The Role of Social Support, Subjective Well-Being, and Gender on Psychological Help-Seeking among Turkish Adolescents

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this studyis to investigate whether adolescents' psychological help-seeking attitudes are predicted on a significant level by social support, subjective well-being and gender variables among Turkish adolescents. The participants of the study consisted of 433 high school students including 248 females and 185 males. In the study, the Psychological Help-Seeking Attitude Scale, the Social Support Appraisals Scale for Children and Adolescents, the Subjective Well-Being Scale and the Demographic Information Sheet were used as data collection tools. The Multiple Regression Analysis was used for data analysis. In conducting the analyses, while a significant positive relationship was found between professional psychological help-seeking attitude and subjective well-being, a significant negative relationship was found with perceived social support.In addition, the gender variable significantly was found to predict psychological help-seeking. It was observed that all variables significantly predict psychological help-seeking attitudes.It is important to take into consideration the factors affecting psychological help-seeking attitudes in terms of psychological counseling prevention and intervention programs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Psychological help-seeking for mental problems as a concept is a social movement between the interpersonal domain and the inner world personal domain in social relationships. Help-seeking is the process of actively seeking help and social relationship utilization for resolving personal problems in both formal and informal ways. Contrary to other social actions, the help-seeking is highly personal [1]. Psychological help-seeking means that individuals benefit from various support sources to overcome challenges they face [2]. Support is available from various sources on both a formal and an informal level. Informal help is available from social relationships such as family and friends, while formal help is the form of help received from professional resources-it is the type of help received from professionals with appropriate training and who play a role in providing such help and assistance. For example, such professionals include mental health experts, health experts, teachers, youth workers and chaplains. Besides, help-seeking can also beobtainedfrom other sources that do not involve direct contact with another person, such as the internet [1].

Professional psychological help-seeking is an individual's effort to look for professional help in terms of the solution of his/her emotional, social, interpersonal and other psychological problems [3,4]. As opposed to informal help-seeking, professional help-seeking is considered as a protective factor with regard to a range of emotional problems [5]. Seeking help from a professional source or from a person who facilitates access to professional psychological help has a risk factor the effect in terms of reducing and eliminating. For instance, seeking early help before developing suicidal thoughts and behaviors [6] or active suicidal thoughts and behaviors will reduce risks significantly [7].

As the theory of help-seeking [1], factors were considered that were expected to affect awareness of the personal domain in relation to mental health problems, the ability to articulate or express this personal domain to others, and the willingness to disclose to these people. The following process model of help-seeking has guided the research design: awareness and appraisal of problems, expression of symptoms and need for support, availability of sources of help, willingness to seek out and disclose to sources. Help-seeking is conceptualized as a process and this process begins with the awareness of symptoms and appraising that one has a problem that may require intervention. This awareness and problem-solving appraisal must then be able to be articulated or expressed in words that can be understood by others, and which the potential help-seeker feels comfortable expressing. Sources of help must be available and accessible. Finally, the help-seeker must be willing and able to disclose their inner state to that source.

As emphasized in studies conducted with adolescents, since their emotional and behavioral problems are widespread in this period of their life, and these problems gradually increase following the start of the adolescence [8,9], psychological help is evaluated as one of the important needs in this respect. In addition, adolescents' receiving appropriate psychological help has a negative effect on personal psychological stresses in addition to social and emotional problems [10]. In astudy [9], it was determined that although adolescents showed that they faced various psychological problems and felt in need of help, they received much less mental health support than they needed, and that there was a resistance groupagainst seeking help [11]. On the other hand, the young tended to use formal resources in the form of professional help less than informal help sources such as family and friends [1,12-16]. Also, young people tend to seek help from different sources for different types of problem [8,13]. Help-seekingfrom mental health professionals is consistently preferredleast of all available sources [17].

