Unveiling the Perceptions of Counselor Candidates: Metaphorical Perspectives into Mental Health and Self-Care Skills

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate counselor candidates' perspectives on the concepts of "mental health of counselors" and "self-care skills of counselors." In this study, metaphor analysis, a discourse analysis method, was employed. This study included 106 third and fourth-year psychological counselor candidates (86 females and 20 males). A brief questionnaire consisting of two sentences was provided, and counselor applicants were instructed to complete the statements using metaphors. Content analysis revealed five salient sub-themes, including analogies about mental health, which were health and balance, diversity and individuality, elegance and sensitivity, strength and resilience, and movement and change. Five sub-themes about self-care skills were found: Care and attention, artistic understanding and diversity, elegance and sensitivity, cleanliness and order, and energy and renewal. The findings revealed that counselor candidates addressed various mental health and self-care concepts. The variety of metaphors showed how counselor applicants perceived and appreciated these concepts on a multifaceted and personal basis.

Keywords: Counselor candidates, mental health, self-care skills, metaphor analysis.

Psikolojik Danışman Adaylarının Bakış Açılarını Ortaya Koymak: Ruh Sağlığı ve Öz Bakım Becerilerine İlişkin Metaforik Yaklaşımlar

Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı, psikolojik danışman adaylarının "psikolojik danışmanların ruh sağlığı" ve "psikolojik danışmanların öz bakım becerileri" kavramlarına ilişkin bakış açılarını ortaya koymaktır. Bu çalışmada söylem analizi yöntemlerinden biri olan metafor analizi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya 106 üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıf psikolojik danışman adayı (86 kadın, 20 erkek) katılmıştır. İki cümleden oluşan kısa bir anket verilmiştir, psikolojik danışman adaylarının bu ifadeleri metaforlar kullanarak tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Yapılan içerik analizi bulguları, ruh sağlığına ilişkin beş alt tema ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu alt temalar şu şekildedir: Sağlık ve denge, çeşitlilik ve bireysellik, zarafet ve hassasiyet, güç ve dayanıklılık, hareket ve değişim. Öz-bakım becerilerine ilişkin beş alt tema keşfedilmiştir. Bu alt temalar şu şekilde isimlendirilmiştir: İlgi ve dikkat, sanatsal anlayış ve çeşitlilik, zarafet ve hassasiyet, temizlik ve düzen, enerji ve yenilenme. Bulgular, psikolojik danışman adaylarının ruh sağlığı ve öz bakım becerileri kavramlarını çok geniş bir yelpazede ele aldıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Metaforların çeşitliliği, psikolojik danışman adaylarının bu kavramları çok yönlü ve kişisel olarak nasıl algıladıklarını ve değerlendirdiklerini göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Psikolojik danışman adayları, ruh sağlığı, ruh sağlığı, metafor analizi.

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Introduction

Throughout history, a variety of professional organizations and individuals have provided psychological help to those who are in need. In all these forms of interaction, individuals have preferred helping relationships in which they are respected, valued and understood (Ültanır, 2005). The psychological counseling profession, which was born out of this necessity, is a process in which individuals seek assistance from professional psychological counselors to address their current social, educational, and personal issues, as well as to establish their goals, make decisions, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of themselves (Schmidt, 1996). Counselors who practice this profession play a vital role in promoting mental health and well-being in a variety of settings, including private practice, hospitals, schools and community organizations. Their responsibilities are diverse, reflecting the multifaceted nature of mental health services (Lewis et al., 2022).

Counselors are responsible for providing individual and group counseling to help clients address emotional, psychological, and behavioral issues. They utilize various therapeutic techniques tailored to the unique needs of each client, helping them cope with stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2021). In addition to counseling, counselors conduct assessments and evaluations to understand the underlying issues affecting their clients. These assessments help in developing effective treatment plans and measuring progress over time (ACA, 2014). Counselors also offer crisis intervention services. In situations where clients are experiencing acute distress, such as a mental health crisis or traumatic event, counselors provide immediate support and develop safety plans to prevent harm (James & Gilliland, 2017). Another key duty of counselors is advocacy. They work to reduce stigma associated with mental health issues and advocate for better mental health services and policies. Counselors often engage in community outreach and education to raise awareness about mental health and promote accessible care for all individuals (Toporek et al., 2009). Therefore, the benefits of counselors' work are extensive, contributing to improved mental (Lambert & Barley, 2001) and physical health (Patnode et al., 2022), better coping strategies (Hill, 2004), increased self-awareness (Erden, 2015), and overall social skills (Bierman & Sanders, 2021).

Counselors often encounter a myriad of challenges in their practice, which can significantly impact their mental health and well-being. An essential obstacle encountered by counselors is the emotional burden associated with their profession. Providing assistance to individuals who are experiencing serious mental health conditions, trauma, or persistent crises can be emotionally exhausting. Counselors frequently encounter secondary traumatic stress, a condition that emerges from being exposed to the traumatic experiences of their clients (Figley, 2020). The experience of vicarious trauma can gradually build up, resulting in emotional exhaustion and burnout. Research has indicated that counselors who work with trauma survivors experience elevated levels of stress and burnout in comparison to those who work with less severe instances (Morse et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2023).

