

The Child's Perception Of Family Through The Application Of The Family Drawing Test: A Field Study On Three Cases At The Assisted Childhood Center In El Oued

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ABSTRACT

The current study aims to explore the perception of the family image among school-aged assisted children. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a clinical approach, examining a sample of three cases aged between 12 and 14 years (two females and one male), selected purposively based on their psychological reports provided by the clinical specialist and their repeated attempts to escape from the center. The research was conducted at the Assisted Childhood Center in El Oued during June 2024. Semi-structured clinical interviews were conducted with the clinical specialist and the children in question, alongside the application of the Family Drawing Test by Louis Corman. This method aimed to uncover internal conflicts and emotional disturbances.

Through an analysis of interviews with the psychologist, the children's interviews, and their drawings, the study concluded that the family image for assisted children is characterized by:

- The absence of the father figure in all three cases.
- The absence of the mother figure except in the first case.
- A completely distorted family image.

Keywords : Family image, assisted school-aged child.

Introduction

Childhood is regarded as one of the most critical developmental stages, during which the fundamental features of personality are formed. In this period, the child requires care and attention from their surroundings, fulfilling their biological, psychological, and social needs, particularly from the mother. Early childhood, in particular, is marked by a clear attachment to the mother, as the child establishes a deep emotional bond with her. Similarly, the relationship between the child and the father is of significant importance and sometimes holds even greater influence. Parents profoundly impact their child's development, with the extent of their influence depending on the child's age, gender, temperament, and environmental conditions.

If a child is deprived of living with their parents, it can have negative repercussions on their psychological well-being. These children may be orphans, abandoned due to poverty, imprisonment, addiction, or other reasons, or they may be born out of wedlock. In such cases, they are placed in care institutions where their basic needs are met, such as food, clothing, and education opportunities.

In Algeria, approximately 3,000 children are born out of wedlock annually, with 90 of them abandoned due to economic and social reasons. These children are placed in one of 35 care institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Employment and National Solidarity. Families visit these institutions to select a child under the guardianship system, a long-term hosting arrangement established by law.

Study Problem:

Psychologists universally agree that childhood holds critical importance in shaping an individual's personality in later life. Childhood experiences and memories leave strong imprints that persist into adulthood, as human

life is a continuum of interconnected stages (Abdulrahman Al-Eisawi, 2000, p. 238). At birth, the child's relationship with their parents begins as a biological connection and gradually evolves into an emotional and psychological bond. This development fosters a familial attachment characterized by a series of perceptions and feelings. The child subsequently forms attachments influenced by Oedipal dynamics, eventually aligning with the same-gender parent as a role model, shaping their personality and identity, and guiding them toward maturity.

When a child is deprived of the care and presence of their parents, the psychological consequences can be profound. For such children, the home is more than just a physical structure; it symbolizes safety, stability, and emotional security. It is within this environment that children grow, take their first steps, experience parental affection, and witness familial events that enrich their lives and form their individual memories. Without this nurturing familial environment, children exposed to significant stressors—such as institutionalization in care facilities—may face irreparable developmental challenges, as these institutions cannot replicate the irreplaceable warmth and affection of parental care (Louchahe F., 2010, p. 3).

Research has shown that children deprived of parental care often suffer from severe psychological disturbances, leading to maladjustment in society, and in some cases, even physical decline due to sensory and emotional deprivation. Freud identified such children—often referred to as "abandoned children"—as those forcibly separated from their families due to compelling circumstances, deprived of consistent emotional contact with their parents, and placed in institutional care settings such as orphanages or shelters. These children face significant developmental risks that are challenging to overcome later in life (Ansi M. Q., 1998, p. 115).

To address this, there is a pressing need to provide adequate and suitable care for these children, ensuring they receive the emotional warmth and familial stability they lack. The distinction between ordinary children and rescued children lies in the difficulty the latter face in forming a clear and healthy perception of family, prompting this study to explore the concept of family as perceived by rescued children.