On the other hand, while among the factors affecting the help-seeking preferences' of adolescents, the following facts are defined such as attitudes and beliefs of adolescents regarding help-seeking process [18,19]; previous professional psychological help-seeking experience [20] or previous counseling experiences [21]; negative beliefs related to the therapy techniques and psychological support process used [18], hopelessness [21]; the existence of emotional deficiency and negative attitudes towards professional help-seeking [1,22]; fear of invasion of privacy, perception of there being no help available from any person or institution [23]. On the other hand, factors and

facilities that increase the possibility of searching for help have also been identified. These are expressed as emotional adjustment, knowledge, attitude towards help-seeking, social incentives, and the establishment of trust relationships. For instance, the receipt of positive help in the past can both encourage the young and others, increase social support, and decrease being affected [1,22].

In this respect, adolescents getting help from appropriate sources, and encouraging them to seek help can both be very effective. Such help not only affects mental health and well-being [1]) but also has quite anadjustment function in the course of life [24]. Help-seeking is another coping strategy that is associated with trust in other people; it is based on interpersonal communication skills and social relations [1,22]. In this sense, as a help-seeking behavior, the protective function of social support in negative situations [25] and high-risk living conditions in an adolescent's life are frequently discussed in adolescent research [26]. Social support is an important factor affecting psychological well-being [27]; psychological well-being in a positive direction is also an important factor [28]. Actually, well-being is closely related to a range of mental health measures, including life satisfaction and the availability of help and support during periods of life stress and duress. But it is clear that more than 70% of people with mental illness receive no formal help or treatment [29].

Adolescence is a time of opportunities as well as vulnerabilities in terms of risk-associated behaviors that can have lifelong consequences for health and well-being. They point to the importance of caring and meaningful relationships as well as pro-social connections with individuals and social institutions, reducing risks and promoting healthy and positive developmental outcomes [30]. Psychological counseling help during an adolescent's effective coping with his or her emotional and behavioral problems will help the adolescent both to advance conformational in his/her developmental journey, and to find new and sufficient coping by way of counseling [31]. There has also been a call for more attention to be paid to research into where, why and how adolescents seek help, and the sources of, and nature, of the help that is available to them in their social support. Also,given that adolescent health and development includes a broad range of psychosocial, affective and health needs, which includes normative developmental needs as well

as specific problem-oriented needs, then a broader definition of adolescent help-seeking behavior is required [30]. In this respect, the fact that psychological counselors working in this field in Turkey together with other experts, are aware of the factors affecting adolescent attitudes towards help-seeking and thanks to their counseling applicationsin terms of creating change in a positive sense, will contribute to reaching more adolescents. In this respect, having a limited number of researchers in Turkey also reveals the need for the determination of factors affecting adolescents' psychological help-seeking attitudes. The aim of this study is to analyze theeffect of the perceived social support, subjective well-being and gender,on the role of prediction of adolescents' psychological help-seeking attitudes.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study uses the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design.

2.1 Participants

The study's population was made up of 12 high schools students in Karşıyaka, Turkey. Considering heterogeneity of the sample and for the purpose of covering various types of schools; participants were selected by random sampling technique from four high schools (two of which were Vocational High Schools and other two were Anatolian High Schools and they were determined by randomization). Participants consist of a total of 433 high school students, 248 of whom (57.3%) were female, and 185 (42.7%) were male. The grade-based distribution of these adolescents was as follows: 130 of them (30.02%) attended the 9th grade, 100 (27.7%) attended the 10th grade, 120 (27.7%) attended the 11th grade and 83 (14.58%) students attended the 12th grade. Adolescents' average of age is determined as 17.6.

2.2. Procedures

After, researcher was granted permission from the General Directorate of High Education, data tools were applied to adolescents. An informed consent form was given to the students along with a questionnaire form and a short demographic measure. An informed consent form, for the purpose of the study, was explained and also likely risks associated with their taking part in the study were informed. If they accept

voluntarily participation in the study and, it was informed that data acquired from the research would be used solely according to the study objectives, kept anonymous and confidential. Therefore, students were asked to refrain from writing any personal information that could reveal their identity.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Professional psychological help-seeking attitude scale

This scale was developed with a view to measuring secondary education adolescents' attitudes towards professional psychological help-seeking.The scale consists of 15 items and three sub-dimensions. The factors are "confidence toward psychological help", "closeness to psychological help", "negative belief in psychological counseling and the process". Gettinga high score with regard to the whole scale indicates a positive attitude towards professional psychological help whereas a low score indicates a negative attitude. A minimum of 15 points and a maximum of 75 points can be obtained from the scale. The total correlation coefficients of items included in the scale range from .41 to .57. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale is .85. The test-retest coefficient was found to be .83. Findings related to the validity and reliability of the scale reveal that the psychometric properties of the scale are at acceptable levels [32]. Within the scope of this study, the scale's Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient is calculated as .92.

