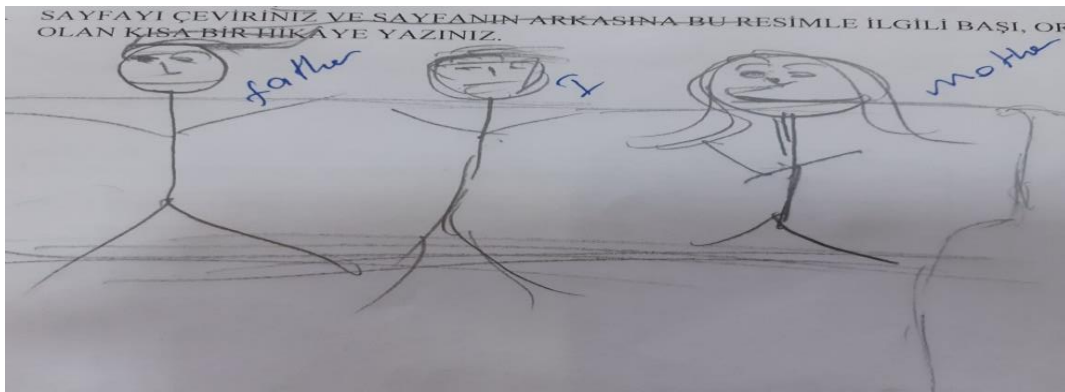
**The best of mothers** is my mother.

In the Draw Family Test of the same participant, the fact that he drew himself in the middle shows that he wants to show himself in the center of the family. He also drew the father on the left, which indicates that he identifies with him, but because the direction of the feet was towards the mother, he turned to the mother. All these situations can be a concrete indication that the child uses the projective identification defense mechanism.

Similarly, the responses of the 15th participant, who did not have any trauma, to the Beier Sentence Completion Test, are as follows:

**The best of fathers** *is my dad.*

**I love my mother** more than any other mother.



(Figure 7: The Draw Family Test of the 4th Participant Without Trauma)

**Psychodynamic Interpretation:** As it can be seen in Figure 7, when both the picture and sentence completion tests were analyzed, it can be argued that the participant has a positive attitude towards parents, and also while identifying with the father, s/he does not neglect the mother and turns to her, which means that the child uses the projective identification defense mechanism.

### Discussion and Results

In this mixed method study, the purpose was to evaluate the object relations of children with and without trauma by using projective tests. Both quantitative and qualitative data were evaluated and the results were discussed separately in the study.

### Discussion of Quantitative Findings

The negative scores of children with trauma were higher than the positive scores in the responses of children with and without traumas to the Beier Sentence Completion Test. This result shows that children with traumas have more negative attitudes towards their parents, and have more negative object relations. On the other hand, the positive scores were higher than the

negative scores in the answers given to the Beier Sentence Completion Test by children without traumas. It was determined that children without trauma have more positive attitudes towards their parents, for this reason, they have more positive object relations. In this context, it was also determined that the object relations of children without trauma are healthier than those with trauma. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Szymanski & Springer (2014), which reported that children and adolescents with trauma have more negative cognitive and emotional object relations and more negative relationship experiences with others than their non-traumatic peers. On the other hand, in a previous study that examined the relationship between the two aspects of object relations, self-esteem and the emotional quality of one's representations of the other and trauma, it was reported that a significant relationship was detected between the two aspects of object relations and trauma, and both self-esteem and the emotional quality of one's representations were complementary mediators to the relationship between the symptoms of trauma (Ortigo et al., 2013). In this context, it can be argued that children with trauma have more impaired object relations than children without trauma, and trauma is an effective psychopathological condition in the relationship between the child and the parent.

### **Discussion of Qualitative Findings**

The responses of children with and without trauma to the Beier Sentence Completion Test and the data obtained from the pictures drawn in the Draw Family Test are discussed in this part. The contents of both projective tests were discussed together and common themes related to them were determined.

#### **Object and Self Image Theme**

When the projective tests of children with and without trauma were analyzed, it was seen that children with trauma showed negative attitudes towards their parents. Also, children with trauma either drew family members in certain parts of their family members as dominant or exaggerated or drew themselves away from their parents in their family pictures. Based on this point of view, it can be argued that the object and self-images of children with trauma were impaired in object relations. For this reason, since the parents did not fulfill the duty of a good and calming object image to fight the trauma in the child, the child develops negative attitudes towards the parents and this leads to the deterioration of the object and self-image. This might have occurred due to the effect of trauma, and it may be that the trauma in the child externalized the psychological pain reflecting it in the drawing or incomplete sentences. In this way, the child created an image of an object representing evil. The child identifies the parents (object image) that represent evil with trauma to protect himself/herself from trauma or to prevent



further deterioration of self-image. Volkan (2007) interpreted this situation as the representation of the shifts in self and object images and the transition from one side of the primitive compartment to the other. In the approaches of Blanck and Blanck (1986), which were consistent with the data of the present study, it was reported that self and object images were formed as a result of past traumatic experiences, and internalization of these experiences created more primitive forms of defense and negative self and object images. As a result, it was determined that children with trauma had more negative object images (cruel mother, bad father, abusive mother, uncaring father, unhappy and cold-behaving father) and negative self-images (unloved child, child exposed to violence or exposed to traumatic experiences) than children without traumas. It was also argued that all these processes made up the unconscious basis of the child's conscious psychological activity (Beres and Joseph, 1970).

