

The Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood Experiences of Adult Only Children and their Interpersonal Relationships*

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Abstract: It appears that the only children are raised in a unique way of life and differentiate from children with siblings concerning their psychosocial experiences. In this study, how adult only children perceive their only-child experiences in the context of psychosocial experiences and how they shape those experiences in their interpersonal relationships were discussed. The experiences of being an only child were evaluated by comparing childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This study was conducted in a phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research types. In this study, there were 10 only children, five females and five males, aged between 20 and 26 using the criterion sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed with interpretive phenomenological analysis. Toward the findings of the study, a framework was structured on how the only child-experiences are interpreted in adulthood. The main themes of the research were being an only child, the only child in family relationships, the only child in friendship, and the only child experiences in the past and present. From the experiences of being an only child, parenting processes of the only children can be investigated.


Keywords: Only child, personality traits, interpersonal relations, interpretive phenomenological analysis.

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Introduction

Children who grow up and develop without siblings or peers in the family from infancy to adulthood are defined as the only children (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Being an only child is a common phenomenon today. As a matter of fact, according to the data of 2016 in the European Union countries, the rate of families with one child is 47%, the rate of families with two children is 40%, and the rate of families with three or more children is 13% (European Commission, 2016). In Turkey, although there is no clear statistical information about the number, the number of one-child families has increased. Parents may prefer to have an only child in terms of economic factors, career progression, physiological conditions, and childcare (Rosen, 2001; Weinlein, 2000). Thus, the number of families with one child is increasing gradually, and the phenomenon of being an only child becomes a situation, including different experiences.

Growing up as an only child is a process that has unique developmental characteristics. Showing all attention to the only child during childhood and adolescence comes to the fore. Besides, it is also possible for the family to direct all its economic, social and emotional resources to the only child (Falbo, 2012). It is stated that the only children who are in the focus of their parents are more successful academically than those with siblings (Chen & Liu, 2014). On the other hand, it is stated that due to the overprotective approach of parents, excessive tolerance and inadequacy of discipline, the only children may be spoiled, inadequate to share and inadequate concerning social skills, and experience loneliness and have a perfectionist understanding (Mickus, 1994; Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Rosen, 2001). At this point, parents' approaches in their social interactions with their only child stand out as a prominent situation. The attitudes of parents towards their only child affect their development process. It is thought that parental approaches or attitudes may be determinant in these situations that may arise in the experiences of only children.

Within the scope of interpersonal relationships of the only children, there are explanations about their relationships with their parents as well as their friendship relationships. The only children may experience conflict in their social relationships due to excesses or imbalances in the parents' attitudes towards their only child (White, 2004). However, there are some thoughts that the only children have difficulty in interpersonal adaptation, show weakness in social skills, and are isolated from social environments by their peers (Falbo, 2012). On the other hand, it is stated that siblings contribute to social development, but the only children's social skills are not weaker than children with siblings (Bobbitt-Zeher & Downey, 2013). Considering the related literature, it can be thought that the context in which they live determines the course of the social relationships of the only children. In addition, the elements that arise in the relationships of the only children with their parents can be reflected in their experiences of peer relationships.

The first studies on experiences of being an only child are based on Adler's research on birth order (Adler, 1927/2018, 1929/2018). Adler examined the development of the first child, middle child, last child and the only child in birth order studies and tried to determine how those children's characteristics were shaped. In the context of the characteristics of birth order, it was stated that the only children were self-centered and insufficient concerning social skills (Adler, 1964). Besides, it is stated that the only children grow up like adults due to the absence of siblings in the family and excessive approach of the parents.

When examined in regard of development periods, the experience of being an only child in childhood and adolescence differs from children with siblings in terms of parenting attitudes, family relationships, personality traits and peer relationships (Doh & Falbo, 1999; Pickhardt, 2008; Polit & Falbo, 1987; White, 2004). The reflections of childhood and adolescent experiences in adulthood reveal a specific situation of the experiences of being an only child in all developmental periods. In this respect, examining the prominent themes in the only children's experiences will allow the formation of a holistic framework. Thus, this study was designed with phenomenological research to interpret the experiences of being an only child that appears in childhood, adolescence and adulthood and draws attention to interpersonal relationships.