Counselor stress is also influenced by high caseloads and time pressures. Many counselors often have the challenge of handling a significant caseload, which leaves them with little opportunities for self-care or professional growth. The persistent requirement to deliver high-quality treatment amid restricted time constraints might result in sentiments of incompetence and

heightened levels of stress (Dost, 2020). In addition, the inclusion of administrative duties such as maintaining records, handling insurance paperwork, and adhering to rules increases the amount of work, intensifying stress and diminishing the amount of time available for providing direct care to clients (Kalay & Mamacı, 2021).

Another notable obstacle is the absence of professional support and supervision. Counselors, especially those who work in private practice or in settings with limited resources, may face feelings of loneliness and a lack of support from their colleagues. Supervision and support from peers on a regular basis are essential for reducing stress and avoiding burnout. However, these resources may not always be easily accessible (Bakioğlu & Asyalı, 2013). Counselors may experience feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed by the demands of their work when they lack a supporting professional network.

The impact of these challenges on counselors' mental health can be profound. Chronic stress and burnout can lead to various negative outcomes, including anxiety (Hill et al. 2016), depression (Vlăduţ & Kállay, 2010), and decreased career satisfaction (Rupert et al. 2012). Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, is particularly prevalent among counselors and can significantly impair their ability to provide effective care (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In severe cases, counselors may experience compassion fatigue, which diminishes their capacity for empathy and negatively affects their therapeutic relationships with clients (Finlay-Jones et al. 2015). In 2021, the American Psychological Association [APA] conducted a survey among mental health practitioners. The findings revealed that 84% of practitioners who treated anxiety disorders observed a surge in the need for anxiety treatment. 72% of mental health practitioners who treated depressive disorders reported an increase in demand for depression treatment. Hence, it is crucial for counselors to prioritize their own mental health and cultivate self-care skills as individuals (Posluns & Gall, 2020). In addition, the American Counseling Association ([ACA], 2014) in its Code of Ethics emphasizes the importance of counselor self-care with the statement "counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities."

Self-care refers to the intentional strategies that counselors perform to maintain their own mental health. It encompasses a wide range of activities that enhance physical well-being, mental stability, and emotional resilience. Self-care is an ongoing activity that takes constant attention and effort. It entails identifying one's own needs and taking proactive actions to address them in a balanced and sustainable manner (Dye et al., 2020).

Counselors' effective self-care skills encompass a variety of physical, emotional, and professional strategies. Counselors may exercise regularly, eat a nutritious diet, get enough sleep, and take time to relax and recharge. Emotionally, self-care entails establishing boundaries with clients, seeking support from friends and family members, engaging in enjoyable hobbies and activities, and practicing mindfulness or meditation to relieve stress (Dye et al., 2020; Lakioti et al., 2020). Professionally, counselors may pursue further training and education to keep up-to-date in their area, seek regular supervision or consultation to process challenging situations, and establish a supportive peer network (Lakioti et al., 2020; Smith, 2017).

Self-care is vital for counselors for several reasons. First, it can help prevent burnout, which is a major problem in the counseling profession. By engaging in regular self-care practices, counselors can mitigate the risk of burnout and maintain their emotional and mental health (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Second, self-care can improve the quality of counseling that counselors offer their clients. Counselors who are relaxed, emotionally balanced, and mentally focused are better able to engage with their clients, provide empathy, and build successful therapeutic relationships (Arnout & Almoied, 2021). Finally, practicing self-care improves general well-being and job satisfaction. Counselors who prioritize self-care report higher job satisfaction, stronger resilience, and a more positive attitude toward their work (Rupert et al., 2012). Self-care is an important part of a counselor's professional practice. It enables counselors to balance the demands of their jobs, preserve their own mental health, and provide the best possible service to their clients. Counselors can maintain their enthusiasm for their profession and continue to make a positive impact in the lives of those they serve by including self-care into their daily routines (Jiang et al., 2021).

Self-care is also important for psychological counselor candidates since it provides the foundation for their future professional practice and personal well-being. Without effective self-care practices, candidates are at risk for burnout, compassion fatigue, and poor mental health, which can impair their potential to become effective counselors in the future (Jiang et al., 2021). Improving self-care skills during training promises that candidates develop healthy habits that will benefit them throughout their careers. Candidates who prioritize self-care can improve their resilience and ability to deal with the emotional demands of their future profession (Dye et al., 2020; Guler & Ceyhan, 2021). Furthermore, self-care is critical to retaining professional performance. Counseling candidates who practice self-care are better able to preserve ethical norms and provide high-quality services (ACA, 2014).

Self-care skills are crucial for counselors to protect their mental health and cope with the challenges of their professional lives. Therefore, the mental health of psychological counselors can be regarded as a cornerstone of professional resilience and the ability to provide sustainable counseling services (ACA, 2014). This highlights the necessity for counselor candidates to monitor and safeguard their own mental health proactively (Dye et al., 2020). Recognizing the importance of their own mental health and developing strategies to support it will enable candidates to manage the stressors they will encounter throughout their careers more effectively. By maintaining their mental health, counselor candidates not only enhance their own well-being but also improve their capacity to provide high-quality support to their clients, fostering a positive impact on the counseling process and inspiring others to do the same (Nelson & Wines, 2023).