Study Question:

- What is the perception of family among rescued children?

Study Hypothesis:

- Rescued children possess a negative perception of family.

Study Objectives:

- To answer the central question regarding how rescued children perceive their families.

Importance of the Study:

- To gain insight into the world of rescued children.
- To highlight the significance of childhood as a pivotal stage in life requiring psychological and social care.
- To propose solutions to prevent this phenomenon and mitigate its negative effects on children.

Motivation for Choosing the Topic:

- To understand and evaluate the type of family perception among rescued children, whether positive or negative.

Operational Definitions:

1. Rescued Child: A child without guardianship who is placed in institutional care by judicial order or transferred from a maternity hospital due to parental rejection.

7- Previous Studies:

A number of researchers have conducted studies on the impact of parental absence and deprivation on children. Notable studies include:

7-1 Ahmad's Study (1985): This study aimed to identify the prominent or characteristic personality traits of children in some residential institutions, as well as to explore the psychological and social factors that preceded their placement in these institutions or contributed to the formation of distinct traits in this group of children. The results showed that the key characteristics of children in residential institutions included introversion, feelings of guilt, shyness, imagination, and tension (Hani Al-Hijazi, 2004, p. 52).

7-2 Suhail Kamel Ahmad's Study: This study addressed the issue of parental deprivation during childhood and its relationship with the concept of self and behavioral disorders in children. It emphasized the importance of the family's role and the necessity of parental involvement in a child's life, as the presence of parents has a psychological impact more than a biological one (Adel Abd Allah, 2000, p. 59).

7-3 Malika Houyoua's Study (2016): This study focused on the behavioral problems of children deprived of their family environment, from the perspective of teachers at a primary school in Marah Ali, Ain El-Touta in Batna Province. It concluded that the most prevalent behavioral problems among these children included aggression, hyperactivity, lying, and stealing.

8- Research Methodology:

In our study, we adopted a clinical approach, as the topic necessitates following specific methodological steps and tools for data collection. This was achieved by studying three cases, in accordance with case study methodology. The clinical approach involves studying the individual as a complete and unique unit, aiming to understand the personality of a specific individual. It relies on in-depth research into the psychological histories of individuals, revealing significant indicators for diagnosing cases of disorder or illness.

9- Survey Study:

The survey study is considered an initial phase of every specific scientific research study, used to explore certain issues that might be related to the research variables. It helps in uncovering variables that may have a relationship with one or more research variables. Furthermore, it aids researchers in verifying the accuracy of the chosen methodology for the study by comparing it with its related variables, and in determining the suitability of the measurement tools.

The purpose of the survey study is as follows:

- Ensuring that the conditions surrounding the institution allow the application of data collection tools.
- Gathering as much information as possible about the cases under study.
- Verifying the availability of appropriate study cases and identifying the suitable age group and gender.

Thus, the survey study is an essential and fundamental step in research, as it helps to control all aspects of the subject under investigation. We started our survey study on March 19, 2024, regarding the topic: the family image in the life of a child at the emergency childhood center in the Al-Rimal district of Al-Wadi Municipality.

This passage appears to be an excerpt from a research study related to child development or psychological assessment. Here's a breakdown of the main elements of the study described:

1. Basic Study Overview:

- Preliminary interviews were conducted, followed by clinical interviews with children.
- The study used two main tools:
 - **Clinical Semi-Structured Interview:** A method of conducting a dynamic, verbal exchange between the researcher and the child.
 - **Family Drawing Test:** A psychological test where children draw their family, helping assess emotional conflicts, internal struggles, and fears that might not be easily expressed verbally.

2. Study Tools:

- **Clinical Semi-Structured Interview:** Described as a major tool in research, especially in clinical settings. It involves a dynamic relationship between the researcher and the child, helping to gain insights into the child's inner world.
- **Family Drawing Test:** This test is used to understand a child's psychological state, emotional struggles, and personal characteristics. It is considered a projective test, allowing children to express their suppressed feelings and conflicts.