The present study aimed to investigate how adult only children make sense of childhood, adolescence and adulthood experiences and interpersonal relationships and experiences. The research questions composed in line with this main purpose of the research are as follows:

1. How do adult only children make sense of the experience of being an only child?
2. How do adult only children define the only children's personality traits? How do they evaluate their own personality traits?
3. How do adult only children interpret family relationships?
4. How do adult only children make sense of friendship relationships?
5. How do adult only children compare their childhood period with their current life status?
6. How do adult only children compare adolescence with their current life status?

Methodology

Research Design

Phenomenology, which focuses on how people make sense of an experience with their interpretations and expressions, is also defined as the perception of the world in which

people live (Langdrige, 2007; Mayring, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2015). In this context, this study was conducted with a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research types, as the present study aimed to investigate how adult only children make sense of and interpret the experiences of their childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and interpersonal relationships with their perspective.

Participants

In phenomenological studies, participants are determined by criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling techniques (Christensen & Brumfield, 2009). In this study, the participants were selected among individuals who had experiences related to the only child phenomenon through criterion sampling. Therefore, the participants who showed similar characteristics to explain the research phenomenon were reached. The study group consists of 10 only children (5 females, 5 males) between the ages of 20-26, who were in young adulthood. In addition, the participants were from different socio-economic backgrounds, attending university or having a university degree. Anonymity and confidentiality was preserved. Information about the participants is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Information about the Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Educational Status	Marital Status
Pelin	Female	26	Bachelor	Single
Sila	Female	22	Bachelor	Single
Melih	Male	20	Undergraduate	Single
Ilayda	Female	24	Bachelor	Single
Kaan	Male	24	Bachelor	Single
Ahmet	Male	21	Undergraduate	Single
Asli	Female	21	Undergraduate	Single
Murat	Male	20	Undergraduate	Single
Tolga	Male	25	Bachelor	Single
Ebru	Female	20	Undergraduate	Single

Data Collection and Procedure

In the study, interviews were conducted with the participants to determine and interpret the childhood, adolescent, and adulthood experiences of the only children and their interpersonal relationships experiences. Semi-structured interview was utilized. With semi-structured interview questions, new situations and topics that may arise during the interview are also investigated (Smith & Osborn, 2004). In this way, it was aimed to evaluate new questions that may arise during the interview within the scope of this study. The questions asked during the interview with the participants within the scope of this research are as follows:

1. How do you define being an only child?

- a. Are there any similarities/differences with what society perceives?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages dimensions of being an only child for you?
3. How are your relationships with your parents? How does it differ from ones with siblings?
 - a. What are the expectations of your family from you?
 - b. How do you perceive/interpret them?
4. How are your friendships as an only child?
5. How would you compare your childhood with your current life status?
6. How would you compare your adolescence period with your current life status?
7. What would be different in your life if you had a sibling?
8. Was it important to be an only child in the growing-up process?

In this study, the only children in adulthood were identified as participants. In line with the main purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals aged 20-26 who are the only children of their family in terms of evaluating the experiences in childhood and adolescence and interpreting the experiences in interpersonal relationships. Before the interviews with the participants, they were informed about this study. Interviews were conducted with people who chose to participate in this study voluntarily. Also, the participants were informed that the audio recording would be taken. The interviews' records were transcribed verbatim and the data in these transcripts were analyzed by the researcher.

Data Analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The data obtained from the participants in this study were evaluated based on the interpretive phenomenological analysis. In the interpretive phenomenological analysis, the way individuals make sense of their lives and the connections between their experiences are interpreted by the researcher (Eatough & Smith, 2008). In other words, interpretative phenomenological analysis aims to make sense of individuals' lives, interpret this sense, and reveal the themes. The steps followed in the analysis of the data of the study are as follows: Interview transcripts were prepared, and certain meaning groups were formed. These groups, which were first created at the personal level, were later expanded to the whole group. Themes were created by bringing together these groups of meanings. Among these themes, related themes were combined and top themes were determined. Quotations were given on how the experience was interpreted by adult only children. Thus, it was shown how interpretations of the themes and sub-themes were meaningful. Since it aimed to interpret the psychosocial experiences of adult only children in childhood, adolescence and adulthood and their interpersonal interactions, the data obtained in this study were evaluated with an interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Accuracy and Credibility of Findings

Feedback was received from three experts in the field of Guidance and Psychological Counseling regarding the upper and sub-themes that emerged after the analysis of the data, and the findings were reviewed in this way. During the research process, it was tried to ensure consistency by ensuring the consistent progress of qualitative research with experts' opinions. Also, the research data were examined by different experts. As a result of these examinations, the qualitative research findings were tried to be confirmed.

