ETHICAL POSITIONS OF PROSPECTIVE COUNSELORS WITH RELATION TO MINDFULNESS

PSİKOLOJİK DANIŞMAN ADAYLARININ ETİK KONUMLARININ BİLİNÇLİ FARKINDALIK DÜZEYLERİ İLE İLİŞKİSİ

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Abstract

Ethical positions shape within life experiences via confronting and resolving ethical dilemmas of moral issues, and were consisted of idealism and relativism. Within cultural context, Western cultures had low scores on both idealism and relativism (exceptionists) while Eastern ones had high relativism scores with both high idealism (situationists) and low idealism (subjectivists) scores on Ethical Position Questionnaire. Recently, a combination of ethical decision making and awareness started to be investigated under the roof of ethical mindfulness while enabling ethical clinical practices and implementation. Prior to stepping into that area, more explanatory presentation of the relationship between ethical decision making process and mindfulness among prospective psychological health professionals, psychological counseling students were presented in this descriptive study. Results of preliminary analyses showed that approximately half of the participants (39.85 %) are on the situationist side on ethical decision making. As a result of main analyses, it was found that level of mindfulness is related with high scores on both idealism (M_{low}=3.90, M_{middle}=4.02, M_{high}=4.26) and relativism (M_{low}=3.34, M_{middle}=3.75, M_{high}=4.08).

Keywords: Ethical decision making, ethical position, mindfulness

Öz

Etik konumlar, ahlaki konulardaki etik ikilemlerle yüzleşme ve bunları çözme yoluyla yaşam deneyimleri içerisinde şekillenmekte ve idealizm ile görecelilikten oluşmaktadır. Kültürel bağlamda, Batı kültürleri hem idealizm hem de görecelilik (istisnacılar) konusunda düşük puanlara sahipken, Doğu kültürleri Etik Konum Ölçeğinde hem yüksek idealizm (durumcular) hem de düşük idealizm (öznelciler) puanları ile yüksek görecelilik puanlarına sahiptir. Son zamanlarda, etik klinik uygulamaları ve uygulamayı mümkün kılarken etik karar verme ve farkındalığın bir kombinasyonu etik farkındalık çatısı altında araştırılmaya başlanmıştır. Bu alana adım atmadan önce, bu betimsel çalışmada psikolojik danışmanlık öğrencilerinde etik karar verme süreci ve farkındalık arasındaki ilişkinin daha açıklayıcı bir sunumu yapılmıştır. Ön analizlerin sonuçları, katılımcıların yarıya yakınının (%39.85) etik karar verme konusunda durumcu tarafta olduğunu göstermiştir. Ana analizler sonucunda, bilinçli farkındalık düzeyinin hem idealizm ($M_{düşük}$=3.90, M_{orta}=4.02, $M_{yüksek}$=4.26) hem de görecelilikte ($M_{düşük}$=3.34, M_{orta}=3.75, $M_{yüksek}$=4.08) yüksek puanlarla ilişkili olduğu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etik karar verme, etik pozisyon, bilinçli farkındalık

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Introduction

Ethical Position Theory (Forsyth, 1980), based on the works of Kohlberg (1958) and Piaget (1932), posits that moral behaviors and judgements are the outer manifestation of an entire conceptual framework of personal ethical position. Ethical positions of individuals tend to be shaped regarding ones' life experiences acquired as a result of their contact with ethical dilemmas of moral issues. These positions might be considered as a continuum with two major dimensions in each end; relativism and idealism. To illustrate, relativism is determined as a function of repositioning moral rules; and whereas the foci of idealism is on the assessments of actions and consequences. Individuals that are close to the more relativistic position are mostly suspicious about the idea of creating universal moral principles so they avoid making decisions based on moral norms. On the other hand, individuals who are low in relativism are closer to the point that right actions are in tune with the moral principles and norms. By the same token, highly idealistic people believe that if they take the correct action, they will always get the right results. Those who are less idealistic, contrarily, consider that damage is sometimes inescapable and that one must occasionally pick between the lesser of two evils within pragmatic lenses (Forsyth, 1980; Yazıcı& Yazıcı, 2010).

Considering individuals positions in the line between relativism and idealism, Forsyth (1980) presented a multi-factorial design demonstrating four ethical ideologies named as situationism, subjectivism, absolutism, and exceptionalism. High scores on both relativism and idealism refer to situationism that refers to avoiding being stuck to moral rules and support evaluating each act regarding the situation. High idealism scores with low relativism is addressed as absolutism. Absolutists are the ones that expect people avert violating these rules. On the other hand low idealism accompanying high relativism are characteristics of subjectivists who make their ethical judgments on the basis of personal values and perspective rather than universal moral principles. Lastly, low scores on both dimension indicates exceptionism in which moral judgments of have been dominated by moral absolute rules.