2.3.2 Social support evaluation scale for children and adolescents

The scale measures the extent to which the child is considered as beloved, interested, valued and accepted by the social network he/she belongs to. In this respect, the children's perceptions regarding social support received from family, friends (close friends and classmates) and teachers are evaluated. The scale is a Likert scale and consists of 41 items and three factors. Factor I is Friend Support; Factor II is Family support; and Factor III is Teacher Support. A high score obtained from the scale suggests a high degree of perceived social support. Internal consistency coefficients have been obtained for the criteria validity of the scale (r=-.62; p<0.01) and sub-dimensions are calculated as .89, .86 and .88; the test-retest reliability coefficient has been calculated as .49 (p<0.01) for all of the

scale; the split-half Guttman reliability is .82; and the relation of the article-total reliability with the total point is detected as ranging between .34 and .64. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale is .93. The highest score that can be achieved from the scale is 205 [33]. Within the scope of this research, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is determined as .81.

2.3.3 Subjective well-being scale-high school form

Thescale is comprised of 37 items consisting of positive and negative emotional expressions, and personal judgments on the fields affecting life satisfaction. In this 5 Point Likert type scale, 22 of the items are positive and 15 of them are negative. The high point achieved from the scale shows the high subjective well-being, while the low point shows low subjective well-being. The scale's Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .91; the Pearson moments product correlation coefficient was calculated as a result of the test-retest implementation,andwas found to be .45 [34]. Comparing the factor structure of the form prepared for college students, the adaptation coefficient was observed to be .85. [34,35]. Within the scope of this study, the scale's Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient is calculated as .88.

2.3.4 Demographic information sheet

For the purpose of the research objectives, this form was developed by the researcher to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

2.4 Data Analysis

In the analysis of the research data, it was determined that the primary assumptions of normality, linearity and homogeneity were met. A linear relationship was determined between the predictor variables and the predicted variables of the research. The Durbin-Watson value was observed as being 1.76 about whether or not autocorrelation was found. This value ranges between 1.5 and 2.5, hence it is observed that there is no autocorrelation in the model and that the standard errors of the b coefficient are very small and the regression assumption is provided [36]. In this study, the relationship between the variables is analyzed with Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient among the parametric methods. To determine how much

adolescents' perceived social support, subjective well-being and gender variables predict their psychological help-seeking attitude, Progressive Linear Regression Analysis among the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis methods was employed. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis is a type of analysis involving predicting a dependent variable based on two or more independent variables related to the dependent variable. By including independent variables as important predictors of the dependent variable only in the regression equity or the model of Progressive Linear Regression Analysis and excluding other variables out of the equality, the analysis continues [37,38]. Among the independent variables included in the research, gender (categorical variable) was analyzed as an artificial (dummy) variable, and for each variable, a category number of -1 of the new variable was assigned [39].

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1, the mean and standard deviation values related to the measuring tools used in this research can be seen.

3.2 The Results of Correlational Analyses

As can be seen in Table 2, while a positive relationship between professional psychological help-seeking, its sub-scales, and subjective well-being was found, a negative oriented significant meaning was found between social support, its sub-scalesand professional psychological help-seeking attitude in terms of total points. Accordingly, while the subjective well-being level of adolescents' increases, professional psychological help-seeking attitude increases positively. On the other hand, as perceived social support increases, psychological help-seeking attitude decreases.