As a result, the mental health and self-care skills of counselors are crucial in ensuring the quality and sustainability of psychological counseling services (ACA, 2014). Despite their significance, these concepts have received limited attention in the education and training of psychological counselor candidates in Türkiye. Specifically, there is currently no direct emphasis on developing candidates' self-care skills and encouraging them to prioritize and value their own mental health within existing undergraduate programs. Therefore, there is uncertainty about how counselor candidates address their own mental health and self-care skills. This gap underscores the need for a thorough exploration of how counselor candidates perceive these essential concepts, as their perceptions directly influence their ability to manage future professional demands. It will be

useful to uncover the candidates' views and definitions of these two concepts from their own perspectives through metaphor analysis, in order to provide valuable insights for the development of targeted educational strategies. Ultimately, the findings aim to enhance psychological counseling education and promote the overall well-being of future counselors. Therefore, the goal of this study was to reveal counselor candidates' perceptions of mental health and self-care skills through metaphor analysis.

The problem statements of the research are given below:

How do counselor candidates perceive the concept of "mental health of counselors" through metaphors?

How do counselor candidates perceive the concept of "self-care skills of counselors" through metaphors?

Method

Study Design

In this study, metaphor analysis, a discourse analysis method, was used. Discourse Analysis is a method that is not limited to analyzing text structures but also aims to reveal their meanings and ideas (Sözen, 2014). According to Moser (2000), metaphor analysis is essentially a qualitative research method, although it allows researchers to apply quantitative procedures on categorical data. The premise behind this methodology is to uncover the metaphors that individuals use to describe their experiences, feelings and thoughts and the meanings underlying these metaphors. Therefore, metaphor analysis is accepted as an important way of thinking about the world, conceptualizing the world and accessing tacit knowledge. The purpose of this study was to reveal counselor candidates' perceptions about the concepts of "mental health of counselors" and "self-care skills of counselors" through metaphors.

Participants and Procedure

This study was reviewed and ethically approved by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with ethical standards in Turkey. The criterion sampling method was used as the sampling technique. The criteria for participants to be included in the study were that they must be third- or fourth-year students enrolled in the Guidance and Psychological Counseling program in formal education. The third-year students were selected because, as part of their curriculum, they begin practical work with clients through the Career Counseling course, allowing them to gain initial hands-on experience in counseling. Fourth-year students were also included, as they engage in further applied counseling practices through courses such as School Counseling Practices and Individual Counseling Practices, where they work directly with clients in real-world settings. This selection was made to ensure that participants had a foundational level of practical experience, which enriches their perspectives on self-care and mental health as they prepare for their future careers in counseling. Before the study was conducted, the participants were informed, and their personal consent was obtained. The study group consisted of 106 third and fourth year students/psychological counselor candidates attending the "Guidance and Psychological Counseling" department at a state university in Turkey. Participation in the study was entirely

voluntary. The participants' average age was calculated as 20,26. Table 1 shows the demographic information for the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (n= 106)

Variable	*n*	*%*
Gender		
Woman	86	%81
Male	20	%18,9
Class		
3rd Grade	50	%47,2
4th Grade	56	%52,8
Total	106	100

Instruments

In order to examine counselor candidates' perceptions and beliefs about "mental health and self-care skills" in more detail, a short questionnaire consisting of two questions was applied to 106 counselor candidates. The counselor candidates were asked to complete the given statements with metaphors that came to their minds. For this purpose, the participants were first given an example (Ankara is like the human brain. Because the human brain manages and controls our body. Ankara also manages and controls our state because it is the capital of our country). Then, they were asked to liken the concepts of "mental health of psychological counselors" and "self-care skills of psychological counselors" to any living or non-living things as presented in the example, and to explain their reasons with the sentence "Because" after making the analogy. These two questions are as follows: "A psychological counselor's mental health is like .... for me. Because......"; "A counselor's self-care skills are like.........for me. Because......". Candidates were given 15 minutes to respond and were asked to write the first metaphors and explanations that came to their minds. In addition, variables such as gender, grade, age and perceived socio-economic status of the candidates were collected with the Demographic Information Form.

Data analysis

In the analysis of qualitative data, counselor candidates' metaphors were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic strategy to identify repeating patterns and categorize them (Patton, 2014). First, a preliminary analysis of the data was conducted. No invalid metaphor was identified. Each metaphor was coded separately as 'Mental Health' and 'Self-Care Skills'. The metaphors were then grouped into broad categories. The metaphors obtained were brought together in lists, analyzed one by one according to their similarities and placed in the categories created. Since some responses included more than one opinion or various expressions,

metaphors were grouped into as many categories as possible. In addition, since the responses were open to multiple interpretations due to their subjective nature, efforts were made to be as objective as possible while classifying the metaphors. Data were collected, coded and analyzed by a single researcher. However, the metaphors placed into categories were then discussed with two experts in the field of Guidance and Psychological Counseling. In order to confirm that the researcher interpreted the metaphors appropriately and placed them in appropriate categories, a 3-point Likert-type expert opinion form consisting of "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree" was used and the categories were agreed upon.

Results

Content analysis revealed five sub-themes about mental health. The sub-themes are as follows: health and balance, diversity and individuality, elegance and sensitivity, strength and resilience, and movement and change (Table 2).

Table 2
Mental Health Metaphor Categories, Frequencies and Examples

Metaphor Categories	Frequencies	Examples
Health and balance	30	Salt, protecting our body, the balance board, water, tree roots that keep it in balance, etc.
Diversity and individuality	24	Color, garden, mosaic, world, a book with different experiences on each page, etc.
Elegance and sensitivity	20	A crystal vase, a flower, a fine porcelain, a silk cloth, a perishable musical instrument, etc.
Strength and resilience	18	Castle, iron, mountain, armor, sword, etc.
Movement and change	14	River, wind, season, journey, dance, etc.