To ensure the transferability of this research, each stage of the qualitative research process is explained in detail in this section. In addition, participants were determined by criterion sampling technique, one of the purposeful sampling techniques. Thus, the transferable features of the qualitative research phase were presented within a certain framework.

Role of Researcher

In phenomenological studies, situations related to the researcher, such as the researcher's perspective, experiences and prejudices regarding the subject under investigation, are considered. In this respect, a perspective is formed about the position of the researcher in the interpretation of the phenomenon by determining the researcher's stance regarding the phenomenon studied (Christensen & Brumfield, 2009; Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researcher's perspective on being an only child is based on experiential observations. However, the only childhood experiences in the literature are considered in a holistic way. Besides, the researcher evaluated the phenomenon of being an only child with an approach that integrates the perspective of being a sibling child and being an only child.

Findings

In line with the purpose of this study, the content of the interviews with individuals who were the only children of their family were examined with interpretive phenomenological analysis. As a result of the analysis, four upper themes emerged. These themes were interpreted under the headings of being the only child, the only child in family relationships, the only child in friendship relations, and childhood, adolescence and adulthood periods within only child experiences. The sub-themes of being an only child included definitions of only child, the perception of society for the only children and loneliness of only children. In only child in family relationships theme, sub-themes of only focus of parents' attention and pressure created by parents' expectations emerged. The sub-themes of the worthiness of close friendship and the difficulty of making friendships were examined under the only child in friendship relationships, another theme. Finally, with the comparison of childhood, adolescence

and adulthood, the possible effects of having siblings discussed in childhood, adolescence and adulthood in the only child experiences theme (see Figure 1).

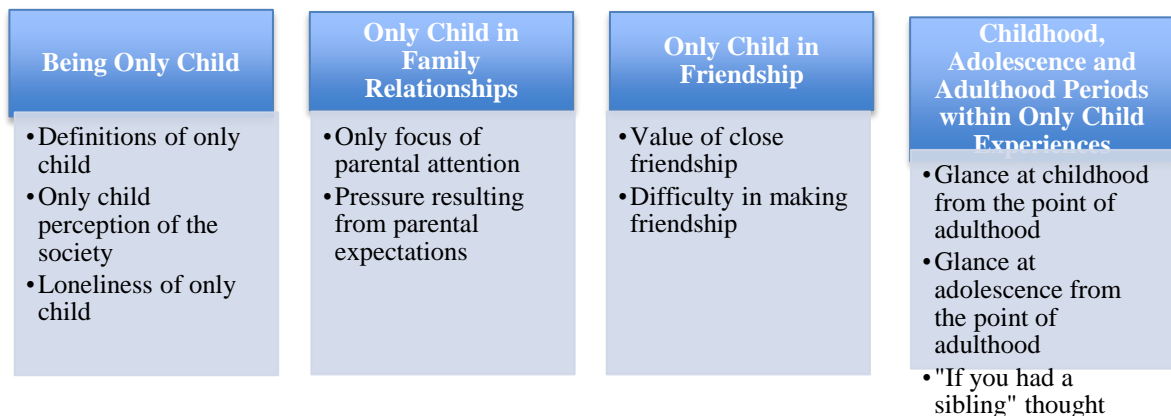


Figure 1. Main themes and sub-themes of adult only children's experiences

Being the Only Child

In their experiences of being an only child, the participants first stated how the only children are defined, the society's perception of an only child, and the characteristics of loneliness only children experience. By combining their experiences of being an only child with the perception and expectation of the environment, they made sense of the characteristics of an only child. The sub-themes of being an only child were definitions of the only child, the perception of society for the only child and loneliness of only child.

Definitions of the Only Child

In the definitions of being an only child, the only children listed some characteristics based on their experiences and observations. The only children described characteristics that might be associated with them and stated that the only children were spoiled, incompatible, aggressive, impatient, ambitious, highly self-confident, self-centered, withdrawn and shy. On the other hand, the only children stated that by turning loneliness into an opportunity, they perceive loneliness as a situation that plays a role in the development of their creativity and that creativity and imagination are developed with a single childhood experience.