Results of a cross-cultural study (Forsyth et al., 2008) indicated that the degree individuals are close to idealism and relativism was related to countries' historical, cultural, religious and traditional moral constructs. Accordingly, ethical orientation might be investigated two-fold within sub-dimensions of cultural orientation: collectivism and individualism. To be more precise, implied that individualized Western cultures had low scores on both idealism and relativism (exceptionists), whereas collectivistic Eastern cultures are more idealistic and relativistic; high scores in relativism accompanying high idealism (situationists) and low idealism (subjectivists) scores. Given study also presented a classification of ethical status of 29 nations. Japan, Thailand and China were listed among subjectivists, and Belgium, Austria, USA were listed among exceptionists, South Africa, Poland, and Egypt were listed among absolutists. Turkey, alongside countries such as Spain and Britain, was listed among situationists. Moreover, Turkey was among the countries with highest idealism scores (Forstyh et al., 2008).

Ethical position has been majorly measured by Ethical Position Questionnaire (EPQ) which was developed by Forsyth (1980) and adapted to Turkish culture by Yazıcı and Yazıcı (2010). In the light of Forsth's model, other studies examined ethical positions among several populations including bank employees (Güğercin & Ay, 2017), accountants (Büyükyılmaz & Gürkan, 2014), small business administrators (Özbek & Özer, 2012), and university students (Özbek et al., 2013). Given studies are in accordance with Forsyth's (2008) results that idealism is high among the Turkish population.

Büyükyılmaz and Gürkan (2014) investigated how the dimensions of burn out (emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization) affect accountants'

ethical decision making process by using structural equation modeling. Results showed that higher scores on emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment increase relativism dimension, whereas depersonalization had non-significant effect on ethical attitudes of accountants.

In another study, relationship among level of religiosity, ethical ideologies (idealism/relativism), ethical perceptions and intentions of small business owners were examined (Özbek & Özer, 2012). Findings of the study identified that small business managers can change their ethical intentions in a positive direction in case of perception of an ethical problem. Increase on idealism dimension and level of religiosity results in escalation of identification and perception of ethical problems by implying individuals with high moral values (idealistic) are more religious.

The association among levels of religiosity, personal moral philosophies, ethical perceptions and intentions were also examined among associate and undergraduate students (Özbek et al., 2013). Results revealed that higher levels of religiosity was positively correlated with idealism due to avoid harming others while giving ethical decisions. Ethical decision-making models mostly highlight that with enough information available, people will make the best choices. Yet, it is not enough to have enough information to make ethical decisions.

Mindfulness is a non-judgemental awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindful acceptance toward moments of experience can be experienced through sensations, cognitions, and emotions in the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2004; Bishop et al., 2004; Jha et al., 2007). Mindfulness practices can enhance to make choices by providing real options in any situation to consciously, and thoughtfully respond (Huang, 2017).

Mindfulness is associated to improvement of ethical decision making practices by several aspects. Primarily, it is well known that mindfulness promotes self-awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2004), so it can be concluded that mindfulness enhances moral judgment during ethical decision making (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). At that point, self-awareness is expected to escalate moral judgment (Forstyh, 1980). Both relativism but idealism can be conceptualized within the philosophy of mindfulness as they require avoidance of harm (Purser & Milillo, 2015)

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Mindfulness requires consideration of relevant information on making decisions (Huang, 2017). Higher mindfulness scores might be in relationship with lower ignorance, or rationalizing ideas that might be potentially self-threatening issues of conflict of interest or bias. Therefore, mindfulness is a helpful indicator for individuals to be conscious on ethical decision making process. Authentically focusing on the present moment, by putting aside individuals own values and emotions (e.g. anxiety and fatigue) might lead to making biased ethical decisions (Huang, 2017). It has been empirically validated that mindfulness might be helpful on regulating the emotional centers of the brain while deactivating parts related with self-referral thinking process (Taylor et al., 2011). At that glance, in order to avoid poor ethical judgements, development of internal coherence with the help of systematic practice of being in the current moment cannot be neglected (Reynolds, 2006).

Recently, a combination of ethical decision making and awareness started to be investigated under the roof of ethical mindfulness which is defined as "a state of being that acknowledges everyday ethics and ethically important moments to enabling ethical clinical practices and implementations". Association of ethical mindfulness is integrated with emotions and investigated many-fold such as being sensitive to emotions, articulating activated emotions during ethically important moments, acknowledging both the generative aspects and the limitations of emotions (Guillemin & Gillam, 2015).Yet, prior to stepping into that area, more

explanatory presentation of the association between making ethical decision process and mindfulness among prospective psychological counseling students are aimed to be presented in the current study.