Health and Balance Sub-theme in Mental Health Metaphors

The "Health and Balance" sub-theme in mental health metaphors emphasizes the critical need for equilibrium and stability in one's psychological state. Counselor candidates explained mental health mostly with metaphors based on this theme. This theme underscores the interconnectedness of mental and physical health, suggesting that achieving and sustaining mental wellness is an ongoing process that requires attention, care, and proactive management. This sub-

theme reflects the delicate yet robust nature of mental health, where maintaining balance is key to thriving and coping with life's challenges. For example, P89 emphasized the health aspect of mental health and used the metaphor of salt as follows:

"*The mental health of a counselor is like salt for me. Because just as food would be unhealthy without salt, life would be tasteless and unhealthy without mental health.*"

P52 emphasized the balance aspect of mental health and explained this concept with the metaphor of a balance board as follows:

"*Mental health is like a balance board. Because just as body balance must be maintained in order to stand on a balance board, mental health is about maintaining our inner balance. If any external factor disturbs the balance, it is necessary to make an effort to find it again.*"

Diversity and Individuality Sub-theme in Mental Health Metaphors

The "Diversity and Individuality" sub-theme in mental health metaphors highlights the unique and varied nature of mental health experiences. This theme suggests that mental health encompasses a wide range of emotions, thoughts, and experiences that are unique to each individual. Metaphors in this sub-theme emphasize that mental health is not a one-size-fits-all concept but rather a deeply personal journey that differs from person to person. This diversity reflects the importance of personalized approaches to mental health care, recognizing that what works for one individual might not work for another. In this context, P91's metaphor of "color" and P65's metaphor of "garden" successfully reflected these different and individual aspects of counselors' mental health.

P91: "*It is like colors. Because it is very diverse and has different meanings according to the person.*"

P65: "*Mental health is like a garden. Because each flower in the garden needs different care and all of them together form a whole with different colors. In the same way, each individual's mental health is personal and requires different approaches.*"

Elegance and Sensitivity Sub-theme in Mental Health Metaphors

The "Elegance and Sensitivity" sub-theme in mental health metaphors focuses on the delicate and refined aspects of maintaining mental health. Metaphors in this sub-theme emphasize the vulnerability and value of mental health, implying that it is easily influenced by external stressors and personal conflicts. This theme highlights the need of treating one's mental health with sensitivity, realizing that simple actions and adjustments can have a significant effect. It also emphasizes the importance of taking a compassionate and attentive attitude to self-care and mental health practices, as well as nourishing oneself with kindness and patience. For example, P99 used the metaphor of "flower" to emphasize the elegant and sensitive aspect of mental health and expressed this metaphor with the following words.

"*It is like a flower. Because it is delicate and requires constant care."*

P101 used the metaphor of "crystal vase" for mental health and explained it as follows:

"*Mental health is like a crystal vase. It is very beautiful and precious, but it is also very fragile and delicate. It can be easily damaged if not carefully protected.*"

Strength and Resilience Sub-theme in Mental Health Metaphors

The "Strength and Resilience" subtheme in mental health metaphors highlights the robust and enduring aspects of maintaining mental well-being. Metaphors in this sub-theme emphasize the resilience and fortitude required to navigate through difficult times, indicating that mental health involves a capacity to recover and bounce back from setbacks. This theme is suggesting that mental health is not only about vulnerability and sensitivity but also about building a resilient foundation. It reflects the idea that mental resilience can be cultivated and strengthened over time through practices such as mindfulness, self-care, and supportive relationships. P48 used the metaphor of iron for mental health and explained it as follows:

"*It is like iron. Because it is strong and durable.*"

P33 analogized it to a castle to emphasize the strong aspect of mental health. He expressed this as follows:

"*It is like a fortress. Because; it has to remain durable and strong against external threats. However, it also needs to be constantly strengthened and supported internally.*"

Movement and Change Sub-theme in Mental Health Metaphors

The last sub-theme obtained under the mental health metaphor categories was "Movement and Change Sub-theme". The "Movement and Change" sub-theme in mental health metaphors highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of mental well-being. Metaphors in this sub-theme emphasize that mental health is a journey marked by continuous movement and adaptation, reflecting the ongoing process of growth, healing, and adjustment. The movement and change sub-theme captures the essence of mental health as an ever-changing landscape, encouraging a perspective that values progress, adaptability, and the ability to change in response to life's challenges and opportunities. P25's "sea" metaphor and P75's "river" metaphor clearly explained the moving and changing nature of mental health.

P25: "*It is like the sea. Because it is constantly moving and changing.*"

P75: "*It is like a river. Because it constantly flows, changes and is renewed. Mental health does not stop, it is shaped by constantly changing life conditions and experiences.*"

Metaphors Related to Self-Care Skills

Five sub-themes about self-care skills were discovered. The sub-themes are as follows: Care and attention, artistic understanding and diversity, elegance and sensitivity, cleanliness and order, and energy and renewal (Table 3).