Being alone in the only children's growth process can help them mature at an earlier age thanks to the strategies they develop while dealing with the situations they encounter. One of the participants drew attention to this situation. Since he was the person who initiated the interaction in the stage of establishing relationships in his social circles, this turned into an advantage and he stated that he gained more advanced social skills.

Ebru: I can say that I got used to loneliness and comfort since I don't have a brother or sister.

Sila: The only children can be ambitious, spoiled, incompatible and curious.

Kaan: Some of the only children are really spoiled and can get angry quickly. My personality traits include being impatient.

Pelin: According to my observations, there are two types of the only children. First, he is the type that does not go beyond the words of his family, although it differs from person to person, with low self-esteem, usually anxious and cautious. The second is the type who is spoiled by his family, who is extremely self-confident and thinks he is in the center of the world. I can often define my own personality traits as the first type in this context.

Tolga: Another disadvantage of being an only child is being introverted and shy.

Murat: They can be stingy on some issues. I also have a bit of stinginess. I was also an introverted person at middle school and high school. However, when I was at the university, this introversion lessened. I have improved my ability to communicate better with people. I think the only children are more creative and imaginative. When I was alone, when I was a child, I used to play imaginatively, imagining absurd items and enjoyed it a lot.

Ilayda: Since I grew up as an only child, I had to learn to start interactions early. This situation made me more compliant and assertive.

Ahmet: I think I have matured earlier than I dealt with all the problems I encountered alone. When I was younger, my loyalty to my family was very strong, but when I moved to college, I saw that this loyalty weakened.

Evaluations concerning definitions of being an only child vary in a positive and negative range. While some features and situations indicate positive meanings for single children, some experiences can negatively affect. In this case, social perceptions towards single children come to the fore.

The Only Child Perception of Society

Single children stated that society's perceptions towards them were generally negative. The only children who stated that the only children's social thought includes "selfish, spoiled, perfectionist, and not able to share" do not accept this situation. However, there were the only children who expressed that there was an opinion that it was advantageous to be an only child in the society. In evaluating the perceptions of an only child based on positive and negative values, it was seen that only children and social thought were in opposite directions.

Ahmet: The perception that only children do not know how to share is very common in our society. I think this perception occurs because they see sharing as an obligation. Someone without a sibling can learn to share too. Only children are not selfish.

Melih: Society may think that only one child is spoiled.

Murat: (According to the society) He is a child who is always kept in favor and raised as spoiled.

Asli: Stereotypes are common, as being an only child is advantageous.

Pelin: The perception of society is very important in a family's upbringing a child, especially if they have only one child. Because, parents make extra effort to minimize the error to raise children who are beneficial to society and in accordance with social norms and to reflect their knowledge to the society, to get rid of the saying that "what does the people say?".

Ebru: When I say yes to the question of whether you are the only child, there are those who say "how beautiful this is" but there are those who say this is very bad.

As stated by the only children, the social perception towards being an only child is generally negative. Some parents had extreme attitudes in the process of raising their only child to overcome this negativity. Due to society's negative perception, these extreme attitudes of parents may create pressure on only children.

Loneliness of the Only Child

It was observed that the most prominent experience apart from the definitions of only child and society's perception towards an only child was loneliness. The only children emphasized being alone concerning their experiences of being an only child the most. While making a definition of the only child, talking about only children's specific characteristics and expressing the perception of the environment for only children, they mentioned loneliness of them. They stated that this loneliness was felt from childhood and that this situation had reflections on adulthood.

The expressions of the only children about loneliness were associated with siblings more. They tried to explain the loneliness they experienced during their growing up with their situation in the family. On the other hand, there were also participants who were worried about the future due to loneliness. The experience of being an only child in late adulthood and eldership was considered to be an alarming factor.

Ahmet: Just like not having someone to share your chocolate with, and not having someone to share your pranks with.

Asli: Loneliness is so hard!

Pelin: Being an only child is a situation that is perceived positively by others, but it is very difficult for the person and has negative effects. It is like being always alone, especially being alone at home is difficult.

Melih: When I come home from school, I feel alone.

