

# A Qualitative Study on Problems of Young People and Ways of Religious Coping in Türkiye

## Türkiye'de Gençlerin Sorunları ve Dini Başa Çıkma Yolları Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to investigate the problems young people face in Turkey and to examine the religious coping mechanisms they use to cope with these problems. A total of 353 students from Turkey participated, including 190 high school and 163 university students. The research, conducted in April 2024, employed two different methods for data collection: Written data were gathered directly from high school students through interviews, while questionnaires were distributed to university students and collected by the researcher. We used semi-structured interviews based on a specific framework, asking participants three comprehensive, open-ended questions. After conducting a content analysis on the data, the researcher categorized the data thematically according to the content. According to the findings of the research based on the available data, the problems faced by young people are classified under three main headings: individual, social and existential issues. Individual problems included gender roles, sexuality, religious doubts, stress, addiction, and loneliness. Social problems consist of local and popular culture, violence, concerns about the future, difficulties in finding a profession, the education process, marriage, and family communication. Existential problems include such issues as the meaning of life, death, and belief in God. The study revealed that young people often resort to religious coping strategies to handle these challenges. Among these strategies, such practices as trusting and believing in Allah, prayer (salat) and supplication (dua), expressing gratitude, repentance, ablution, going to the mosque, reading the Qur'an, participating in religious conversations and volunteering services become prominent. As a result, it was determined that religious coping strategies are an important part of the daily lives of young people in Turkey and that these strategies play an important role in coping with individual, social, and existential challenges. Unlike studies that generally address psychological or social elements, this research highlights the role of religious practices as a coping mechanism.

**Keywords:** Psychology of Religion, Turkey, Youth, Religious Coping, Religious Practice.

### Öz

Araştırmanın amacı Türkiye'deki genç bireylerin karşılaştıkları sorunları araştırmak ve bu sorunlarla başa çıkmak için kullandıkları dini başa çıkma mekanizmalarını incelemektir. Türkiye'den 190 lise ve 163 üniversite öğrencisi olmak üzere toplam 353 öğrenci katılmıştır. Nisan 2024'te gerçekleştirilen çalışmada, veriler iki farklı yöntemle toplanmıştır: Lise öğrencilerinden doğrudan görüşme yoluyla yazılı veriler alınırken, üniversite öğrencilerine anket formu dağıtılmış ve bu formlar araştırmacı tarafından toplanmıştır. Araştırmada, belirli bir çerçeveye dayalı esnek görüşmeler kullanılmış olup, katılımcılara üç kapsamlı ve açık uçlu soru sorulmuştur. İçerik analizi yöntemiyle veriler incelendikten sonra, araştırmacı tarafından içeriğe göre temalara ayrılmıştır. Eldeki verilerden hareketle araştırmacının bulgularına göre gençlerin karşılaştığı sorunlar üç ana başlık altında sınıflandırılmıştır: bireysel, toplumsal ve varoluşsal problemler. Bireysel sorunlar; cinsiyet rolleri, cinsellik, dini şüpheler, stres, bağımlılık ve yalnızlık şeklindedir. Toplumsal sorunlar; yerel ve popüler kültür, şiddet, gelecek kaygısı, iş bulma zorlukları, eğitim süreci, evlilik ve aile içi iletişimden oluşmaktadır. Varoluşsal sorunlar ise yaşamın anlamı, ölüm ve Tanrı inancı gibi konuları içermektedir. Araştırma gençlerin bu sorunlarla başa çıkmada, dini başa çıkma stratejilerine başvurduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu stratejiler arasında Allah'a güvenmek ve inanmak, namaz ve dua, şükür, tövbe, abdest, camiye gitmek, Kur'an okumak, dini sohbetlere ve gönüllülük hizmetlerine katılmak gibi uygulamalar öne çıkmaktadır. Sonuç olarak dini başa çıkma stratejilerinin Türkiye'deki gençlerin günlük yaşamlarının önemli bir parçası olduğu ve bu stratejilerin bireysel, toplumsal ve varoluşsal zorluklarla mücadelede önemli bir rol oynadığı tespit edilmiştir. Bu araştırma, genellikle psikolojik veya sosyal unsurları ele alan çalışmalardan farklı olarak dini uygulamaların bir başa çıkma mekanizması olarak üstlendiği rolü ön plana çıkarmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din Psikolojisi, Türkiye, Gençlik, Dini Başa Çıkma, Dini Pratik.