3.3 Multiple Regression Analyses Results

In Table 3, in examining the regression analyses results, it was defined that all three models constructed in the study were significant (F=14.850, F=18.495, F=20.555, p<.01). It was determined that all variables predict psychological help-seeking attitude significantly with 23% of variance explanation percentage. In the 1st model, social support and sub-dimensions (support received from friends and support received from teachers) explains the psychological help-seeking attitude with a percentage of 12%. In the 2nd Model, the subjective well-being variable explains the psychological help-seeking attitude with a percentage of 6%. In the 3rd Model, the gender variable explains the psychological help-seeking attitude with a percentage of 5%. Analyzing either the social support total points entered in the first step, or social support sub-dimensions (support received from the family, support received from friends and support received from teachers) contributes to the model.Itwas foundthat support received from teachers and total social support contribute to the model (β=-.238, t=-2.251, β=-.106, t=-1.920, p<.01) and support received from friends does not contribute significantly (β=-.106, t=-1.343, β=-.015, t=-.200, p>.05). It was determined thatthe subjective well-being variable entered in the second step contributes significantly to the model (β=.191, t=5.40, p<.001). The gender variable entered in the second step was determined to contribute significantly to the model (β=5.783, t =5.054, p<.001).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations (433)

Variables	X	SD
Confidence towards psychological help	16.5116	3.54943
Closeness to psychological help	17.6759	4.92982
Negativebelief in psychological counseling and the process	13.8681	4.98943
Professional psychological help-seeking attitude	45.1386	12.56996
Subjective well-being	131.5751	15.68998
Support friend	68.4018	10.91127
Support family	45.2540	9.98889
Support teacher	32.9815	6.79049
Perceived social support	146.6767	21.37684

Table 2. Bivariate correlations among variables

	Confidence towards psychological help	Closeness to psychological help	Negative belief in psychological counseling and the process	Professional psychological help-seeking attitude
Subjective well-being	.315**	.140**	.313**	.235**
Support friend	-.028	-.069	-.041	-.280**
Support family	.030	-.013	-.002	-.198**
Support teacher	.025	-.093	.005	-.268**
Perceived social Support	.018	-.041	-.018	-.329**

*p<.05; **p<.01

Table 3. Multiple regression analyses

Model	R	R2	R2 change	F	F change
1	.349	.122	.122	14,850	14,850
2	.422	.178	.056	18,495	29,163
3	.474	.225	.046	20,555	25,543

*p<.01, **p<.001

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the initial findings of the research, itis determineda significant positive relationship between adolescents' professional psychological help-seeking attitude and subjective well-being. Accordingly, while the subjective well-being level of adolescents' increases, professional psychological help-seeking attitudes increases positively. This shows, the psychological help-seeking attitude being positive is evaluated in conjunction with an individual's high subjective well-being. Discussing this result in accordance with the help-seeking model suggested [1], they affect awareness of the personal domain in relation to mental health problems, the ability to articulate or express this personal domain to others, and a willingness to disclose to these people. In addition, low emotional competence is associated with less willingness to seek help. For example, people low in emotional competence tend to have fewer sources of social support from extended family and friends, and therefore have fewer opportunities for seeking help [14]. The reason is that these people have had less successful help-seeking experiences in the past [40], or that these past experiences may have made them less willing to seek help in the future. Lastly, such adolescents may feel embarrassed about their perceived lack of competence to seek help. Besides, this finding can be interpreted in terms of having a significant relationship between two variables based on the fact that help-seeking behavior has quite an adaptive function in the course of one's life [24] and that it may be used as a coping method [1,41]. It may also be accepted as an important factor affecting an individual's mental health and subjective well-being [1]. According to researchers, well-being is closely related to including life satisfaction and the availability of help and support during periods of life stress and duress [42]. Also related to feelings of well-being is the willingness to seek information and support in the form of social support. In particular, the information sharing embedded within it has long been considered integral to health and well-being [43]. In a study [29], it was stated that more than 70% of people with mental illness receive no formal help or treatment. And also, young people avoid or no preference for help from anyone when experiencing symptoms of psychological distress [44,45] two-thirds of adolescents who have the highest levels of anxiety and depression symptoms, didn't seek professional help [45].