Table 3
Self Care Skills Metaphor Categories, Frequencies and Examples

Metaphor Categories	Frequencies	Examples
Care and attention	35	A gardener caring for his plants, a hairdresser cutting hair, a doctor taking care of a patient, an artist touching a painting, a teacher caring for his students, etc.
Artistic understanding and diversity	23	Creating a work of art is like a painter's brush strokes, a sculptor carving marble, a musician making different sounds, a writer putting different words together, etc.
Elegance and sensitivity	21	Feather, a baby care, antique item, jewelry, musical instrument, etc.
Cleanliness and order	18	Keeping the room tidy, cleaning, organizing the desk, organizing the wardrobe, cleaning the kitchen, etc.
Energy and renewal	9	Battery charging, energy drink, sleep, vacation, meditation, etc.

Care and Attention Sub-theme in Self-Care Skills Metaphors

The "Care and Attention" subtheme in self-care skills metaphors emphasizes the meticulous and ongoing effort required to maintain one's mental and physical well-being. Counselor candidates explained self-care skills mostly with metaphors based on this theme. This theme suggests that self-care is not a one-time act but a continuous process that demands regular attention. This sub-theme underscores the importance of self-awareness and the proactive steps necessary to nurture oneself, highlighting that self-care is a fundamental aspect of maintaining overall health and preventing burnout. P74's flower metaphor and P53's gardener metaphor explained the participants' views that self-care skills should be focused on care and attention.

P74: "*It is like a well-groomed flower. Because it requires constant care and attention.*"

P53: "*Self-care skills should be like the plants of a gardener. Because just as plants should be watered and cared for regularly, a psychological counselor should take care of his/her own mental health regularly.*"

Artistic Understanding and Diversity Sub-theme in Self-Care Skills Metaphors

The "Artistic Understanding and Diversity" sub-theme in self-care skills metaphors reflects the idea that self-care is a unique and individualized practice, much like the creation of art. It acknowledges the diverse ways in which individuals find well-being, emphasizing that there is no

one-size-fits-all method. This subtheme celebrates the variety of self-care practices, encouraging people to explore and embrace different activities, whether it be painting, music, writing, or any form of creative expression, as part of their self-care routine. It underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing one's unique path to mental and emotional wellness, much like an artist values the uniqueness of their creation. For example, P56 explained the painter metaphor with the following words:

"*Self-care skill is like a painter. Because counselors understand the diversity in individuals.*"

One of the participants, P89, used the metaphor of a work of art and expressed this metaphor with the following words:

"*Self-care skills are like creating a work of art. Because each detail should be carefully considered and gain meaning with personal touches.*"

Elegance and Sensitivity Sub-theme in Self-Care Skills Metaphors

Similar to the mental health metaphors, the sub-theme "Elegance and Sensitivity" was also found in the "self-care skills" metaphors. The "Elegance and Sensitivity" sub-theme in self-care skills metaphors conveys the notion that self-care involves a delicate and refined approach, much like handling a fragile or precious object. This theme emphasizes the importance of treating oneself with gentleness and respect, recognizing that mental and emotional well-being can be easily impacted by life's challenges. This subtheme highlights the necessity of nurturing oneself with kindness, patience, and a gentle touch. It underscores the idea that self-care is about creating a safe and supportive environment for oneself, where sensitivity to one's emotions and experiences is paramount. P2's views on feathers and P38's analogy of handling a delicate flower with care to prevent damage explained the essence of this theme.

P2: "*Self-care skills should be as light and gentle as a feather. Because self-care is an act of sensitivity and grace.*"

P38: "*A counselor's self-care skills are like flowers. Because they are as delicate and caring as flowers.*"

Cleanliness and Order Sub-theme in Self-Care Skills Metaphors

The "Cleanliness and Order" subtheme in self-care skills metaphors represents the idea that maintaining one's mental and physical well-being requires a structured and organized approach. This theme suggests that just as a clean and orderly environment promotes peace and efficiency, a well-organized self-care routine fosters a sense of calm and control in one's life. It emphasizes the importance of regular habits and routines that help keep one's mind and body in a balanced state. Metaphors in this sub-theme highlight the act of decluttering one's life, both physically and mentally, to reduce stress and increase focus. For example, P23 expressed his/her views with the metaphor of cleanliness:

"*It is like cleaning. Because it requires being organized and careful.*"

P94 used the metaphor of keeping a room organized with the following words:

"*It is like keeping a room organized. Because just as an organized room provides calmness and peace, an organized self-care maintains mental and emotional balance.*"

Energy and Renewal Sub-theme in Self-Care Skills Metaphors

The "Energy and Renewal" sub-theme in self-care skills metaphors highlights the importance of activities and practices that rejuvenate and re-energize the mind and body. This theme suggests that self-care is not only about maintaining current well-being but also about replenishing one's energy reserves and fostering a sense of renewal. It indicates the idea that renewing energy is essential for overall health and resilience, allowing one to better handle stress and face daily challenges with a refreshed and positive outlook. This sub-theme encapsulates the dynamic aspect of self-care, focusing on the cyclical process of expending and regaining energy to maintain well-being.

P94, using the metaphor of recharging a battery, stated that psychological counselors need regular rest, relaxation and activities that bring joy and refreshment.

"*Self-care skills are like a battery recharge. Because just as electronic devices need to be recharged to regain their energy, a counselor needs to take time for herself/himself to regain her/his energy.*"

P103 described counselors' self-care skills as an energy source as follows:

"*It is like a source of energy. Because it is constantly renewing and refreshing.*"

Discussion

The findings from the metaphor analysis provide valuable information into how psychological counselor candidates perceive the concepts of mental health and self-care. These perceptions are crucial as they influence their approach to both their well-being and their future practice. Understanding these perceptions is essential, as they can shape how future counselors approach mental health maintenance and self-care practices in a demanding professional context. This aligns with the literature emphasizing the impact of mental health attitudes on the quality of care provided by professionals and the necessity for counselors to adopt a proactive stance toward their well-being (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014).