## INTRODUCTION2

Coping is the process by which an individual struggles with a stressful situation or anxiety in the face of a perceived threat. It is the ever-changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to combat certain external and/or internal demands that exceed or challenge one's resources. People can turn negative life events into positive ones (Kızılgeçit, 2017). Coping is the search for meaning in difficult times (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). A coping strategy is a behavior that helps us function better in a difficult situation. People often refer to psychological coping mechanisms as coping strategies or coping skills. Both refer to specific efforts, including all behavioral and psychological methods people use to overcome, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events (Ranbhare, 2019). What matters is how individuals cope with these situations, as coping strategies differ according to personal characteristics, experiences, and environments (Kulaksızoğlu, 2009). For children and young people aged 12–25, youth-friendly mental health services sensitive to their unique developmental stage are crucial (Fusar and Poli, 2019). Youth is now more appropriately divided into two periods: adolescence (roughly 10–17 years) and emerging adulthood (roughly 18–25 years), establishing continuity between childhood and adulthood with cultural and institutional variations across countries (Arnett, 2006; Galland, 2003). In developing countries, a holistic approach to addressing the health and development issues of adolescents and youth is essential, considering their entire lifecycle and social environment (Fatusi & Hindin, 2010). In summary, coping strategies help individuals manage negative feelings and thoughts, navigate challenging situations, and develop a positive self-perception (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Two main coping styles were proposed: suppression and sensitization. Men, unlike women, tend to distance themselves from or avoid problems, not talk about relationships or health issues, or engage in emotion-focused coping strategies. In general, women use more coping strategies and seem more willing to talk about solving problems, while men are more likely to remain silent or avoid some problems (Lazarus, 2000). Stressful situations such as starting university, getting a job, life changes, daily troubles, catastrophic events (disasters), and economic and social events, among others, represent significant changes in a person's life. A life change can occur at any point in time (positive or negative) and can be predictable or unexpected (Holmes and Rahe 1967). Over the last three decades, there has been a large body of research showing that coping is an important determinant of psychological well-being and that its outcomes depend largely on the types of strategies used (Liu Z. 2008; Zhang et al. 2008). Studies have proven that higher levels of coping skills are associated with higher levels of positive adjustment, lower levels of stress (Cheng C and Cheung MWs, 2005), and burnout symptoms (Gan et al., 2007). Coping can be classified as effective (positive), ineffective (negative), problem-focused, and emotional-focused (Şahin and Durak, 1995; Arıcı, 2015, 533). Problem-focused coping is a strategy that includes problem identification, searching for alternative solutions, making choices, and implementing steps to change or solve stressful situations. Emotion-focused coping is a strategy in which people who cannot change stressful situations try to adjust their emotions and attitudes (Certel, 1996, 26). A person can also benefit from a system consisting of elements such as beliefs, religion, and human relations when coping with stress. This system allows for adapting to the stressful situation and producing solutions (Bahadır, 2002, 58). Individuals' strategies may vary depending on their personality traits and the characteristics of the stressful situation (Lazarus, 2000). For example, individuals tend to use problem-oriented coping strategies when they feel under control. On the other hand, when the individual does not feel in control, he or she may first try to get rid of negative emotions by using emotion-focused coping strategies. Then, after calming down, they may try to solve the problem by using problem-focused coping strategies. Compared to men, women tend to use more coping strategies to deal with stress. Women, unlike men, tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies to seek emotional support and advice from others to cope with stress (Tamres et al., 2002). The varying upbringings or developmental characteristics of men and women could potentially explain this. Indeed, Gilligan has argued that women show a different developmental trajectory. According to her, women's understanding of morality differs from the morality of care and responsibility, which is characterized by relationships, caring, and closeness, as well as the morality of justice proposed by Kohlberg. In the morality of care and responsibility, sacrificing oneself for the other person is predominant (Bacanlı, 2021, 116).

The problems faced by young people have significant impacts at both individual and societal levels. These problems range from mental health problems to economic difficulties, from social exclusion to cyberbullying (Bottino, 2015; Hamm, 2015; Mamun, 2020; Tighe, 2024)

Many studies have investigated the problems that young people face (Budak and Yıldız, 2022; Ulus, 2020; Can Kaynak and Yılmaz, 2023; Kızılgeçit and Ören, 2019; Ayten and Vural, 2023; Arıcı, 2015). We can categorize these problems into several key areas:

Family, Social Environment, and Mental Health: The main challenges young people face include weakened family bonds, social media addiction, and the increased sense of loneliness caused by this addiction. The weakening of family relationships leads to increased use of social media, creating a foundation for loneliness and psychological problems (Semerci et al., 2023). Loss, bullying, and family/peer conflicts are central issues for children and adolescents, with family and peers playing a crucial role in these challenges (Hill, 1999). Young people seeking help for mental health issues often experience feelings of alienation, mistrust, and a strong desire for self-confidence; support systems are often seen as inaccessible and unresponsive (Westberg et al., 2022). Young adults at risk of early workforce detachment face negative social experiences, psychological distress, and alcohol use difficulties, with relational problems being a primary cause of their illnesses (Sveinsdottir et al., 2018). Furthermore, communication breakdowns and social circles' influence expose young people to addictive substances, with curiosity playing a significant role in this process (Kocadaş, 2023).

Education, Employment, and Economic Issues: Youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) face issues such as unemployment, social exclusion, and disengagement from education. Women, in particular, are more frequently exposed to this risk due to family responsibilities, making it harder for them to integrate into society (Ak et al., 2021). Youth unemployment is linked to factors such as economic growth's inability to create jobs, insufficient self-development efforts by young people, and employers' reluctance to hire inexperienced workers. Addressing this issue requires policies that promote capital formation (Maral et al., 2021). Despite their optimism and hard work, young people who face significant adversity still struggle with education and employment (Munford and Sanders, 2019). Despite their optimism and hard work, young people who face significant adversity still struggle with education and employment (Munford and Sanders, 2019).

Existential Anxiety and Psychological Issues: Existential anxiety is common during adolescence and is associated with psychological symptoms and identity issues (Berman et al., 2006). Young people may turn to illegal drugs to cope with the anxiety stemming from existential struggles such as identity confusion, attachment, the meaning of life, freedom, and responsibility (To et al., 2007). Young men experiencing existential anxiety describe their situation as living in bottomless darkness, enduring daily life, hearing a self-critical voice within, and developing a tough shell to protect themselves (Lundvall et al., 2020). Among adolescents exposed to disasters, these types of anxieties have been linked to increased symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Weems et al., 2016). Academic burnout, existential anxiety, and fear of academic failure are significantly related to higher post-traumatic symptoms (Tomaszek et al., 2022).

Sexual Education and Health Issues: Inadequate sexual education and guidance lead to issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, sexual violence, and difficulties in relationship dynamics. These problems are particularly challenging for disabled young people (Manoj- Suja, 2017). Self-harm and suicide among adolescents are significant public health concerns caused by factors such as genetic predisposition, psychiatric and psychological issues, family dynamics, social and cultural factors, media, contagious diseases, and internet Access (Hawton et al., 2012). In developing countries, young people's health faces a significant disease burden, and interventions targeting youth have the potential for primary and secondary prevention of various health issues (Goodburn, 2000).

These categorized issues provide a framework for understanding the multifaceted challenges that young people encounter, with each category focusing on different aspects of their struggles.

