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PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG FEMALE EMERGING ADULTS AS A FUNCTION OF PARENTAL AUTONOMY SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined female emerging adult well-being as a function of parental autonomy support in Turkey. The conceptualization of well-being included measures of vitality, stress, depression, and anxiety, while autonomy support was measured for both mothers and fathers. A non-random convenience sampling method was used and generated a sample of 140 participants. Analyses included multiple regression and t-tests. Significance was set at $p = .05$, and corresponding effect sizes were reported. Results of quantitative analyses indicated that parental autonomy support predicted well-being across all components. Father autonomy support exhibited a negative relationship with outcome measures, with mother autonomy support relating positively. The findings of the current study are contextualized within Turkish family culture, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Parental autonomy support, emerging adulthood, well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Some young adults flourish while others do not (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan, & Kauffman, 2018; Shek, Dou, Zhu, & Chai, 2019). What is less obvious is why some young adults are successful and experience high levels of well-being while young adults in similar circumstances do not. There are many predictors of young adult well-being, including close relationships (Soons & Liefbroer, 2008), physical health (Perneger, Hudelson, & Bovier, 2004), attachment style (Webster, 1998), and parenting practices (Aquilino & Supple, 2001).

Conceptualization of Parental Autonomy Support

Autonomy is a lifelong psychological need characterized by the capabilities of regulating one's behaviors in a way that aligns with one's self-directed and intrinsic values (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). The development of autonomy in adolescence and young adulthood is associated with individuation and self-government (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Parents play an important and unique role in promoting autonomy development (Grolnick, 2009).

Parental autonomy support is characterized by being supportive and respectful of children's choices and values regarding how they want to live their lives (Ryan, Deci, & Vansteenkiste, 2016). The support is associated with the promotion of independence (PI), in which adolescents are supported to become independent individuals able to express their individuality in their thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving capacities (McCurdy et al., 2020; Silk et al., 2003). Promotion of volitional functioning (PVF) is another dimension of parental autonomy support in which parents validate individuals' perspectives and choices when they are based on internalized values by providing more opportunities for choice and engaging in less control over individuals' behaviors (Ryan et al., 2016; Soenens et al., 2007). Research (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005) suggests PVF is a better predictor of well-being than PI (Kins et al., 2009).

Parental Autonomy Support and Well-being during Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a period of individualization and appears as a natural outgrowth of the development of autonomy (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Individuals during this period begin to develop an understanding of self which is based on personally internalized values (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Parents are also highly involved in this period with their expectations and how they respond to their chil-

dren's quest for autonomy (Inguglia et al., 2015; McCurdy et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important for parents to support young adults in the development of autonomy. Furthermore, during emerging adulthood, individuals are faced with lots of decisions to make. Promoting autonomy provides support for this individualization process in decision-making which has implications for well-being (Kins et al., 2009; McCurdy et al., 2020).

Parental autonomy support is associated with numerous well-being outcomes. Lokes et al. (2010) reported higher levels of parental autonomy support increased intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being. In a cross-national study of adolescents in South Korea, Denmark, and the United States, Ferguson et al. (2011) reported that perceived autonomy support was positively related to school and life satisfaction. Similarly, participants' perceptions of autonomy support in 5th grade predicted greater and more successful adjustment in 7th grade (Sher-Censor et al., 2011). Young adults' perceived autonomy support is associated with greater self-governing and more optimal developmental outcomes (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). Additional research demonstrates that parental autonomy support is related to academic achievement (Jiang et al., 2011), intrinsically driven academic interests (Roth et al., 2009), self and behavioral regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2008; Wong, 2008), use of healthy emotion regulation strategies (Roth et al., 2009), prosocial behaviors (Roth, 2008), and school adjustment (Joussemet et al., 2005), among others. In contrast, individuals who are not supported in their development of autonomy tend to experience negative outcomes, such as internalizing difficulties (Liga et al., 2017).

Parental Autonomy Support and Well-being in the Context of Turkey

Few studies of parental autonomy support and well-being have been conducted in Turkey and these studies have complementary findings with what can be observed in other countries. For example, Çankaya (2009) studied 414 young adults attending university in Izmir, Turkey, and reported that family autonomy support predicted young adults' subjective well-being. Chirkov et al. (2003) conducted cross-national studies of well-being and autonomy in countries with diverse political and social relationships. In both collectivistic and individualistic countries, including Turkey, autonomy was positively related with well-being. In addition, according to Aksüt et al. (2019), having parents who provide choices and alternatives, as well as

being supportive of autonomy demonstrated a negative correlation with depression, and positively correlated with life satisfaction in a study conducted with Turkish university students, which are in line with the findings observed by Liga et al.'s (2017) study with Italian and American emerging adults. Furthermore, Kocayörük (2012b) observed that parental support along with adolescents' autonomous functioning was found to be related to the emotional well-being of adolescents. In terms of educational settings and their implications for well-being, Kurt and Taş (2018) observed that parental autonomy support and parental involvement in adolescents' lives supported students' academic achievements and well-being.