The metaphors used to describe mental health primarily reflect its multifaceted nature. The frequent comparison to essential and balancing elements like salt or a balance board indicates a recognition of mental health as foundational to overall well-being. This perspective aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the critical role of mental health in achieving a balanced life (World Health Organization, 2021). Also, this perception parallels assertions by Barnett and Cooper (2009) which indicate that mental health professionals who view mental health as fundamental are more likely to engage in preventative self-care. Furthermore, the diversity and individuality metaphors resonate with contemporary views on personalized mental health care, acknowledging that mental health experiences and needs vary widely among individuals (APA, 2020).

The metaphors in the grace and sensitivity category highlight an understanding of the fragile and valuable nature of mental health, suggesting an awareness that mental well-being must be carefully nurtured and safeguarded. This is consistent with the notion that mental health requires careful nurturing and protection, as even minor neglect can lead to significant issues (Howard & Khalifeh, 2020). In contrast, the strength and resilience metaphors suggest a recognition of the

inherent capability of individuals to withstand and recover from mental health challenges, which is supported by research on resilience and mental fortitude (Bonanno, 2004). These metaphors convey the belief that, while mental health may be delicate, it also possesses a robust, dynamic quality that enables individuals to recover from hardships when supported by effective coping mechanisms. Together, these perspectives underscore a balanced view of mental health as both vulnerable and resilient, highlighting the importance of maintaining protective practices while also cultivating strength and adaptability to manage life's challenges.

The movement and change metaphors underscore the dynamic and fluid nature of mental health. This perspective is vital as it reflects the reality that mental health is not static but is influenced by ongoing life events and experiences. Individuals' mental health can be impacted by both positive and negative occurrences, suggesting that well-being requires a degree of flexibility to navigate these fluctuations. The comparison to natural elements like rivers and seas suggests an acceptance of mental health's inherent variability and the need for adaptive strategies to manage its ebbs and flows (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012). This aligns with models of mental health that emphasize adaptability and continuous adjustment as key components of well-being (Herrman et al., 2005).

For counselors' self-care skills, the metaphors indicate a strong awareness of the importance of regular, attentive care, underscoring the idea that self-care is not merely a one-time effort but an ongoing commitment. The care and attention metaphors reflect the necessity for continuous and mindful self-care practices, akin to tending a garden, which is essential for maintaining professional effectiveness and personal well-being. This process of mindful maintenance allows counselors to replenish their emotional resources and sustain their capacity for empathy and patience in their counseling process (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). The artistic understanding and diversity metaphors suggest that self-care is not a one-size-fits-all approach but rather a personalized practice that requires creativity and adaptability, which is crucial for addressing the unique stressors faced by counselors. This individualized approach to self-care is crucial for addressing the unique stressors faced by counselors, as it allows them to develop strategies that resonate with their personal coping styles and life circumstances (Norcross & Guy, 2007).

The metaphors in the grace and sensitivity category again highlight the delicate nature of self-care, reinforcing the idea that self-care practices must be gentle and considerate. This perspective emphasizes that self-care is not solely about discipline or routine, but also about treating oneself with kindness and compassion. Such a gentle approach allows counselors to address their own needs. The cleanliness and order metaphors underline the importance of systematic and organized self-care routines, which can help in creating a stable and serene professional life. A well-organized self-care routine can serve as a foundation for mental clarity and emotional stability (Pope & Vasquez, 2016). Lastly, the energy and renewal metaphors emphasize the restorative aspect of self-care, recognizing that counselors need to recharge regularly to maintain their effectiveness and well-being (Wei & Wei, 2020). These metaphors suggest that self-care requires actively replenishing one's emotional and physical resources. By prioritizing activities that restore energy, counselors can continue to support their clients.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Directions

This study provides valuable insights into psychological counselor candidates' perceptions of mental health and self-care through metaphor analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the study to understand the context and constraints of the findings fully.

One of the primary limitations is the sample size and diversity. The study's findings are based on responses from a specific group of participants, which may not be representative of all psychological counselor candidates. The lack of diversity in terms of cultural, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds could limit the generalizability of the results. Therefore, future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to capture a broader spectrum of perceptions and experiences. Additionally, the subjective nature of metaphor analysis presents another limitation. Metaphors are inherently interpretative, and the process of categorizing and understanding them can be influenced by the researchers' perspectives. This subjectivity can introduce bias and affect the consistency and reliability of the findings. To mitigate this, future studies could employ multiple analysts to cross-verify interpretations and enhance the robustness of the analysis. The reliance on self-reported data is another limitation, as participants may respond in ways they believe are expected or socially desirable rather than providing authentic reflections of their thoughts and experiences. This self-report bias can skew the results and should be considered when interpreting the findings. Incorporating methods such as triangulation, where data from different sources are compared, could help validate the self-reported information.

Despite these limitations, the study offers several practical implications. The insights gained can inform the design of training programs for psychological counselors, emphasizing the importance of maintaining mental health and developing effective self-care practices. Training programs can incorporate modules that address the diverse and dynamic nature of mental health, as highlighted by the metaphors used by participants. This approach can help future counselors develop personalized self-care strategies that resonate with their unique needs and professional contexts. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of fostering mental health awareness and resilience among psychological counselor candidates. Educators and trainers should create an environment that promotes open discussions about mental health challenges and the importance of self-care. Integrating resilience-building activities into the curriculum can equip future counselors with the skills to manage stress and prevent burnout effectively.