This study seeks to answer key questions regarding the challenges faced by young individuals in Turkey and the religious strategies they use to navigate these obstacles. It aims to explore how these coping mechanisms may impact mental health and overall well-being, focusing on the role that religious practices play in addressing personal, societal, and existential challenges. The research investigates specific difficulties, such as gender roles, sexuality, stress, addiction, loneliness, and religious doubt, and explores how young individuals utilize religious practices like prayer, repentance, and attending religious gatherings to cope with these issues. The question of how effective these religious coping mechanisms are in supporting young individuals through their challenges drives the study. It seeks to understand the potential impact of these strategies on their mental well-being, offering insights into how religion may contribute to managing stress and uncertainty. What sets this research apart is its specific focus on the religious coping strategies used by young individuals in Turkey, where religion holds considerable cultural and societal significance. Unlike studies that primarily explore psychological or social aspects, this study emphasizes the role of religious practices as coping tools. By using a qualitative methodology, the research aims to provide a detailed, context-specific understanding of young people's experiences—an approach that is often less emphasized in larger, quantitative studies.

## 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 1.1. Sample

The study included a total of 353 participants, comprising 190 high school students and 163 university students from Erzurum. The participants ranged in age from 14 to 24 years, with an average age of 19.5 years. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 155 females and 198 males participating. We selected high school and university students from various educational institutions in Erzurum, thereby representing a diverse demographic within the region.

### 1.2. Data Collection Instruments

The study adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary tool for gathering data. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing participants to express their experiences and opinions freely. The questions focused on three main areas: (1) the specific challenges participants were facing in their personal, external, and philosophical lives (e.g., uncertainties, gender-related issues, education, family, future concerns, death, life, belief in God); (2) the religious coping strategies participants used, including both positive strategies (e.g., prayer, repentance, trust in God) and negative ones (e.g., attributing problems to the devil, blaming God); and (3) any additional thoughts or comments the participants wanted to share.

### 1.3. Data Collection Process and Analysis

We divided the data collection process into two phases: one for high school students and the other for university students.

-In the high school group, the researcher conducted the interviews directly, with the approval of the participants, asking questions during classroom sessions. Instead of using audio recordings or formal documentation forms, the researcher took detailed written notes of the student's responses. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 minutes, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the participants' views.

-The university group distributed the questions via forms, which the students independently completed. The researcher then collected and analyzed these forms.

After collecting all the data, we applied content analysis to examine the responses. We thoroughly examined the difficulties shared by participants and organized them into distinct categories based on their nature. We then classified the coping strategies participants employed to address these problems similarly. We synthesized both sets of classifications, the challenges and the coping methods, with existing literature to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

The research provided notable conclusions but acknowledged certain limitations. These included the relatively small sample size, difficulties in generalising the findings to a larger population, and the fact that the content analysis was conducted solely by the researcher without external review. Despite these constraints, the study received ethical approval from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Atatürk University on March 29, 2024, under reference number E.88656144-000-2400112131.

## 2. RESULTS

### 2.1. Problems Facing Young People

The analysis of data obtained from young people revealed the problem areas experienced by the youth of Türkiye. The Figure 1 presents the situations that young people encounter during this period, which may occasionally pose a challenge. In such cases, these situations tend to be perceived as difficult to overcome or as manageable problems. Based on the findings of this study, the issues faced by young people can be categorized into three sections: individual, social, and existential.

The study yielded significant findings regarding the challenges encountered by young individuals, as depicted in Figure 1, which can be classified into many categories. According to the findings of the study, the challenges encountered by young individuals were classified into three distinct categories: personal, societal, and existential. The categorization was universally applied to the entire sample and was determined by the nature of the problems revealed during the data analysis. Personal and psychological challenges were specific to each individual, social problems involved relationships between people and society, and existential questions delved into profound philosophical and spiritual matters. This classification was developed to thoroughly encompass the diverse range of obstacles experienced by the participants in the study.