Kocayörük (2012b) observed that even though both parental and maternal autonomy support was associated with positive effects on affective well-being of adolescents, the strength of this association was found to be different for perceived paternal and maternal support. In line with this finding, Tuzgöl-Dost (2010) reported that paternal, but not maternal, democratic parenting was associated with greater subjective well-being among college students in Turkey. Tuzgöl-Dost (2010) explains: "Given that fathers in Turkey might be more authoritarian and thus more favorable and supportive attitudes by them might make significant contributions to young individuals' perceptions of their lives" (p. 77). Likewise, Kocayörük (2012a) also stresses the importance of these findings in terms of understanding the roles that fathers play in adolescents' lives. However, Fousiani et al.'s (2014) study with Greek and Belgian adolescents observed that adolescents reported more promotion of volitional functioning (PVF) from their mothers. This finding suggests that there might also be cross-cultural differences depending on the dimensions of parental autonomy support.

With these findings in mind, the purpose of this current study was to examine the relationship between perceived parental autonomy support and well-being among young adult females living in Istanbul, Turkey. Because previous research in Turkey has indicated that mothers and fathers make unique contributions to children's well-being (see Tuzgöl-Dost, 2010), we examined their autonomy support separately. The following research questions guided our study: "Do participants perceive their mothers or fathers to provide greater autonomy support?" and "How does maternal and paternal autonomy support influence young adult females' well-being?"

METHOD

Participants

A non-random convenience sampling technique was used, with a resulting sample set of 140 young adult females living in Istanbul, Turkey. All participants were enrolled at a university. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 25 with a mean age of 21.32 (SD = 1.28) with 50% (n=70) living with their parents, 20% (n=28) with friends, and 25.7% (n=36) living in dormitories. Participants indicated whether they considered themselves to be adults, with responses being *yes*, *no*, and *sometimes yes/sometimes no*. Over half of the participants (n=83, 59.3%) self-identified as an adult while 53 participants (n=37.9%) answered *sometimes yes/sometimes no*.

Materials

Autonomy Support Scale: Parental autonomy was measured using the Perceptions of Parents Scale (POPS) autonomy subscale for college-aged students (Robbins, 1994). The POPS is a 42-item inventory that measures respondents' perceptions of maternal and paternal parenting along three dimensions: warmth, involvement, and autonomy support using a 7-point Likert scale. Similar to the previous administration of the Turkish form (Kocayörük, 2012a), both the maternal and paternal autonomy support subscales demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.84 for fathers and .85 for mothers.

Well-being indicators: Well-being was assessed by asking respondents to complete a series of questions assessing vitality, depression, stress, anxiety, and autonomy. Vitality was assessed using the 7-item Subjective Vitality Scale (VS) designed by Ryan and Frederick (1997). The Turkish translation and validation of the VS (Akın et al., 2012) was used in this study. The VS asks respondents to indicate on a scale of 1 to 7 how applicable different statements are to their lives. For example, "I feel alive and vital." In this study, the VS demonstrated good reliability (alpha = .74).

Depression, stress, and anxiety were assessed using the short-form version of the Turkish version of the Depression Stress Anxiety Scales (DASS-21) (Bilgel & Bayram, 2010). The DASS-21, derived from a longer, 42-item inventory developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), consists of three subscales, each with 7 items and scored on a scale with responses ranging from 0 (statement does not apply) to 3 (statement applies most the time). All three subscales demonstrated good reliability

in the current study (Cronbach's alpha), with scores of .79 (DASS-Depression), .84 (DASS-Anxiety), and .85 (DASS-Stress).

Autonomy: Autonomy was assessed using the Self-Determination Scale (SDS) developed by Sheldon and Deci (1993) and translated to Turkish by Kart Müge and Güldü (2008). The SDS is a 10-item -report instrument that measures two forms of autonomy: awareness of self and choice. For each item, respondents indicate which of two statements is most true for them, with responses ranging from 1 (only A feels true) to 9 (only B feels true). The two subscales can be examined separately or together (Sheldon, 1995). In this study, the full scale had a Cronbach alpha of .71.