Looking forward, there are several directions for future research. Expanding the sample size and diversity in subsequent studies will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how various factors influence perceptions of mental health and self-care. Longitudinal studies can offer insights into how these perceptions evolve over time and with professional experience, contributing to the development of sustainable self-care practices. Comparative studies across different regions and cultures can identify universal and culturally specific aspects of mental health and self-care, guiding the creation of more culturally sensitive training programs. Additionally, intervention studies that evaluate the effectiveness of specific training programs aimed at improving self-care practices and mental health awareness can provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing counselor education. In-depth qualitative research, such as interviews and focus groups, can complement metaphor analysis by providing richer, more detailed accounts of the personal experiences and challenges faced by counselor candidates. This qualitative data can deepen our understanding of the complexities involved and inform the development of targeted support strategies.

In conclusion, while this study offers valuable insights into the perceptions of mental health and self-care among psychological counselor candidates, addressing its limitations and pursuing future research directions will enhance our understanding and support the development of effective training and support systems for future psychological counselors.

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Geniş Özet

Problem Durumu

Psikolojik danışmanlar bir yardım mesleğinin gereği olarak danışanlarına etkili karar verme, problem çözme gibi pek çok konuda destek sunsalar da zaman zaman bazı zorluklarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadırlar (Toporek et al., 2009). Bu zorluklar arasında duygusal yük, yoğun iş yükü, süpervizyon eksikliği yer almaktadır (Figley, 2020) ve tükenmişlik, depresyon, anksiyete gibi psikolojik danışmanların ruh sağlığındaki bozulmalar ile sonuçlanmaktadır (Leung vd., 2023). Bu nedenle psikolojik danışmanların sadece danışanlarına yönelik değil kendi ruh sağlıklarına da özen göstermeleri ve öz bakım becerilerini uygulamaları büyük önem taşımaktadır (ACA, 2014). Psikolojik danışmanların öz bakım becerileri fiziksel, duygusal ve profesyonel stratejileri içermektedir. Öz bakım becerileri psikolojik danışmanların iş ortamı ve günlük hayat arasında

denge kurmalarına, kendi ruh sağlıklarını korumalarına ve danışanlarına mümkün olan en iyi psikolojik danışma hizmetini sunmalarına destek olmaktadır (Jiang vd., 2021). Öz bakım becerileri, psikolojik danışman adayları için de önemlidir; çünkü adayların gelecekteki mesleki uygulamalarının ve genel ruh sağlıklarının temelini oluşturmaktadır (Dye vd., 2020). Öz bakım becerileri, psikolojik danışmanların ruh sağlığını korumaları ve mesleki yaşamlarının getirdiği zorluklarla başa çıkmaları açısından da kritik bir öneme sahiptir. Dolayısıyla psikolojik danışmanların ruh sağlığı, mesleki dayanıklılığın ve etkili psikolojik danışmanlık hizmeti sunmanın temel taşlarından biri olarak kabul edilebilir (ACA, 2014). Bu durum psikolojik danışman adaylarının kendi ruh sağlıklarını takip etme ve koruma gerekliliğini ön plana çıkartmaktadır (Dye et al., 2020). Adayların mesleki yaşamlarında karşılaşacakları stres faktörleriyle başa çıkabilmeleri için kendi ruh sağlıklarının ne kadar önemli olduğunu fark etmeleri, ruh sağlıklarını destekleme stratejileri geliştirmeleri hem kendilerinin hem de danışanlarının iyi oluşu için büyük önem taşımaktadır (Nelson & Wines, 2023). Ancak alanyazında psikolojik danışman adaylarının kendi ruh sağlıklarını ve öz bakım becerilerini nasıl ele aldıkları konusunda belirsizlik bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı psikolojik danışman adaylarının ruh sağlığı ve öz bakım becerilerine ilişkin algılarını metafor analizi yoluyla ortaya çıkarmaktır.

Yöntem

Bu çalışmada bir söylem analizi yöntemi olan metafor analizi kullanılmıştır. Metafor analizi çoğunlukla nitel bir araştırma metodu olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bu metodolojinin temel amacı, bireylerin deneyimlerini, duygu ve düşüncelerini tanımlarken kullandıkları metaforları ve bu metaforların altındaki anlamları ortaya çıkartmaktır (Moser, 2000). Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu "Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık" bölümüne devam eden 106 üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. Psikolojik danışman adaylarının "ruh sağlığı ve öz bakım becerilerine" yönelik algı ve inançlarını daha ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelemek amacıyla, psikolojik danışman adaylarına iki sorudan oluşan kısa bir anket uygulanmıştır. Psikolojik danışman adaylarından verilen ifadeleri akıllarına gelen metaforlarla tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Adayların "psikolojik danışmanların ruh sağlığı" ve "psikolojik danışmanların öz bakım becerileri" kavramlarını canlı ya da cansız herhangi bir varlığa benzetmeleri, benzetmeyi yaptıktan sonra "Çünkü" cümlesi ile gerekçelerini açıklamaları istenmiştir. Ayrıca adaylara ait cinsiyet, sınıf, yaş ve algılanan sosyo-ekonomik durum gibi değişkenler ise Demografik Bilgi Formu ile toplanmıştır. Nitel verilerin analizinde, psikolojik danışman adaylarından gelen metaforlar içerik analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Veriler tek bir araştırmacı tarafından toplanmış, kodlanmış ve analiz edilmiştir. Ancak daha sonra kategorilere yerleştirilen metaforlar Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık alanındaki iki uzman ile tartışılmış, kategoriler üzerinde mutabık kalınmıştır.