Sila: When I was a child, I was very lonely. My mother was working half a day and I was very bored. The only disadvantage for me is that I can't find anything to do when I'm alone and get bored.

Ilayda: I have felt lonely since I was little and I wanted a sibling so much that my request was mostly left unfinished.

Murat: They are used to loneliness. Since I have been alone at home since I was little, it is no longer a problem for me to be alone, but it scares me to be alone when I get old in the future.

The Only Child in Family Relationships

Being an only child in family relationships indicated two different dimensions. Being the only focus of the family, that is, the parents' attention, care and love to them is welcomed by only children. However, the family's high concentration of attention and interest can lead to an increase in family expectations. In this case, only children may

be under the pressure of their parents concerning academic, social, relational and value system expectations. The meaning of being an only child in the family was to be the person at the center of attention and also to experience the pressure of intensity of expectations.

The Only Focus of Parental Attention

The most overwhelming advantage of being an only child was to be the center of parental attention and care. Only children positively assessed their parents' interest in them. That family's love and attention were concentrating in one focus turns out to be a gratifying situation for single children. Also, another prominent situation was that parents used almost all of their economic resources for their only children. These experiences were developing from childhood continue in adulthood.

Murat: I can say that being an only child means that the parents work for their child, that they make all efforts for their children to have a better future, and that they spend everything they possess for his only child.

Pelin: If I look at my perspective for being an only child, I think that besides difficulties, it also brings convenience. Being an only child is like feeling all eyes on you. Being always interested in you (it can turn into a disadvantage from time to time) and using domestic facilities for you can be considered an advantage of being an only child.

Ebru: It is good for me to have all my family's attention on me.

Kaan: All parents work for their children to have a good future, but in families with a higher number of siblings, some siblings are more prominent and some siblings are less prominent.

Ahmet: The most important advantage is that my family always spares their free time for me.

Melih: It is an advantage to be the only and most loved child in the family.

Ilayda: I think you become everything in the family. Everything is bought for you, everything is done for you. To be the center of attention of the family. To be closer with the parents. There is no such thing as a bedroom fight.

Ebru: It is very nice to have everything you want and always pay attention to you.

Sila: I can say that it is very comfortable, since I was an only child, they gathered all their attention on me.

Pressure Resulting from Parental Expectations

Parents with only children may have intensive or high expectations. Expectations of parents who use all of their emotional, behavioral, social, cognitive and economic resources for their only child are also rising. They therefore expect their only children to succeed in all cases. This experience is perceived as an element of oppression by only children. Only children can develop the idea of taking responsibility against parental expectations, which can sometimes lead to overburdening the only child.

Ahmet: Being the only child in your family, more precisely, in the house, draws attention on you. In this context, I think that people should realize their own wishes and thoughts as well as the expectations, wishes and thoughts of their whole family, and although these expectations are not told or expressed, I think that they are subjected to psychological pressure. This situation reduces

the self-confidence of the person, creates fear of being alone, relational problems with parents due to your focus in the family, and occasionally aggressiveness to express your own thoughts.

Ebru: Too much control/perfection expectation.

Asli: Because of the focus of attention, I think I have more conflicts of opinion with parents than with those with siblings.

Sila: The family's desire for success all the time

Kaan: Since I was an only child, my family's focus was just me. I think it raises these expectations. The most important expectation was my education. Frankly, I have been very tired to meet the expectations during my upbringing.

Murat: I definitely think that my only child has an impact on my growing up. Although you are free, you are also limited. Because the eyes are on you, so expectations are high in this context and you are trying to meet what is expected of you. Inevitably, a limitation and pressure can be felt. This situation affects you psychologically and continues in the growth process.

The Only Child in Friendship

The only children emphasized the value of close friendship in their social relationships. They emphasize being selective in choosing friends and maintaining a small number of close friendships that affect only children's lives. On the other hand, only children, who stated that growing up alone creates difficulties in establishing friendships, attributed their difficulties in establishing friendships to constantly interacting with adults during the upbringing.

Value of Close Friendship

The only children stated that they value close friendship. They stated that they were selective in friendship relationship and that they could not trust anyone. A participant who express friendship as "like brotherhood" stated that he had a protectionist attitude to his friends. Reflection of the loneliness experienced as a child stands out in the value given to friendship relations.