3. Study Boundaries:

- **Geographical Boundaries:** The study took place at a child protection center in the "Rimal" neighborhood, Wilaya of El Oued, Algeria.
- **Temporal Boundaries:** The study was conducted on April 10th and 11th, 2024.
- **Human Boundaries:** The study focused on three children aged between 12 and 14 years, two females and one male, all in their late childhood.

4. Details about the Study Location:

- The study was carried out at an emergency childhood institution (EEA) in the "Rimal" neighborhood, El Oued. The center was established in 2013 and began operations in 2012, with a nominal capacity of 40 children, though the actual number of children they accommodate is only 8. The center offers internal care with specialized staff.

This passage provides an in-depth look at a clinical interview conducted by an occupational therapist, focusing on the strategies, challenges, and observations related to children in a care center. Here's a breakdown of the key aspects:

11-1 Clinical Interview with the Occupational Therapist:

- **Strategy for Engagement:** The therapist gathers initial data about each child, earns their trust, communicates with the previous therapist, and develops a psychological follow-up program.
- **Number of Children Under Care:** The therapist oversees 8 children, including two boys and six girls, ranging from 1st grade to 5th grade.

- **Challenges:**
 - Overwhelming workload due to limited staff and a lack of volunteers.
 - Difficulty maintaining a professional relationship due to emotional bonds established.
 - Challenges related to administrative processes, such as delayed court orders affecting child care.
- **Therapeutic Relationship:** The children regard the therapist as a maternal figure, referring to her as "Mama Nassima," indicating a nurturing and emotional connection.
- **Goals:** The primary objective is to be both a mother figure and a support system while fulfilling the children's needs.

Observations on Children's Behavior:

- **Children as a Family Unit:** They often act like a family, experiencing conflicts typical of siblings.
- **Emotional Challenges:**
 - Case 1 ("H"): Distressed due to the presence of only female children, leading to shock.
 - Case 2 ("R"): Tends to lie, indicating a behavioral issue.
 - Case 3 ("F"): Mysterious and introverted.

Relationships with Caregivers: The relationships are largely superficial, characterized by limited emotional depth.

- **Educational Outcomes:** Generally, they show good to moderate academic performance, with Case 1 and Case 2 having stable outcomes, while Case 3 has fluctuating academic results.

Behavioral Issues:

- Case 1: Significant behavioral issues, including aggression and hyperactivity.
- Case 2: Impulsivity and aggressiveness.
- Case 3: Anxiety and emotional withdrawal.

12-1 Analysis of Case 1:

- **General Presentation:** The child, referred to as "H," is a 14-year-old boy in the 5th grade with good academic performance but experiencing emotional and social difficulties due to family background complexities, such as an unknown father and non-traditional family dynamics.

12-1-2 History of Case "H":

- **Background:** "H" is a 14-year-old boy with an unknown father, stemming from an illegitimate relationship. He was transferred by court order from the Wilaya of Ouargla to the institution, where he was placed in a foster family. However, due to behavioral issues and mischief, the family rejected him, which led to emotional disturbances. He also suffers from academic delays as he was out of school for 3 years. Additionally, he was transferred to a new institution in Sétif because he was the only male in an all-female environment.

12-1-3 Summary of the Interview with Case "H":

- The interview occurred after school hours. The specialist instructed "H" to remove his apron and bag, accompanied by the caretaker, and allowed him to rest. He showed cooperation and responded well to the questions. "H" depicted a clear image of his real family, not an imaginary one, and expressed deep shock and distress due to his reality. He shared that he had no male peers to play with, except at school.

12-1-4 Interview Analysis with Case "H":

- **Living in the Institution:** "H" feels comfortable within the institution and his needs are met. However, he experiences anxiety, emotional deprivation, and shock due to the circumstances of his life—being taken away from his family and the death of his mother. He also struggles with the absence of male peers to bond with, spending much of his time with the workers or caretaker. At school, he has five friends—Yahi, Arabi, Sidou, Bashir, and Hassan—whom he spends time with, engaging in activities and playing. His primary wish is to succeed in the primary school certificate exam. His relationship with both the specialist and the caretaker is good, and the teacher also treats him kindly without punishment.