Bulgular

Yapılan içerik analizi bulguları, ruh sağlığına ilişkin beş alt tema ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu alt temalar şu şekildedir: Sağlık ve denge: 30 metafor (tuz, bedenimiz korumak, denge tahtası, su, dengede tutan ağaç kökleri vb), çeşitlilik ve bireysellik: 24 metafor (renk, bahçe, mozaik, dünya, her sayfasında farklı deneyimler barındıran bir kitap vb.), zarafet ve hassasiyet: 20 metafor (kristal vazo, çiçek, ince bir porselen, ipek kumaş, bozulabilen bir müzik aleti), güç ve dayanıklılık: 18 metafor (kale, demir, dağ, zırh, kılıç vb.), hareket ve değişim: 14 metafor (nehir, rüzgar, mevsim, yolculuk, dans vb.). Öz-bakım becerilerine ilişkin beş alt tema keşfedilmiştir. Bu alt temalar şu

şekilde isimlendirilmiştir: İlgi ve dikkat: 35 metafor (bahçıvanın bitkileri, kuaförün saç kesmesi, doktorun hastasına bakması, sanatçının tablosuna dokunması, öğretmenin öğrencilerine gösterdiği ilgi vb.), sanatsal anlayış ve çeşitlilik: 23 metafor (sanat eseri yaratmak, bir ressamın fırça darbeleri, bir heykeltıraşın mermeri oyması, bir müzisyenin farklı sesler çıkarması, bir yazarın farklı kelimeleri bir araya getirmesi vb.), zarafet ve hassasiyet: 21 metafor (tüy, bir bebek bakımı, antika eşya, mücevher, müzik aleti vb.), temizlik ve düzen: 18 metafor (odanın düzenli tutulması, temizlik yapmak, masa düzenlemek, gardırop düzenlemek, mutfağı temizlemek vb.), enerji ve yenilenme: 9 metafor (pil şarjı, enerji içeceği, uyku, tatil, meditasyon vb.).

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Metafor analizinden elde edilen bulgular, psikolojik danışman adaylarının ruh sağlığı ve öz bakım kavramlarını nasıl algıladıklarına dair değerli bilgiler sağlamıştır. Ruh sağlığını tanımlamak için kullanılan metaforlar onun çok yönlü bir yapıya sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Tuz veya denge tahtası gibi temel ve dengeleyici unsurlarla sık sık karşılaştırılması, ruh sağlığının adaylar için temel bir yapı taşı olduğunu göstermiştir (Dünya Sağlık Örgütü, 2021). Ayrıca, çeşitlilik ve bireysellik metaforları, ruh sağlığının bireyler arasında büyük farklılıklar gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur (APA, 2020). Zarafet ve hassasiyet kategorisindeki metaforlar, ruh sağlığının kırılgan ve narin yapısını vurgulamıştır (Howard & Khalifeh, 2020). Güç ve dayanıklılık metaforları, adayların ruh sağlığı sorunlarıyla mücadele etme ve bu sorunları aşma konusundaki içsel potansiyellerini ve inançlarını göstermiştir (Bonanno, 2004). Hareket ve değişim metaforları ise ruh sağlığının dinamik ve değişken yapısını yansıtmıştır (Herrman vd., 2005). Öz bakım becerilerine ilişkin metaforlar da çok önemli bakış açıları sağlamıştır. Öncelikle bakım ve dikkat metaforları, sürekli ve özenli öz bakım uygulamalarının gerekliliğini vurgulamıştır (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). Sanatsal anlayış ve çeşitlilik metaforları, öz bakımın herkese uyan tek bir yaklaşım olmadığını, aksine kişiselleştirilmiş bir uygulama olduğunu göstermiştir (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Zarafet ve hassasiyet kategorisindeki metaforlar öz bakımın hassas doğasını vurgulamıştır ve öz bakım uygulamalarının nazik bir şekilde olması gerektiğini ortaya koymuştur. Temizlik ve düzen metaforları, sistematik ve düzenli öz bakım rutinlerinin önemini göstermiştir (Pope & Vasquez, 2016). Son olarak, enerji ve yenilenme metaforları ise öz bakımın onarıcı ve yeniden şarj edici yönünü vurgulamıştır (Wei ve Wei, 2020).

Psikolojik danışman adayları ruh sağlığını genellikle sağlık ve denge metaforları ile ilişkilendirmişlerdir. Ayrıca, ruh sağlığının kişisel ve çeşitli unsurlarla dolu olduğunu, hassasiyet ve süreklilik arz ettiğini vurgulamışlardır. Güç ve dayanıklılık, hareket ve değişim gibi kavramlar da önemli bulunmuştur. Adaylar, öz bakım becerilerini daha çok bireyin kendine özen göstermesi ve düzenin sağlanması ile ilişkilendirmiştir. Ayrıca, kendine ve diğerlerine sanatsal bir anlayışla yaklaşma ve enerji ile yenilenme süreçlerini önemli bulmuşlardır.