Ilayda: I am very selective in my friendships. However, my friendship relations with the friends I have chosen continue long. However, I am a bit of a vengeful person, when I see their mistakes and these mistakes are things that hurt me, I have a personality that instantly interrupts my relationship and conversation.

Pelin: I have a small number of close friends and they are all in very important places for me. I can say that without them, my social and playful personality would not emerge.

Ahmet: Fear of being alone and anxiety arising from being an only child inevitably reflects on friendship relations. In order not to end friendships, I may not care about myself from time to time. In short, the state of being on the tenterhooks, which usually occurs psychologically from time to time, can inevitably be reflected in my environment.

Ebru: Since I consider my friends like my siblings, I protect them very much.

The Difficulty in Establishing a Friendship

In addition to the value given to close friendship, only children also mentioned the difficulty of establishing a friendship. The lack of peers around during the growing-up period might lead to only children interacting with adults continuously during this process. Only children may have difficulty communicating with their peers in this case. In addition, the fact that only children who grew up alone were selective in friends' relationships was also considered the difficulty of establishing a friendship.

Pelin: The feeling of jealousy and embrace that emerges from being the only child in the family, if the child has no peers around him, constantly communicating with older people and spending most of his time with them can be counted as his main characteristics. However, in my opinion, it is a situation that is accepted after being an only child stage.

Murat: I think only children are always selective in friendships. They don't make friends with everyone. I am very selective in my choice of friends, and I cannot be a friend-confidant with everyone.

Childhood, Adolescence and Adulthood Periods in Experiences of the Only Children

The interpretation of experiences specific to developmental periods in the context of only children's experiences is another theme. The only children compared their experiences in childhood and adolescence with those in adulthood. They mentioned the reflections of childhood and adolescence experiences to adulthood. In addition, they revealed how the differences in their lives progressed concerning developmental periods with a framework of being an only child.

A Glance at Childhood from the Point of Adulthood

Only children compared their experiences as a child with how they currently lived as an only child. They expressed the reflections of the experiences of being an only child to the adulthood process with the differences in the course of the developmental process. The differences between childhood and current experiences were highlighted in terms of being an only child.

Ahmet: I was freer as a child, I didn't have to plan my time, my selection of friends was interfered with. I have to be more planned right now; my friend choices are not interfered with. I am more social than when I was a kid.

Melih: In my childhood, everything I wanted happened instantly, and I was loved very much. Right now everything I want is not happening right that moment or at all, but I am still loved.

Asli: When I was little, I was extremely selfish in primary and secondary school years, but I no longer have such a habit. As I got older, my sharing increased more. When I was a kid, my social circle was wider. We used to play games outside all the time, but as I grew older, my circle of friends narrowed down, and I started to form longer relationships with fewer people.

Murat: When I was a child, I wanted siblings less, but when I grew up, I understood this deficiency better.

Pelin: As a child, I think I was a very quiet, insecure, introvert child. Now, although I try to overcome my introversion, my silence turns into pessimism from time to time due to not sharing with others, and I sometimes feel a partial lack of self-confidence.

Ebru: I can say that they welcomed everything because it was a period of growing up as a child. Judging by my recent age, I take care of my own things.

Sila: I was not a spoiled child whose every wish happened. But it affected me negatively that I was not going out and being very shy while growing up.

A Glance at Adolescence from the Point of Adulthood

It was stated that there were some differences in being an only child when they compared adolescence with their current life, similar to the experiences of only children during childhood and that these differences arose because they grew up as an only child and their adolescence experiences were reflections for current ones. In addition to the developmental characteristics of adolescence, the participants discussed the unique aspects of adolescent experiences as an only child and expressed how the effects of these experiences in adulthood followed.

Ahmet: I was more impulsive when I was a teenager. I would make decisions without thinking. I used to exaggerate all the emotions. I had no balancing mechanism. Now I'm more careful when making decisions, I have learned that every emotion comes and goes and should not be exaggerated.

Melih: In adolescence, when I didn't want it, I would cause a lot of conflicts. However, right now, I am not creating conflicts.

Murat: I was a very closed and shy person in high school and middle school. I would not try to communicate with different people. However, at university, I tried to surpass myself. I've known different people, I've tried to overcome my introversion and shyness and I'm still trying to beat it. Compared to my previous periods, I can express myself better when talking to people. My communication with people is better. I'm less shy.