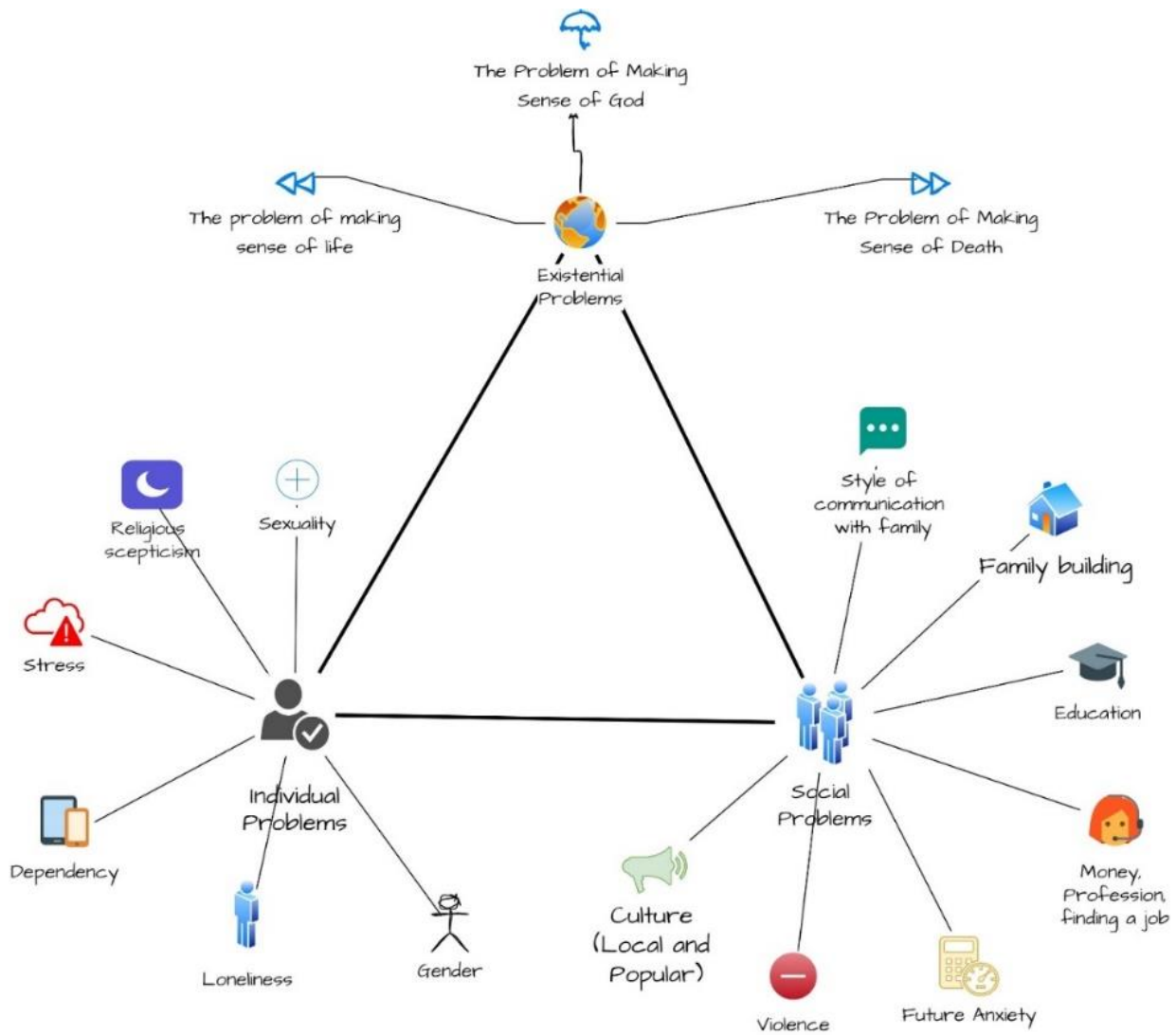


Figure 1: Categories of Problems Faced by Turkish Youth

The study produced some important conclusions on the difficulties experienced by young people that fit under numerous categories. These results match the body of current research but also provide a fresh understanding of the particular experiences of the subjects.

### 2.1.1. Individual Problems

#### 2.1.1.1. Gender

Adolescence is a time of notable physical, psychological, and social changes; gender is therefore rather important in this process. Many times, young individuals feel compelled to fit society's gender norms, which can provide major difficulties in navigating their identity. Often under pressure to follow conventional gender norms, the study found that female participants were especially worried about satisfying the expectations set for them by their families. Male participants, on the other hand, emphasized problems with independence and social pressure to perform, with stress from academic and professional expectations more clearly evident among men. Though the particular difficulties they highlighted reflected the varying expectations placed on them depending on their gender, both sexes regularly battled to define their identities within the confines of society's standards.

#### 2.1.1.2. Sexuality

During adolescence, individuals start to encounter sexual urges and develop romantic attractions towards individuals of the opposite gender. The study revealed that acquiring precise and dependable knowledge regarding sexuality can present challenges, resulting in misconceptions and improper conduct. This conclusion aligns with previous studies, indicating that



teenagers frequently experience feelings of shame and guilt over their sexuality, which hinders their willingness to seek assistance or engage in open discussions on the subject (Güçlü and Özerk, 2021; Set et al., 2006).

#### **2.1.1.3. Religious scepticism**

The study also revealed that adolescents frequently initiate a process of questioning and doubting their religious views. During this phase of cognitive growth and self-discovery, individuals may have doubts about religion, and some may even undergo a total loss of belief (Kanca, 2023). This is consistent with prior research that highlights the need to enable young individuals to examine many viewpoints and construct substantial belief systems independently (Yapıcı 2020; Hökelekli, 1983).

#### **2.1.1.4. Stress**

During adolescence, individuals experience significant and swift transformations. A study revealed that young individuals encounter multiple stressors, including the search for personal identity, the longing for autonomy, the influence of peers, the pressure to meet academic standards, and challenges within their family dynamics. The research extensively documents these stressors, emphasizing the necessity of employing good coping methods throughout this crucial developmental phase (Buzlu, 1999).

#### **2.1.1.5. Dependency**

The study identified dependency, namely in the form of behavioral addictions such as gaming and gambling, as an increasing issue (Taşgın - Taşgın, 2023) among young males. This discovery aligns with evidence that suggests reliance is a persistent, recurring neurological disorder that necessitates extensive treatment strategies (Leshner, 1997; Becirovic and Pajević, 2020).

#### **2.1.1.6. Loneliness**

The study found loneliness to be a prominent concern, particularly among teenagers and young adults, who reported experiencing higher degrees of loneliness compared to individuals in other age groups. The detrimental impacts of loneliness on both physical and psychological well-being have been extensively documented. This study contributes to the increasing amount of evidence that emphasizes the high occurrence of loneliness among young individuals (Kozaklı, 2016; Uruk and Demir, 2003; Karaoğlu et al., 2009).

### **2.1.2. Social Problems**

Furthermore, the study also investigated social issues arising from the participants' communities and surroundings:

#### **2.1.2.1. Culture**

The study revealed that local and popular culture exert a substantial impact on the process of identity formation in young individuals. The pervasive cultural elements disseminated via the internet and social media exert a pivotal influence on the formation of values and behaviors among young individuals, a conclusion substantiated by prior research (Shahin, 2005; Zaborskis et al., 2021).

#### **2.1.2.2. Style of Communication with Family**

The study emphasized the presence of communication challenges between parents and adolescents, wherein young individuals frequently experience feelings of oppression or criticism from their families. This discovery aligns with the existing body of research that emphasizes the significance of positive family communication in promoting the growth and maturation of adolescents (Youth and Goodness, 2018; Elkin, 2016).

#### **2.1.2.3. Family Building**

Young individuals commonly experience tremendous stress due to societal expectations regarding marriage and the establishment of a family. The study discovered that social and economic pressures, as well as societal expectations, have a detrimental effect on the choices made by young individuals when it comes to starting a family. These findings align with past research on the subject. In Turkey, young people tend to delay marriage due to factors such as achieving economic independence, completing their education, avoiding restrictions on their freedom, maturing, and focusing on their careers. However, they still view marriage as an important part of life (Erkol et al., 2021). Low levels of psychological preparedness before marriage contribute to increased anxiety about marriage and family

formation (Batsylyeva et al., 2019). Additionally, the intergenerational transmission of family-related anxieties influences young people's negative perceptions and feelings about marriage (Larson et al., 1998). Socio-economic factors, including personal satisfaction, the burdens of parenthood, marital stress, and pessimistic financial forecasts for the future, also play a role in shaping young people's decisions about marriage and having children (Fışkın and Sarı, 2021).