### **Libidinal and Aggressive Attitude Theme**

It was determined in this theme that children with trauma drew more aggressive incomplete sentences and family images than children without trauma. On the other hand, it was also seen that the attitudes of children without trauma were positive in sentence completion tests (my mother is a good woman, we get along well with my father) and Draw Family Test (positive facial expressions of parents, drawing themselves next to their parents and holding hands). For this reason, it can be argued that children with trauma have more negative object relations than children without trauma. Jacobson (1964) argued that libido and aggression were constantly redirected from love object to self and from self to love object or from one object to another. In this process, the self and object images, along with the images of different objects, temporarily merge, separate, and recombine. It was also emphasized that there is a tendency to invest only in the libido in such a mixed image and direct all aggression into the other. On the other hand, it was also determined in the present study that children with trauma exhibited more aggressive attitudes. Winnicott (1986) emphasized that aggression emerges as a reaction to early losses and traumas. Similarly, it was also reported that traumatized children who reflect their aggression outwardly had more negative object representations than their non-traumatized peers, and traumatized aggression-laden children do not allow positive object relations to develop (Szymanski & Springer, 2014). In the present study, it was found that traumatized children develop negative attitudes towards their parents, and this shows that such children are loaded with aggression towards both themselves and their parents. In this context, traumatized, aggression-laden children in the present study seem to be in a particularly high-risk group in terms of long-term violence and long-term trauma psychopathology. It was stated previously that children's externalized aggression-laden attitudes and negative object representations cause

more disruption in object relations (Pepler & Rubin, 1991). As a result, it was seen in the present study that traumatized children had more negative object relations than non-traumatized children and had negative attitudes both in the Sentence Completion Test and the Draw Family Test. On the other hand, it was also found that non-traumatized children's attitudes towards their parents were externalizing through drawings and were more libidinal-laden.

### **Defense Mechanisms Theme**

Considering the process within the scope of this theme, it was found that the participants used the partition defense mechanism. In this context, it was also found that children with trauma used the devaluation defense mechanism more, and children without trauma used the glorification defense mechanism. In the responses of children with trauma to the Beier Sentence Completion Test, it was seen that children said "*I do not like my mother, my father is not a good person*", or in the Draw Family Test, it was seen that they drew their parents away from them, their face, mouth and other parts either exaggeratedly draw or emphasized or not drawn at all. This means that children use the devaluation defense mechanism in object relations. It was reported that the purpose of object relations defense mechanisms is to protect the object, self, and object relations (Masterson, 1976). When the child idealizes the object, the object is well preserved, and in this way, secure attachment occurs. If the child idealizes himself/herself, the self is preserved by dividing any shame associated with the trauma memories. On the other hand, the child protects the object by devaluing the self and putting the blame for the trauma on himself/herself. In this way, s/he allows the object to remain idealized. Finally, it is stated that the child can protect the object as "good" by putting the trauma in the place of others, or as "bad" by devaluing the other (mother, father, or persecutor), and similarly, s/he wants to protect himself/herself by projecting his/her traumatic shame feelings onto others (Bluhm & Blizard, 1992). It is emphasized that all these emerge as the internal mechanism of the compartment defense (Kernberg, 1986). Previous studies report that children use defense mechanisms to avoid traumas (Herman & van der Kolk, 1987; Putnam, 1989), and object relations are used to protect the child, himself/herself, the object, and the relationship with the object (Kernberg, 1985; Masterson, 1976).

As a result, it was concluded that the object relations of children with trauma are more impaired than those without trauma, displaying bad behavior toward children will cause serious psychological pain in the long run, and this pain will leave such a deep trace in the child's psychological world that whenever there is a state of separation from any object throughout life s/he will feel that pain again and again. Especially when the pictures in the Draw Family Test were evaluated, it was determined that the pictures were generally faint, the limbs were missing,

the participating child drew himself far from the parents, and certain parts of the parents (head, eyes, hands) were drawn with more pressure, and some of the pictures were angular (representing aggression and domestic violence). When the Draw Family Tests of the participants without trauma were examined, it was determined that the pictures were more prominent, the limbs were full, and the distance between the child and the family was closer. Based on all these data, it can be argued that the traumatized participants have more disconnection in inter-object relations, maladaptive inter-object patterns, and impaired capacity to relate to objects more than those without trauma. Finally, it can be argued that projective tests such as the Beier Sentence Completion Test and the Draw Family Test can be easily used to examine the object relations of individuals.

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