Ethical ideologies are argued to be correlated to ethical positions and decisions which plays a tremendous role on ethical decision making (Davis et al., 2001; Güğercin & Ay, 2017). Since ethical ideology is a representation of ethical judgements and positions, it has a guiding role on ethical decision making (Henle et al., 2005). Yet, ethical standards in exhibited behaviors may change over time, and ethical behaviors may change accordingly (Burucuoğlu & Erdoğan, 2016). The study of Siviş-Çetinkaya (2015) also massively contributed to enlighten psychological counselors' ethical judgements. Siviş-Çetinkaya (2015) investigated the ethical judgements of Turkish counselors (N = 767) via Ethical Judgements Survey. Albeit different scale was used for assessment, findings of that large scaled study were essential to understand that Turkish psychological counselors mostly judged breach of confidentiality in cases of child abuse and potential harm toward oneself or others as ethical. Besides, sexual dual relationships were predominantly perceived as unethical. In this context, the ethical approach and attitude of the individual is of great importance in the formation of ethical behaviors (Büyükyılmaz & Gürkan 2014).

Ethical decision making of diverse samples (teachers, university students etc.) have been examined in the current literature, however mental health professionals, who are frequently in need of resolving ethical dilemmas in their therapeutic relationship with the clients (Juujärvia et al., 2020), have not been covered yet. Considering that, by nature, ethical decision making is at the core of counseling psychology regarding confidentiality, adopting an objective standpoint and providing optimum help to the client without any harm for the benefit of the client and society, the ethical positions of psychological counselors should be investigated. Moreover, the previous studies examining ethical positions of various stakeholders provided results of descriptive analyses (e.g. Güğercin & Ay, 2017), however there is a gap in explaining the practices having relationship to ethical positions.

Ethical decision making of diverse samples have been examined in the current literature, however ethical decision making process of mental health professionals, who are frequently in need of resolving ethical dilemmas in their therapeutic relationship with the clients (Juujärvia et al., 2020) needs further elaboration. All in all, ethical positions and decision making process within mindfulness gains importance yet remained unclear in the field of psychological counseling. Therefore, present study aims to investigate the ethical positions of prospective counselors – counseling students in Turkey- with regard to mindfulness levels.

Method

Participants and Sampling

Data was collected utilizing convenience sampling. A total of 128 psychological counseling students have participated to the current study. Of the participants 89.1% (n=114) were female and 50% (n=64) were senior students.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

		f	%
Gender			
	Female	114	89.1
	Male	14	10.9
Grade Level			
	Freshman	3	2.3
	Sophomore	49	38.3
	Junior	12	9.4
	Senior	64	50.0
Total			100

Data Collection and Measures

In the current study a demographic information form consisting of information about gender and grade level, Ethics Position Questionnaire and Toronto Mindfulness Scale are used to collect data via online survey. After approval of ethical committee has obtained, participants were invited to the study via e-mail.

Ethics Position Questionnaire

The Ethics Position Questionnaire was developed by Forsyth (1980) with 10 items in each subscale including 10 items in idealism and 10 items in relativism. It was adapted to Turkish by Yazıcı & Yazıcı (2010). It contains 9 items in idealism and 10 items in relativism subscales. Responses regarding using a 9-point scale ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree." The reliability and validity of the EPQ was investigated explanatory factor analysis, principal component analysis with the participation of 543 university students. The results showed that two factors explained 51.07% of the variance. Internal consistency reliability was noted as .90 for total, and .92 and .84 for idealism and relativism factors (Yazıcı & Yazıcı, 2010). In this study, Cronbach alpha coefficients were 0.81 and 0.80 for idealism and relativism respectively.

Toronto Mindfulness Scale

Toronto Mindfulness Scale was originally established by Lau et al. (2006) and adapted to Turkish by Hisli-Şahin and Yeniçeri (2015). It contains 13 items to measure state-like experiences of mindfulness. Degree of agreement or disagreement has been determined by using a 5-point including responds from ''not at all'' to ''very much''. Cronbach alpha coefficient for total mindfulness score in this study was .78.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Participants were categorized with regard to ethical positions based on the study of Forsyth and his colleagues (2008; Table 2) and to level of mindfulness following a cut off score regarding the mean scores (Table 3).

Table 2. Ethical Positions

Ethical Positions	*f*	*%*
Situationist*	51	39.85
Subjectivits**	27	21.09
Absolutist*	24	18.75
Exceptionist**	26	20.31

*Above the median on both idealism and on relativism
**Below the median on idealism and above the median on relativism

Data Analysis

Research questions of the current study was "Is there a difference between ethical positions of prospective counselors with regard to mindfulness levels?"

A one-way between groups MANOVA was conducted to examine mindfulness in ethical tendencies of counseling trainees. The dependent variables were two ethical positions (idealism and relativism) and the independent variable was level of mindfulness (low, middle high). Preliminary assumptions was checked via normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity. There were not any violations.