Asli: During my adolescence, I wanted to have a sibling more than ever, but now I have to give up my hope.

Pelin: The silence I had previously experienced during adolescence turned into irritability and emotional disorders. Now, as a result of long efforts, I try to reduce the irritability and control my feelings no matter how hard it is.

Ebru: I can say that there is strict control in adolescence, like my circle of friends, the focus was too much on me. Considering my current age and environment, I am more free.

"If You Had a Sibling" Thought

Only children formed a positive frame in their thoughts about siblings. In fact, having siblings eliminated being an only child. Mentioning this subject to determine which experienced the sibling would affect will strengthen the understanding and meaning of being an only child. In the case that the participants had siblings, they stated that they would feel less alone, emotional sharing, someone to trust, avoid extreme situations in friendship relations, learn to share, social relations will be better, something will be

good teachers, high self-confidence. The differences that the sibling brings to their lives indicated the deficiencies they experienced in the situations they were talking about.

Ahmet: I used less spare time for myself. I wouldn't feel alone at home. When I got upset, I would make sure to whom I had to run first.

Melih: My approach to people could have been different. Since they are not siblings, there are times when I devote a lot of love and value and looking at every friend as a brother. Maybe they wouldn't have that much emotional charge.

Murat: When I was little, I used to be less selfish. I could learn to share better. My social relationships would be better. I could get rid of loneliness and boredom.

Asli: Everything would be different and beautiful.

Pelin: (If I had a sibling) I think that I can establish more comfortable relationships with people I have just met, have more self-confidence, be more active and sociable in my social life, and make my own decisions more comfortably.

Sila: I think it would be good for me to have a sibling and teach him something.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, adult only children's experiences in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood and their experiences in interpersonal relationships were examined. Within this study's scope, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five female and five male participants, who were the only children of their family. Due to the focus on the participants' life experiences, this study was conducted based on phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research methods. The phenomenon studied in this research was being an only child. In the study, the reflections of being an only child in adulthood, making sense of it by comparing it with childhood and adolescence, and dealing with the experiences that come to the fore in interpersonal interactions were examined with a phenomenological pattern.

Adult only children have interpreted their perceptions towards being an only child, the phenomenon of being the only child in the family, how their friendship experiences are shaped, the reflections of childhood and adolescence to adulthood, and their thoughts on the possible differences that siblings will bring to their lives. Within the framework of the characteristics of an only child, the sub-themes of definitions of the only child, the perception of society for the only child and the loneliness of only child have emerged. When only children define their own characteristics, they draw attention to aspects that may be different and similar to social perception. In addition, the only children especially emphasize loneliness in social and emotional dimensions. It is stated that growing alone creates a need for social and emotional support.

Another theme that emerged as a result of the study is interpersonal relationships. In the context of interpersonal relationships, only children interpreted family and friendship relationships. Only children made sense of their experiences based on focusing attention and care in their interactions with their parents. They also state that

this attention and care is a pressure factor for some experiences. It is another situation in family relationships where it is difficult to meet this pressure as an only child.

On the other hand, only children evaluated friendship relationships in two ways. The first concerns the difficulty of making close friendships due to the disadvantages of growing up alone. The second is that close friendship is valuable, based on the situations brought about by growing up as an only child. Single children have difficulties in establishing friendships, but they also consider close friendships they establish very valuable.

The fourth theme of the study states how being an only child progresses in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Being an only child differs throughout the individual's life cycle and these experiences affect each other. Thus, being an only child reflects the distinctive personality, social and behavioral situations throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In this respect, how the phenomenon of being an only child has been shaped throughout life should be discussed.

When it comes to experiences of adult only children, their interpretations of characteristics of only children and their comparison with social perception, interpretation of the positions in family relations, care of aging parents, attachment styles to their parents and friendships, the value and meaning of friendship relations, and personality traits come to the fore (Carpenter, 2014; Garcia, 2010; Griffin, 2002). How the lives of adult only children are shaped in the processes of maintaining close friendships, establishing close relationships and having children are also considered as topics that require answers. In addition, the responsibility taken in the care of aging parents and how the grief process proceeds after their loss come to the fore within the case of adult only children (Sorensen, 2008). In this study, in the light of all these, how adult only children make sense of and interpret their lives were examined and how adult only children made sense of their experiences was evaluated.