12-1-5 Family Drawing Test Analysis:

- **Line Quality:** The drawing was done with a strong, firm line, indicating strong motivation toward depicting his family—himself, his mother, and his brother.
- **Paper Space:** The family was drawn in the center of the page, symbolizing strong emotions and feelings.
- **Symbolic Meanings:**
 - **Eyes:** Dot-like eyes indicate fear of asking for help.
 - **No Ears:** Indicates indifference to what others say about him.

- **Mouth as a Line:** Represents a personality deprived of the ability to influence others through speech.
- **No Neck:** Symbolizes internal conflict and the suppression of negative emotions.
- **Hands:** The absence of hands suggests a lack of close relationships, particularly with his mother and foster family, as he is mentally and emotionally connected to them.
- **Feet:** Present in the drawing, indicating that his support in life comes from his brother.
- **Distances:** "H" places himself close to his mother but keeps his brother farther away due to unfamiliarity.

12-1-6 Discussion of Case "H":

- Based on the interview and drawing analysis, "H" exhibits signs of fear, anxiety, and emotional emptiness. He maintains a positive, idealized image of his mother while the father is absent in the drawing, reflecting his emotional reliance on the mother. He exhibits behavioral disturbances as a compensation for the emotional deprivation and loss of both his biological and foster family. This aligns with the findings in Sibir Kamalah Ahmed's study, which discusses the impact of parental deprivation in childhood on self-concept and behavioral disturbances in children. The study emphasizes the importance of family connections and the psychological effects of parental absence.

12-2 Analysis of Case "R":

- **Background:** "R" is a 13-year-old girl from a poor family of 11 children. Her father abandoned the family due to financial incapacity and remarried. This left her mother to struggle with providing for the family through begging. As a result, the family faced neglect and instability, leading to her transfer to the institution by court order.

12-2-3 Summary of the Interview with Case "R":

- "R" was receptive but gave brief, direct responses. She depicted a real, rather than imaginary, family in her drawing. She is socially active with friends both inside and outside the institution, although her relationships are superficial. She frequently argues with her classmates, especially when they ask about her parents, responding with hostility. She has a detached emotional response toward her peers, saying she feels nothing towards them. She has a strained relationship with most caregivers, except for one whom she prefers. She often runs away and is found with her family, and she expresses a desire for independence, such as wanting a cell phone. Her behavior includes excessive restlessness, as noted by the specialist and caretaker, including kicking a classmate while sitting.

12-2-5 Analysis of the Family Drawing Test with Case "R":

- **Line Quality:** The drawing features light lines, suggesting a superficial emotional connection toward the depicted family members—her siblings. This reflects a lack of value and contempt toward them.
- **Paper Space:** The drawing is positioned at the top of the page, symbolizing a dreamlike state where she fantasizes about being part of her large family.

- **Symbolic Meanings:**

- **No Eyes:** Suggests that she feels invisible to her siblings, despite some of them being teenagers who could care for her.
- **No Ears:** Indicates indifference toward the opinions of those around her.
- **No Mouth:** Reflects her inability to express herself or communicate her emotions.
- **No Neck:** Represents internal conflict and the suppression of negative feelings.
- **No Hands:** The absence of hands suggests a lack of close relationships with others, particularly with her family.
- **No Legs:** The absence of legs symbolizes a lack of support, and feelings of restriction, lack of freedom, and independence.
- **Distances:** The siblings are drawn close together, indicating their connection to each other, while the two parents are absent from the drawing, symbolizing her feeling of neglect and absence from the family. She also omitted herself from the drawing, reflecting her sense of not having a place within the family.