Findings

A statistically significant difference was noted in mindfulness on ethical tendencies of counseling trainees, $F_{(4, 248)} = 9.321$, $p < .0005$; Wilk's $\Lambda = .76$, partial $\eta 2 = .14$. As the results for the dependent variables were considered solely, Bonferroni correction was used by adjusting alpha level to .09 was idealism $F_{(2,125)} = 6.77$, $p = .00$; partial $\eta 2 = .10$ and .20 was relativism $F_{(2,125)} = 15.85$, $p = .00$; partial $\eta 2 = .10$.

Table 3. Ethical Positions and Mindfulness Levels

	Mindfulness	*M*	*SD*
Idealism	Low	3.90	.08
	Middle	4.02	.07
	High	4.26	.08
Relativism	Low	3.34	.09
	Middle	3.75	.08
	High	4.08	.09

Discussion & Conclusion

The ethical decision-making processes of individuals are characterized regarding two continuum ethical positions as relativism and idealism. Considering these two dimensions, one of which is relativism, where moral rules are rejected, and the other is idealism, where actions and their results are evaluated, a quadruple system of ethical ideology has been put forward. Results of previous studies showed that Turkey is one of the countries having a tendency to be situationist with a higher rate of idealism (Forsyth et al., 2008; Ural et al., 2017). In this study, by utilizing the Ethical Position Questionnaire, ethical tendencies of prospective counselors were examined. Through preliminary analyses considering categorization suggested by Forsty et.al. (2008), congruent with the previous studies approximately half of the participants (40%) have found to follow situationist ideology on ethical decision making. Since both idealism and relativisim scores are high for situationists that might be in tune within the shift in cultural paradigms of Turkey. To be more precise, the cultural assessment within Turkish sample, which was previously noted as collectivist in the literature, had changed to individualistic or collectivist (Aypay, 2016). Accordingly, good-for-all supporter's relativistic and/or more normative idealistic scores under the roof situationists are understandable regarding diversity within cultural dynamics of Turkish society.

In the present study the relationship between levels of mindfulness of prospective counselors to ethical ideologies have been investigated. Results of the current study was found to be in tune with suggestions of Huang (2017) that implied higher mindfulness scores regarding lower ignorance, or rationalize potential self-threating ideas such as conflict of interest or potential bias, were related with high scores on both idealism and relativism. A possible explanation might be that aspects of mindfulness including moral awareness, moral responsible behavior, emotion regulation and development of internal cohesion might be influential on higher scores on both dimensions of prospective psychological counselors' ethical decision making. For instance, as individuals be able regulate their emotions effectively, it is expected that they will be purified by the negative effects of undesirable emotions (i.e. anxiety, fatigue) that lead to making unbiased ethical decisions.

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For the reasons mentioned above, the role of mindfulness practices gains importance regarding counselor education and counseling practices within ethical decision making process. In tune with this purpose, several suggestions might worth considering. First of all, practices of breath-focused attention, listening mindfully, and reflection journals can be integrated into the courses of counseling education. Al Kaszniak from University of Arizona has used these practices in his psychology classes entitled "The Psychology of Empathy and Compassion: Contemplative and Scientific Perspectives". David Levy from University of Washington has also used similar contemplative techniques that might be crucial on not only enhancement of ethical decision making process of mental health professionals but also beneficial on observing and minimizing undesirable emotions such as anxiety and stress by making conscious choices (Bush, 2011).

Aside from clinical research looking at the benefits of mindfulness training, there is rising enthusiasm in incorporating mindfulness-based training for mental health providers. In this regard, programs such as "mindfulness-based wellness education" (MBWE) seems to become more important. For instance, in Poulin's (2009) 8 week long MBWE, which was designed to advocate health intervention for especially individuals at risk of developing stress related problems, such as mental health professionals, basic mindfulness practices to enhance awareness of individual's physical, social, emotional, vocational, and mental domains have been taught. These applications are promising and have empirically supported in a four-year qualitative study that held with graduate counseling students (Schure et al., 2008). The results of the current study identified that 15 week long mindfulness-based stress reduction course have shown not only have positive effects on the physical, emotional, mental, interpersonal shifts of

students' but also presented considerable developments on their counseling skills by presenting more powerful and connected therapeutic relationships.

An explanation for that might be that core features of mindfulness in tune with the responsible decision-making which is "the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior, social interactions, and school and life expectations based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others" (Soloway, 2016). Thereby, in sum, mindfulness indicates a notable role within ethical decision making of counselors and needs to be considered as a vital part of counselor education for the benefit of ethical decision making process within enriched therapeutic alliance and sustain their well-being as mental health professionals as well.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

There is no conflict of interest between researchers. There is no institution, source or person with a conflict of interest in the study. Written consent of the participants involved in the study was taken before starting data collection. The approval of the University Human Research Ethics Committee (number: 27535802-050.03.04) was obtained for ethical compliance with the research procedures.

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