In this study, while others' perception and the characteristics of only children were expressed by their own definitions, negative characteristics were mentioned. It was stated that only children were asocial and incompatible and did not know how to share, but the participants evaluated themselves far from this perception. The idea of being selfish, spoiled, lonely, asocial and incompatible for only children is expressed in every field. This idea is found in birth order research (Eckstein, 2000; Nyman, 1995). However, these ideas about only children seem to remain controversial in the light of scientific research. This study examines how only children make sense of their lives based on these discussions. As a result of this research, only children interpret their lives in a different way from the perception of others and approach them more positively. They state that they experience negative traits as much as any child. In this process shaped by the approach of the family and the environment to children, more efficient evaluations can be conducted by combining what the only children think, feel and experience and how the environment perceives it.

Polit and Falbo (1987) state that various mechanisms are involved during only children's personality development. These mechanisms are sibling absence, uniqueness of being an only child, and parental interest and closeness. When evaluated concerning sibling absence, it is stated that only children cannot develop the social skills. Thus, they cannot establish positive peer relationships. Moreover, it is also claimed that only children are weak in terms of social cohesion and cooperation since they do not have siblings. On the other hand, it is stated that these views put forward for only children cannot be confirmed; on the contrary, only children are not different from those who have siblings in terms of social cohesion, cooperation and peer relations (Poston & Falbo, 1990). As a matter of fact, in this study, only children stated that they had a small number of close friendships and that they found these close friendships very valuable. On the other hand, only children who associate growing up as an only child with loneliness also pointed out the difficulty of making friendships.

One of the prominent themes of this study was the experiences of only children, which attracted all their parents' attention, that interest was not divided and concentrated on a single focus. Besides, it was seen that the excessive expectation of parents put pressure on single children and they could not feel autonomous. The fact is that, single children feel under pressure due to excessive expectations leads to a decrease in the psychological autonomy attitudes perceived by the family (Byrd, et al., 1993). In addition, this extreme approach of parents leads to greater responsibility for single children or at least only children state a greater sense of responsibility (Pitkeathley & Emerson, 2011). In this study, they expressed their satisfaction with being the focus of their parents' attention. On the other hand, when the expectations of the parents were excessive, the only children stated that they felt under pressure.

In addition to the parents' approach, it is stated that the only children who do not have any sibling interaction during childhood have difficulty in social relations (Downey et al., 2015). It is stated that sibling relationship is one of the most important sources in which emotional and social skills are learned and experienced (Downey & Condrón, 2004; Kramer, 2014). An only child's inadequacy in social skills may cause difficulties in establishing and maintaining friendships. On the other hand, studies are indicating that only children are not more inadequate concerning social skills than siblings (Chen et al., 1994; Fussell et al., 2005). In this study, they mentioned the possible differences that only children will have in having siblings. The only children stated that if they had siblings, they would feel less alone, they would create a sharing environment with their siblings, they would have better social relations, they would learn to share, and it would be good for them to teach their siblings.

Being an only child has its own unique life experiences. In this regard, when comparing only children with children with siblings, it would be more appropriate to consider being an only child with its specific processes rather than evaluations at the positive and negative ends. Rather than qualifying the social perception towards only children negatively, it should be evaluated with a perspective concerning the experiences specific to an only child. In educational settings, psychological counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents may need to develop an awareness of only

children's life processes and specific features. Thus, this awareness can contribute to fulfilling the inner and social needs of only children.

Experiences of only children should be discussed from different perspectives with quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method studies. In this context, the following can be suggested as a suggestion for studies to be conducted: When the experiences of being only children are evaluated in terms of their life periods, it can be investigated which situations come to the fore in late adulthood and old ages. In addition, how the phenomenon of being an only child progresses during the parenting process can be examined. The prominent factors in the relationship of individuals who grow up as only children with their children can be evaluated.

This study was conducted with adult only children between the ages of 20-26. In this study, equal representation power in terms of gender and representation of different socio-economic regions is provided. Adulthood experiences are limited to early adulthood. In addition, the participants are people who attend university or have a university degree. Based on these limitations, individuals' experiences in middle adulthood and late adulthood as an only child can be considered in future studies. In addition, studies can be conducted with individuals from different education levels to make sense of being an only child.

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