RESULTS

Participants reported that mothers provided greater autonomy support ($M=5.41$, $SD=1.19$) than fathers ($M=4.94$, $SD=1.24$) and this difference was significant, $t(125) = 3.59$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$. To further analyze the perceived difference between maternal and paternal autonomy support, a repeated measures t-test was conducted using only those respondents' scores who were living at home at the time of the data collection. Results indicated that mothers ($M=5.57$, $SD=.97$) were perceived to provide greater autonomy support than fathers ($M=4.85$, $SD=1.23$), $t(60) = 4.30$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.24$.

A series of non-hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with maternal and paternal autonomy support entered as predictor variables and the well-being variables entered as dependent variables. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine the significance of all regression analyses. The regression model for vitality was significant, $R^2 = .11$, $F(2, 120) = 7.39$, $p < .05$, indicating that approximately 11% of the variability in vitality scores was accounted for by parental autonomy support. An analysis of the regression model indicated that father autonomy support was the only variable contributing significantly to the model. Similarly, the regression model for autonomy was significant, $R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 123) = 9.64$, $p < .05$, with only father autonomy support making a significant contribution. See Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. *Summary of Regression Model for Vitality*

Variable	B	SE B	β
Maternal Autonomy Support	.11	.08	.12
Paternal Autonomy Support*	.23	.07	.28

Note: $R^2 = .11$, $F(2, 120) = 7.39$, $p < .01$, $*p < .05$.

Table 2. *Summary of Regression Model for Autonomy*

Variable	B	SE B	β
Maternal Autonomy Support	.93	.48	.17
Paternal Autonomy Support*	1.51	.46	.29

Note: $R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 123) = 9.64$, $p < .01$, $*p < .05$.

The regression model for depression was significant, $R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 114) = 3.45$, $p < .05$, with father autonomy the only significant contributor. The regression model for anxiety was significant, $R^2 = .04$, $F(2, 118) = 2.46$, $p < .05$, with father autonomy support making a significant contribution. The regression model for stress was also significant, $R^2 = .05$, $F(2, 121) = 3.39$, $p < .05$, and again, only father autonomy support making a significant contribution. In all three models, paternal autonomy support exerted a significant and negative linear relationship with depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating that higher levels of paternal autonomy support were associated with lower levels of psychological distress. For mothers, the relationship was the opposite. Although maternal autonomy support was a nonsignificant contributor to each of the models, it exhibited a positive relationship with stress and anxiety. More maternal autonomy support was associated with more stress and anxiety among participants.

Table 3. *Summary of Regression Model for Depression*

Variable	B	SE B	β
Maternal Autonomy Support	-.08	.37	-.02
Paternal Autonomy Support*	-.88	.36	-.23

Note: $R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 114) = 3.45$, $p < .05$

Table 4. *Summary of Regression Model for Anxiety*

Variable	B	SE B	β
Maternal Autonomy Support	.36	.33	.10
Paternal Autonomy Support*	-.70	.32	-.20

Note: $R^2 = .04$, $F(2, 118) = 2.46$, $p < .05$

Table 5. *Summary of Regression Model for Stress*

Variable	B	SE B	β
Maternal Autonomy Support	.04	.37	.01
Paternal Autonomy Support*	-.90	.36	-.23

Note: $R^2 = .05$, $F(2, 121) = 3.39$, $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

Autonomy support has been associated with young adult (emerging adult) psychosocial well-being across a number of domains (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001; Demir, Özdemir, & Marum, 2011; Lekes, et al., 2010; Vasquez, et al., 2016). For example, Mageau et al., (2015) found that parental autonomy support predicted young adults' psychological adjustment over and beyond other measures of parental support in young adults. Parental autonomy support has further been found to predict need satisfaction and vitality, whereas parental psychological control was associated with need frustration (Costa, et al., 2016). While these results indicate the importance of parental autonomy support, it is important to note that in dyadic parenting units, there is a relationship between mothers' and fathers' autonomy support, in that a strong positive correlation has been reported between how each parent provides autonomy support.

Both mothers and fathers exert a profound role in developing autonomy in children, from early childhood through young adulthood. Vasquez et al., (2016) in a meta-analysis reported that the relationship between parental autonomy support and psychological health outcomes was strongest when both parents in a mother-father dy-

adic unit were significant positive contributors to autonomy development in adolescents and young adults (Downie, et al., 2007). However, moving beyond the shared contribution of mother-father parental dyads, it is often the role of fathers and their contribution to children's and adolescents' psychological development that is overlooked, despite evidence suggesting that fathers exert a significant influence on developmental outcomes, stretching from early childhood through later young adult periods. For example, Meuwissen and Carlson (2015) reported that fathers' parenting practices helped predict executive functioning in their young children. Similarly, Corwyn and Bradley (2016) reported that fathers' autonomy support was predictive on a range of social competence behaviors, but when holding constant the contribution of mothers' autonomy support, father support was a significant predictor for female outcomes, but not males.