It is possible to consider that this situation may be associated with lower awareness levels in terms of help-seeking and the usage of help-resources, and well-being on a psychological level. Help-seeking behavior from the point of view of adolescents is highly important in terms of their mental health and well-being states. Adolescents orienting towards receiving support from appropriate support channels seems to be directly associated with their subjective well-being. Considering the fact that professional psychological help-seeking will contribute to the well-being of adolescents, this process seems to be associated with professional help-seeking attitudes in terms of adolescents' mental health.

According to another finding of the research, there isa significant negative relationship between adolescents' professional psychological help-seeking attitude and social support. Accordingly, it was determined that adolescents seek less professional psychological support as the support received from friends and teachers increases. Compared to the results of other research, it was emphasized that supportive behaviors received from family, teachers, classmates and schools are powerful predictors of strong positive results related to personal, spiritual, health and social development among school age children and adolescents [25]. Social support generally involves protective factors for many adolescent health and developmental outcomes [46]. It has been discovered that weak social support directs the individual to look for professional psychological help more [47]. At the same time, social support among adolescents is found to be associated with psychological adjustment, depression and self-esteem [48,49]. Having and using social support is associated with lower rates of suicide, safer sexual behavior, lower rates of substance use, later sexual debut, and lower rates of delinquency or perpetration of violence [46]. It isrevealed that individuals with strong social support are more reluctant to seek professional psychological help. By contrast, those who lack support from informal support sources easily tend towards professional help sources [4]. The sense that a better understanding of individuals in terms of informal sources of help, and an adequate perception of social support may affect the frequency of resorting to formal sources of help. The presence of social support resources is important for the protection of mental health and maintenance. Based on this result, that there may be a relationship in that an adequate level of support received from social support sources can contribute with regard to adolescents' adaptation and development, and therefore, it indicates that adolescents need less professional psychological support as a result.

Another finding of the research is that the gender variable significantly predicts psychological help-seeking. In this study, while evaluating the contribution of gender to the model, since boys are excluded and girls are included, these results show such that girls tend to have more positive attitude towards psychological help-seeking than boys. This result is consistent with previous research findings regarding the fact that boys tend to have lower inclination towards psychological help-seeking; that girls compared to boys tend to seek more psychological help, although this varies based on the type of experience and help source [1,13,50,51]; that boys tend to believe in themselves and deny the presence of problems rather than seeking help, therefore, they seek less support [8]. Among boys, it is emphasized that this situation may be associated with the possibility of thinking that asking for help in public, or feeling the need for assistance may humiliate a man [52]. It is stated when faced with periods of ill health, men tendto lack the skills needed to source appropriate timely information and support in order to assist them to find the care they need. While analyzing adolescents' help-seeking attitude, the relationship between help-seeking attitude and gender is thought to be a finding that should be considered as a factor [53]. Besides, men are less likely than women to seek help when experiencing periods of poor well-being, and across the life-span more generally [54,55]. Examining the relationship between support seeking and well-being, it is clear that the majority of people experiencing mental health problems, particularly men, do not seek help[42] and that members of the community discount mental ill-health in men more often than they do in women [53,56].

Help-seeking is clearly facilitated by the existence of established social relationships that are based on trust and understanding. These relationships need to be both informal and formal, and research needs to determine how to best enable young people to develop such relationships for use in time of need. This is particularly important in the case of professional forms of support [1]. It is necessary for the adolescent to be aware of own need for help, to be open for change, to get professional psychological help.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Psychological help-seeking and accessing psychological support sources when required by adolescents areimportant in terms of subjective well-being. Therefore, by taking into consideration the factors that negatively affect psychological help-seeking attitudes with regard to psychological counseling prevention and intervention programs, mainly in schools, psycho-education programs could be implemented to increase the awareness of adolescents regarding help-seeking and to show them how to utilize social support sources effectively. In this way, it is possible to better

understand the factors that allow young people to express their internal world of personal and emotional experiences to others, and empower them to seek the necessary support.

In terms of the limitations of this study, the study mainly focused on the identification of the relationship among variables,but was unable to determine whether or not there wasa cause and effect relationship. Despite these limitations, the study may contribute to the work of psychological counselorsdealing with adolescents, and that of other experts in Turkey in their studies regarding adolescents' psychological help-seeking.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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