#### **2.1.2.4. Education**

The study verified that education and school surroundings are substantial contributors to stress among adolescents. The study observed problems such as social exclusion, loneliness, and isolation, which are consistent with previous research on the harmful consequences of educational pressures (Buzlu, 1999).

#### **2.1.2.5. Money, Profession, Finding a Job and Future Anxiety**

The participants experienced significant stress due to financial concerns, job aspirations, and uncertainty about the future. The study revealed that both unemployment and the apprehension of failing are factors that contribute to the experience of anxiety and hopelessness. These findings align with the statistical data provided by the Turkish Statistical Authority and previous studies examining the relationship between young unemployment and future anxiety (TÜİK, 2017; Aytar & Soylu, 2019).

#### **2.1.2.6. Violence**

Ultimately, the study revealed that violence is a widespread problem, appearing in several ways, such as physical, mental, sexual, and economic damage. The persistent character of aggressive conduct from childhood to adolescence was observed, which is consistent with the research on the enduring effects of violence on the development of young individuals (Hökelekli, 2008; Youth, 2016).

#### **2.1.3. Existential Problems**

The study's analysis revealed three subcategories under the existential issues young people face: the search for life's meaning, worries about death, and the concept of God.

##### **2.1.3.1. The Problem of The Meaning of Life**

It means "a sense of order, consistency and purpose in one's existence, a sense of pursuit of valuable goals and the feeling of satisfaction that comes after them". (Reker and Wong, 1988, s. 221; Ulu, 2018). The need for meaning in the existential sense of man in his mental world affects all his life activities. It does not seem possible for humans to lead a healthy life in a world that they perceive as meaningless (Shentürk and Yakut, 2014). People who spend more time on social media are more likely to judge their lives without purpose than those who spend less time. (Meydan et al., 2018). Thus, young people who are unable to give meaning to life can feel pointless and unhappy.

##### **2.1.3.2. The Problem of The Meaning of Death**

Young people may not have fully understood the concept of death yet. His thoughts about death are often vague and complex. Studies on the fear and anxiety of adolescents in Türkiye (Turkish Academy of Sciences Reports, 2004; Yıldız, 1999) have found that issues related to death and post-death life constitute the main concerns and fears of teenagers (Çevik, 2005). They need answers to questions about death. These can be questions like what happens after death, the meaning of life, and the best way to face death. Separation from loved ones by death—being buried in the ground—is one of the main causes of young men's fear of death. (Karaca, 2000).

##### **2.1.3.3. The Problem of the Meaning of God**

The image of God is a pattern in each individual's mind that shapes their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about God. This pattern is influenced by the individual's environment, beliefs, personality and information received (Aydın, 2010:54; Kartopu, 2014). Islamic countries lagging behind in science and technology, insufficient role models for young people, religious inclusion in politics, social detachment from religious life, the notion of freedom, and popular culture can lead young people to develop negative attitudes towards religion and God. (Baytemur, 2020). For young people, the problem of God's meaninglessness is a situation that causes them to question the foundations of their belief in God and find it meaningless. This problem may arise as it is affected by the social environment in which young people live and the information they are exposed to.

## 2.2. Young People's Use of Religious Coping

Upon analyzing the methods taken by Turkish adolescents to address their concerns, it becomes apparent that religious coping strategies are extensively exploited. The strategies derived from the interviews are depicted in Figure 2. These youthful individuals actively participate in religious practices such as prayer, supplication, mosque attendance, Quran reading, and engaging in religious discussions as a way to deal with the difficulties of life. In addition, spiritual qualities such as trust and thankfulness play a substantial role in their coping mechanisms.

### Young People's Use of Religious Coping



Figure 2: Religious Coping Strategies Used by Turkish Youth

#### 2.2.1. Praying/Supplication

Despite secularization, prayer remains a coping mechanism for young people, providing inner relaxation, relief, and support (Bänziger et al., 2005). Studies conducted in Türkiye have concluded that prayer is a psychological coping mechanism. Prayer as worship has a positive effect in reducing exam anxiety (Karslı, 2019) and also increases the level of mindfulness in young people (Koç, 2005). To understand young people's perceptions of prayer, their definitions of prayer have been examined, and themes such as "asking and wishing," "communication with Allah," "a means of trust and refuge," and "gratitude" have been identified (Doğan and Özcan, 2022). Most young people who identify themselves as atheists or deists resort to prayer and seek refuge in a higher power when they are in a difficult situation (Yapıcı, 2020). In addition to the spiritual advantages, young individuals also resort to repentance as a method of acknowledging their errors and seeking absolution.

#### 2.2.2. Going to the Mosque

In Muslim societies, education began in the mosque (Yılmaz, 2007). Young people are offered the opportunity to learn and understand Islam, and they can gain knowledge about Islam's fundamental concepts, forms of worship, and moral principles during sermons and lessons held there. Moreover, mosques provide opportunities for young people to meet and mingle with other Muslims. Thus, young people can become more familiar with Islamic values such as brotherhood and solidarity. Going to the mosque on Fridays provides social support and increases the resilience of the community (Bahagia et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the apprehension of eternal damnation in Hell acts as a substantial incentive for young individuals to uphold religious rituals and observances.



### 2.2.3. Performing Ablution

Studies show that ablution includes health improvements such as physical cleanliness, prevention of skin diseases, eradication of viruses, as well as enhancing mental well-being through stimulation of the central nervous system and overcoming life's challenges. Ablution worship is necessary for the health, cleanliness, and prayers of Muslims and can also prevent various skin diseases and cancers (Sulaemang et al., 2016). As a religious practice, ablution promotes physical cleanliness, stimulates the central nervous system, and enhances awareness while encouraging internal purity and spiritual cleansing (Delavar, 2011). In addition to individual purification, collective religious rituals such as attending the mosque serve to strengthen the bond of young individuals with their religious beliefs.