The purpose of the current study was to determine the relationship between parental autonomy support and the well-being of young adult females living in Istanbul, Turkey. Limited research has examined parental autonomy support among Turkish adolescents and emerging adults. Kındap-Tepe and Aktaş (2019) reported that in an examination of Turkish university students that there was no significant difference in how participants perceived parental support from mothers and fathers. Cihangir-Çankaya (2009) found that parental autonomy support predicted need satisfaction and psychological well-being among young adults attending university in Turkey. These findings are similar to other studies examining well-being and autonomy support (see, Kocayoruk, 2012a, 2012b). One limitation in previous studies in Turkey is the limited attention to gender dynamics and examining the unique roles of each parental figure.

In the current study, results indicated that participants perceived their mothers to provide greater levels of autonomy support than provided by fathers. This finding is not surprising given the often-stark contrast in gender roles held by fathers and mothers in Turkey. Erkal et al. (2007) reported that in Turkey, mothers are still the primary caregivers and are expected to receive greater satisfaction from child care than fathers. Families in Turkey place high importance on obedience, authority, and dependency (Palut, 2009), with a divide between the largely modern urban centers and rural areas. However, it is important to note that contemporary mothers endorse greater acceptance and support for children's autonomy compared to earlier genera-

tions of mothers in Turkey (see Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2005; Kagitcibasi et al., 2005).

Sunar and Fisek (2005) write that based on previous work with Turkish families, more rural and traditional Turkish mothers emphasize greater obedience and provide less familial support for adolescent decision making and control both within the family and outside (see Sunar, 2002). Urban and middle-class mothers are less authoritarian and rarely engage in corporal forms of punishment, and provide more support for the emergence of adolescent autonomy and control (Coban, 2013). It is important to consider this difference as a limiting factor, but considering that urbanization in Turkey has increased dramatically in recent years, our results may be more representative.

More significantly, even though mothers provided greater autonomy support, it was only paternal autonomy support that exhibited a significant relationship with the indicators of well-being, a similar finding to what Tuzgöl (2010) reported. This finding may be explained by Turkish fathers' greater tendency toward authoritarian parenting and limited involvement in child-rearing and domestic responsibilities, although it should be noted that father involvement is influenced by income, work status, and gender of the child (Ivrendi & Isikoglu, 2010). This suggests that because men are more likely to be less involved than mothers any contribution that tends toward child involvement may be perceived as having greater salience and importance for the child.

Numerous studies demonstrate that fathers have a unique contribution to the development of children across a range of domains (Belsky et al., 2008; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2008; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; Rollè et al., 2019). In a Dutch multi-wave longitudinal study of parenting and problem behaviors, it was reported that parental autonomy support is associated with fewer problem behaviors (Vrolijk et al., 2020), and suggests that mothers and fathers make unique contributions to children's outcomes. While limited evidence exists examining the role of fathers in Turkish families and their contribution to child outcomes, Gözü (2019) reported that fathers' parenting practices and their endorsement of autonomy and obedience may differ across child sex, with boys receiving greater permissiveness and girls, greater control. Our findings build on these previous findings and suggest that the role of fathers in Turkish families is not only unique but demonstrates a dynamic

informed by child sex, and as such, it is not possible to fully understand a father's contribution to his child's developmental trajectory without first examining the sex of the child.

Limitations and Strengths

It is worth mentioning some of the specific limitations in the current study. First, it was not possible to examine all the factors that relate to parental autonomy support, including for example, attachment patterns, parenting style, geographic location (urban-rural), and intergenerational family structure. Future studies may examine these variables and determine their influence in mediating the relationship between person-level variables and environmental factors. Second, our study used self-report measures to explore all the variables and these self-perceptions of parental autonomy support may not correlate highly with actual autonomy support and thus may bias the findings to a limited extent. Research suggests that parents and children may have different views of expressed parenting style, although the patterns of correlations demonstrate moderate levels of overlap in perceptions (Cho et al., 2020).

Despite these limitations, the current study contributes to our understanding of Turkish parent-child dynamics by elucidating the role of autonomy support in predicting psychological well-being in young adulthood. Additionally, our finding that fathers have a unique contribution to female young adults' well-being through their autonomy support is a contribution that helps extend the extant literature on family functioning and outcomes in Turkey.

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