12-2-6 Discussion of Results for Case "R":

- The interview and drawing analysis reveal that "R" suffers from emotional disturbances, such as lying and aggression, as coping mechanisms for her emotional deprivation. She has a negative image of her family, as evidenced by her refusal to include her parents in the drawing, indicating that she holds them responsible for her current situation in the institution. This finding aligns with Malika Houyoua's study on behavioral problems in children deprived of their family environment, which noted that such children often display aggression, hyperactivity, lying, and stealing as forms of compensation for emotional neglect.

12-3 Analysis of Case "F":

- **Background:** "F" is a 12-year-old girl who is illegitimate and was transferred to the institution by court order from Ouargla, with no knowledge of her biological family.

12-3-3 Summary of the Interview with Case "F":

- The interview took place after school hours. "F" was responsive and ready to draw, depicting a fictional family, unlike the previous cases, as she has no information about her real family. She is socially active, especially with "R," whom she considers an older sister. Despite this, she is reserved and somewhat mysterious according to the clinical specialist. "F" expressed dissatisfaction with life in the institution, wishing to leave and live near her friends. Her relationships with her peers at school include: Maria, Amani, Saja, Isra, and Razan. She enjoys her teacher's company, but struggles with attention, and exhibits aggressive behavior during play.

12-3-4 Analysis of the Family Drawing Test with Case "F":

- **Line Quality:** The drawing shows a strong line, indicating strong emotional drive related to the imagined family, symbolizing fear.
- **Paper Space:** The drawing is located at the top of the page, taking up significant space, symbolizing her hope for a larger family and a desire for belonging.
- **Symbolic Meanings:**
 - **Eyes as Lines:** Represents her inability to express emotions, a projection of her own fear of revealing vulnerability and an unwillingness to ask for help.
 - **No Ears:** Indicates indifference and disregard for the surrounding environment.
 - **Mouth as a Line:** Reflects her inability to communicate her thoughts or express herself.
 - **No Neck:** Represents the internal struggle and suppression of negative emotions.
 - **Hands:** Drawn with fewer than five fingers, symbolizing a readiness to engage in life and form social relationships, but with limitations.
 - **Legs:** Represent freedom and mobility, suggesting her desire to move independently without relying on adults.
 - **Distances:** The characters in her drawing are very close, signifying a desire for connection and closeness with others. She also arranged the figures in an age-appropriate order, reflecting a dream of having a family where she fits in. However, she consciously omitted her biological parents from the drawing, indicating fear of the unknown and a lack of knowledge about her true family.

12-3-6 Discussion of Results for Case "F":

From the interview and drawing analysis, it is evident that "F" struggles with fear, anxiety, and a deep sense of loss for a biological family. Her idealized family is part of a dream that she constructs in her mind, and this is consistent with the findings of Ahmad's study on children in institutional care, where common traits include introversion, guilt, shyness, imagination, and tension. "F" dreams of belonging and forming relationships in a family setting but is unsure of her reality due to the lack of knowledge about her biological background.

Summary of Results:

Through the analysis of the interview with the psychological specialist, along with the interviews with the three cases and the analysis of their drawings, it can be concluded that the family image for the child in crisis is represented by the following:

- The absence of the father's image in all three cases.
- The absence of the mother's image, except in the first case.
- The family image is entirely distorted.

Conclusion:

Through our study, which aimed to understand the perception of the child in crisis regarding their family, we found that the deprivation of the child from their family significantly impacts them negatively in all aspects. The presence of the family in the child's life is fundamental to their mental health, as it provides the fulfillment and care necessary to instill a sense of security and reassurance. These elements are often lacking in many children in crisis, who suffer from various psychological, behavioral, and physical problems.

These behaviors are considered as reactions to the loss of love and affection and serve as coping mechanisms for compensating for the emotional deprivation they have experienced. This emotional deprivation impacts their ability to establish stability within their family, leading them to form a distorted image of their family due to abandonment, either in care institutions or by replacement families. While these institutions may provide some resources, they can never replace the familial environment and parental care.

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