### 2.2.4. Fear of Hell

The fear of Hell is a rational response to individual religious beliefs. It is not an inclination towards fear or anxiety, but it is strongly related to negative religious coping and death anxiety (Cranney et al., 2018). The lack of religious practices among the youth and the desired improvements in the impact dimension not being at the expected level is due to religious education given based on authoritarian pressure and intense fear (Albayrak, 1995, p.143). An individual's fear of death has been linked to the fear of Hell (Chaggaris, 1989). The combination of anxiety and reliance on Allah has a potent influence on the coping mechanisms of young individuals.

### 2.2.5. Trusting in Allah (God)

Faith and trust in Allah are the strongest religious coping mechanisms. The importance of this feeling is clear in young people's search for meaning, the support they seek in tough times, and when combating stress. Research has shown the positive effects of trusting in Allah. Indeed, trusting in Allah, a fundamental construct in Islamic psychology, can reduce anxiety, and depression, and restore hope, benefiting spiritual maturation and psychological health (Bonab and Koohsar, 2011). One study has shown that high levels of trust in Allah are associated with more personal happiness, less anxiety, and depression (Rosmarin et al., 2009). Engaging in the study of the Qur'an and its translations can offer solace and direction during periods of hardship.

### 2.2.6. Praying (Salath)

Worship can be considered as systems that regulate and balance the personality and identity development of adolescents (Koç, 2005). Individuals who pray regularly are seen to be more forgiving, and humble, and have more spiritual continuity, and higher spiritual experiences than others (Gök, 2017). Prayer is a spiritual and physical activity that moves the body and soul together, works the entire body without causing muscle fatigue, and provides tranquillity and peace (Efdal, 2023). Among Muslim youth, careful praying and piety can effectively prevent sexual deviance (Muhibbuthabry et al., 2023). Prayer increases the alpha RP in the brain by providing a state of mind more relaxed than normal relaxation conditions, thereby reducing anxiety (Khanam et al., 2018). Prayer and remembrance practices potentially contribute to protecting mind/body health by positively affecting the psychoneuroimmunological response (Saniotis, 2018). Prayer is not the only important religious activity; doing ablution is also fundamental. Ablution is essential for maintaining both bodily and spiritual well-being.

### 2.2.7. Repenting

Due to the psychological nature of the individual, they are prone to sinning and making mistakes. Repentance is the act of seeking forgiveness from the sacred being for the sins committed from time to time (Peker, 2003; Koç, 2005). Repentance strengthens the spiritual structure of the individual against significant mental illnesses of our age such as anxiety, stress, depression, meaninglessness, and loneliness (Aydın, 2009). Repentance provides spiritual fortitude, while consistent prayer habits help the comprehensive growth of young individuals.

### 2.2.8. Reading the Qur'an and Reading the Quran Translation

Reading the Qur'an, particularly certain chapters, for healing is a widespread form of religious coping among Muslims. Studies have shown that reading or listening to the Qur'an reduces stress and enhances relaxation. Mind behaviors of individuals reading the Qur'an have been measured using EEG waves. The Qur'an can become a tool for contemplation (deep thinking/meditation), reducing stress and facilitating a state of relaxation (calm mind) (Kamal et al., 2013). Participating in discussions about religion deepens this comprehension, providing additional spiritual enlightenment and communal

assistance.

### **2.2.9. Attending Religious Talks**

Prophet Muhammad described religion as conversation and advice (Muslim, *Îmân* 95). Studies have shown the positive effects of participation in conversations. Participating in religious talks once a week is associated with fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms (Sternthal et al., 2010). Participation in religious activities and talks is associated with a reduced risk of death in the United States. There is a seven-year difference in expected lifespan between those who never attend talks at the age of 20 and those who attend more than once a week (Hummer et al., 1999). Monthly participation in religious talks has a 22% lower risk of major depression compared to non-participants (Balbuena et al., 2013). The conviction in predestination enhances these customs, furnishing adolescents with fortitude and a clear objective.

### **2.2.10. Believing in Destiny (Tawakkul)**

Believers in destiny are more resilient, cope with uncertainty, and are more innovative, even in young people. This belief guides modern humans in realising their destiny for a meaningful life (Wilburn, 1950). A strong belief in fate reduces the tendency to forgive among people with attachment anxiety, while such beliefs do not affect forgiveness among people with attachment security (Finkel et al., 2007). Islamic mechanisms of tawakkul, gratitude, and patience can help alleviate anxiety caused by disasters (Fahm, 2019), and significantly reduce academic stress in students (Fatimah and Hawadi, 2020). In summary, believing in destiny, trusting in Allah, and the correct understanding of tawakkul has been seen as an important psychological support mechanism for the faithful (Şahin, 2018). Likewise, adopting religious personalities as exemplars aids in reinforcing these convictions in everyday existence.

### **2.2.11. Taking Religious Figures as Role Models**

Mothers play a crucial role in shaping young people's religious beliefs and attitudes, according to attachment theory. This highlights the importance of motherhood and child-mother communication in transferring religious education and forming religious identities for future generations (Ayten and Vural, 2023, p.140). Aside from emulating role models, expressing gratitude is a habit that enhances one's spiritual well-being and mental health.

### **2.2.12. Giving Thanks**

Research indicates that giving thanks can improve overall health, well-being, and mood, reduce stress, strengthen relationships, and increase positive social behaviors. In women, gratitude is associated with lower haemoglobin A1c levels (Krause et al., 2017). Worship, humility, compassion, and the meaning of life enhance gratitude towards Allah (Krause and Hayward, 2015). Gratitude, especially towards the Creator, enhances its psychological benefits, leading to higher levels of religious commitment and good mental health (Emmons and McCullough, 2003; Rosmarin et al., 2011). In summary, in Islam, giving thanks is an important characteristic that leads to positive self-realization and a better understanding of Allah's commands (Enghariano, 2020). Engaging in philanthropic activities by volunteering not only demonstrates appreciation but also actively enhances the well-being of society.

### **2.2.13. Volunteering in Philanthropic Services in Civil Society**

Participation in civil society organizations can offer young people various opportunities and experiences, thereby enabling them to fulfil their social responsibilities, gain new skills, and contribute to the overall benefit of society. Volunteer services provide significant contributions by conducting operations such as sheltering, feeding, search and rescue, and firefighting in disasters (Aydemir, 2021). All dimensions of religiosity significantly affect volunteer association participation (Lam, 2002).

Therefore, the integration of these various religious practices forms a comprehensive structure that enables young individuals to effectively manage their difficulties.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

When faced with challenges, individuals, including young people, often turn to various active and passive coping methods, such as seeking social support from family and friends, listening to music, going for walks, resorting to alcohol or cigarettes, and actively trying to solve problems; one of these coping mechanisms includes religious coping activities. The study focuses on high school and university students in Turkey, examining the challenges they face and the religious coping strategies they employ to manage these difficulties. Based on the data collected, the researcher categorized the problems into three main

groups: individual, social, and existential problems. Individual problems encompass issues such as gender roles, sexuality, stress, dependency, loneliness, and religious skepticism. Social problems include challenges related to family communication, family formation, education, financial concerns, violence, and cultural expectations. Existential problems, on the other hand, deal with the search for meaning in life, concerns about death, and God's understanding. In addition to these categorizations, the study also classified the religious coping strategies used by the youth to confront these problems.

The study identifies several key religious coping strategies employed by young individuals in Turkey. Prayer serves as a significant mechanism, providing inner peace and relief, while repentance allows them to acknowledge their mistakes and seek forgiveness. Regular prayer not only promotes spiritual growth but also fosters qualities like humility and forgiveness. Engaging in exercise enhances both physical and spiritual well-being, contributing to their overall mental health. Visiting mosques offers social support and reinforces their connection to Islamic values, while the fear of Hell motivates adherence to religious practices. Trusting in Allah emerges as a vital coping strategy, reducing anxiety and providing hope during difficult times. Reading the Qur'an and participating in religious discussions facilitate deeper understanding and communal support. Believing in destiny encourages resilience and aids in managing uncertainty while taking religious figures as role models strengthens their faith. Finally, giving thanks and volunteering in philanthropic services enrich their spiritual and social lives. Collectively, these religious coping strategies play a crucial role in helping young individuals navigate their challenges effectively.

The study uncovers that young individuals encounter a multitude of obstacles, which may be categorized into three distinct groups: personal, societal, and existential. Gender exerts a substantial influence on this process, as females frequently experience pressure to adhere to gender standards, while males have challenges related to autonomy and societal expectations (Davidson, 1981). During this era, young people experience sexual impulses (Wincentak et al., 2017) and theological uncertainties (Kooistra and Pargament, 1999), emphasizing the importance of exploring different perspectives and developing belief systems autonomously. Adolescents encounter various stressors, such as the pursuit of personal identity (Albarello et al., 2018), desire for independence (Daddis, 2011), peer influence (Gardner-Steinberg, 2005), academic demands (Reddy et al., 2017), and familial issues (Conger et al., 1994). Dependency, specifically behavioral addictions such as gaming and gambling, is a growing concern among young boys (Derevensky et al., 2019), requiring comprehensive treatment approaches. Loneliness is a significant issue (Maes et al., 2019), especially among teenagers and young adults, and it has negative effects on both physical and psychological health. Identity development (Crocetti et al., 2013) is influenced by social concerns that arise in communities and surroundings. Local and popular culture has a substantial impact on values and behaviors (Williams, 2011). Communication difficulties between parents and adolescents (Kapetanovic et al., 2020) can result in feelings of suppression or censure from families. Adolescents experience stress due to social and economic demands, including the need to get married (Sari et al., 2022) and create a family. Education and school environments are major factors in causing stress (Satici, 2020), as they often lead to issues such as social exclusion, feelings of loneliness, and a sense of isolation. Financial worries, career ambitions (Doherty and Davies, 1984), and uncertainty about what lies ahead also contribute to stress, with joblessness (Kashani et al., 1997) and fear of not succeeding adding to feelings of anxiety and despair. The study emphasizes the pervasive problem of violence, which has detrimental effects on the physical, mental, sexual, and economic growth of young individuals (Smiley et al., 2021). Furthermore, it underscores the existential dilemmas encountered by young individuals, including the challenge of seeking purpose in life, mortality, and the notion of divinity. The quest for purpose impacts all aspects of existence, and adolescents who are unable to ascribe significance to life may experience a sense of futility and discontentment (Bronk and Finch, 2010). Teenagers also grapple with the thought of mortality (Orbach et al., 1993), pondering the mysteries of the afterlife and contemplating the most effective approach to confronting it. The perception of God is shaped by multiple elements, such as the limited advancements in science and technology in Islamic countries, the lack of influential figures to look up to, the intertwining of religion and politics, the disconnection from religious practices in society, and the impact of popular culture. This might result in adverse attitudes towards religion and God (King and Boyatzis, 2004), prompting young individuals to scrutinize their beliefs (Faix, 2014).

It can be said that there are existential problems deeper than the individual and social issues experienced by the youth obtained in the study. The problem of not being able to make sense of life, death, and the creator tends to emerge along with other problems in the youth. If we set aside the physical issues brought by the growth characteristics of adolescence, it can be expressed that the underlying main problem is meaninglessness. According to Yalom (2017), our endless quest for a solid purpose for our lives often brings us to the brink of crisis. The number of individuals who start therapy because they are concerned about the purposes of life is much more than therapists realize.

In conclusion, there are many main reasons why young people believe in religion and live it. Indeed, one of the primary functions of religion is to help people cope with existential uncertainty. Religion provides people with a system of meaning that helps them sustain their lives and understand the world in its infinite complexity and uncertainty. Like other sources of meaning, religion helps people make predictions about the future and uncertainties (Inzlicht et al., 2011; Gürsu, 2018). "In our youth, when we think about our future life, we are like children in the theater waiting for the curtain to rise. We sit in our seats joyfully and eagerly waiting for the play to start. Not knowing what will happen is a blessing. If we could foresee the future, sometimes children might seem to us like prisoners sentenced not to death but to life, unaware of what their punishment means". (Yalom, 2017). Human beings, who begin the task of making sense of life and death from childhood, must also learn how to cope with it.

Using a restricted sample size, the study was conducted. Using bigger and more diverse datasets in future studies might improve the results' generalizability. A more accurate knowledge of the effects of religious coping mechanisms could be achieved in future studies by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. We used cross-sectional data for this investigation. The growth and change of religious coping mechanisms in young people can be better understood through longitudinal studies.

In conclusion, the problems faced by young people in Turkey are similar to those experienced by youth in other parts of the world and can generally be categorized into three main areas: individual, social, and existential issues. When addressing these challenges, religious coping strategies play a significant role. These strategies, such as prayer, repentance, reading the Qur'an, attending religious gatherings, trusting in Allah, and volunteering in philanthropic activities, can serve as coping mechanisms at different times and in different ways for each individual, providing spiritual and psychological support in navigating life's difficulties.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Erzurum'da yaşları 14 ile 24 arasında değişen ve yaş ortalaması 19,5 olan toplam 353 lise ve üniversite öğrencisi bu çalışmaya katılmıştır. Verilerin konusu, öğrencilerin kişisel, sosyal ve varoluşsal konulara ilişkin yaşamda karşılaştıkları zorluklar ile dini başa çıkma stratejilerine odaklanmaktadır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla yürütülen, veri toplama süreci, lise ve üniversite öğrencileri için ayrı ayrı iki aşamadır. Lise öğrencileriyle doğrudan görüşmeler yapılırken, üniversite öğrencilerinden veri toplamak için form yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler içerik analizi yöntemi ile incelenmiş ve yaşanan zorluklar ile başa çıkma stratejileri kategorilere ayrılmıştır. Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları arasında, örneklem sayısının az olması, bulguların genellenmesinin güçlüğü ve içerik analizinin yalnızca araştırmacı tarafından, dış değerlendirme olmaksızın yapılması sayılabilir. Bu sınırlılıklara rağmen, çalışma için hem katılımcılardan onay alınmış hem de Atatürk Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu'ndan etik izin sağlanmıştır.

Çalışmada, gençlerin yaşadığı bireysel sorunlar, cinsiyet rolleri, cinsellik, dini şüphecilik, stres, bağımlılık ve yalnızlık başlıkları altında ele alınmaktadır. Kadın katılımcılar aile beklentilerini karşılamak konusunda baskı hissederken, erkekler daha çok bağımsızlık ve sosyal baskılarla başa çıkmakta zorlanmaktadır. Özellikle oyun ve kumar gibi davranışsal bağımlılıklar genç erkeklerde artış göstermektedir. Toplumsal sorunlar, yerel ve popüler kültürün etkileri, aile içi iletişim, evlilik ve aile kurma baskıları, eğitim süreci, maddi zorluklar ve şiddet gibi konuları kapsamaktadır. Gençler, bu baskılar karşısında kimlik oluşumu ve kültürel beklentilerle çatışma yaşamaktadır. Aile içindeki iletişim sorunları ve toplumun evlilik ve aile kurma konusundaki beklentileri de bu sorunları derinleştirmektedir. Gençlerin varoluşsal sorunları arasında yaşamın anlamını sorgulama, ölüm korkusu ve Tanrı kavramına ilişkin belirsizlikler yer almaktadır. Bu sorunlar gençlerin yaşamlarını anlamlandırmalarını güçleştirmekte ve bazı durumlarda dine ve Tanrı'ya karşı olumsuz tutumlar geliştirmelerine yol açmaktadır. Ölüm düşüncesi ve sevdiklerinden ayrılma korkusu özellikle genç erkeklerde sık görülen bir endişe kaynağıdır.

Gençlerin karşılaştıkları zorluklarla başa çıkmada dua, tövbe, ibadet, camiye gitme, Kur'an okuma ve dini sohbetlere katılma gibi temel dini uygulamaları benimsedikleri görülmektedir. Bu stratejiler arasında Allah'a güvenme, kadere inanma, şükretme ve hayır işlerine gönüllü olarak katılma gibi manevi değerlerin de öne çıktığı tespit edilmiştir. Dua ve ibadet gençlerin iç huzur bulmalarını sağlarken, tövbe ve şükretme, yapılan hatalardan ders almayı ve manevi bağları güçlendirmeyi desteklemektedir. Cami ziyareti ve dini sohbetler sosyal destek sağlarken, Allah'a güvenmek ve kadere inanmak, gençlerin belirsizlikle baş etmelerine ve manevi dayanıklılık kazanmalarına yardımcı olmaktadır. Türkiye'deki gençlerin yaşadığı bireysel, toplumsal ve varoluşsal sorunlara karşı dini başa çıkma stratejilerini kullanma eğilimleri, bu yaş grubunun manevi desteğe olan ihtiyacını açıkça göstermektedir. Çalışma, dini uygulamaların gençlerin yaşamlarındaki zorlukları aşmada işlevsel bir mekanizma olarak rol oynadığını ve bu stratejilerin onların içsel (manevi) denge, huzur ve anlam arayışlarını desteklediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin, dini başa çıkma yollarının tercihinde önemli bir etken olduğu görülmektedir. Kadınlar ve erkekler, yaşadıkları farklı toplumsal baskılara bağlı olarak kendilerine uygun stratejilere yönelmektedir.

Bu bulgular, dini başa çıkma stratejilerinin gençlerin zihinsel sağlığına ve manevi gelişimlerine katkı sunduğunu göstermekte, gençlerin bu süreçte kimlik, anlam arayışı ve kişisel gelişim gibi konularda dinin sunduğu manevi destekten yararlandığını ifade etmektedir. Çalışmanın sınırlılıkları arasında örneklemin belirli bir bölgeden alınmış olması ve yalnızca içerik analizi yöntemine dayanması yer almaktadır. Gelecekte daha geniş örneklem ve boylamsal çalışmalarla yapılacak araştırmalar, gençlerde dini başa çıkma mekanizmalarının gelişimini ve değişimini daha kapsamlı biçimde anlamamıza katkı sağlayacaktır. Bu tür araştırmalar gençlerin dini başa çıkma stratejilerinin uzun vadede zihinsel ve duygusal iyilik hallerine olan etkisini daha derin bir perspektiften inceleme imkânı sunabilir.