School Burnout and Depression Among Adolescents: A High School Example in Sivas City Center

Hakan Evcili [1]*

[1]Sivas Kongre High School, Sivas, Türkiye

ABSTRACT:

Purpose: This study was conducted to determine the relationship between school burnout and depression among adolescent high school students.

Material and Methods: The research employed a descriptive research design. The sample of the study consisted of 402 students enrolled in a public high school during the 2022-2023 academic year. Data were collected using the School Burnout Scale (SBS) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). The data were transferred to the SPSS 22.0 program and analyzed using descriptive statistical analyses, as well as Pearson correlation analysis.

Results: The mean age of the students was 16.18 (SD=4.26), with 47.7% being female students, and 70.6% indicating experiencing career concerns. The mean total score of the SBS for the students was 106.86 (SD=10.46) (min: 34, max: 136), with 73.2% of the students showing no signs of depression and 26.8% exhibiting symptoms of depression. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between age and school burnout. When comparing the mean SBS scores of the participants according to their socio-demographic characteristics, significant differences were found in gender, grade level, maternal education level, paternal education level, income status, place of residence, career concerns, and depression symptom groups according to BDI ($p<0.05$). Male students, 12th-grade students, students whose parents had a middle school education or lower versus those with parents having a high school education or higher, students who described their income status as "low" versus those who described it as "good," students living in a district/village versus those living in the city center, and students indicating experiencing career concerns versus those who did not, all showed statistically significant levels of school burnout. Students with depression symptoms, as measured by the BDI, had higher average scores of school burnout.

Conclusion: Measures should be taken to help the sensitive and vulnerable population of adolescent students cope with school burnout and the risk of depression. Guidance and counseling services that meet the needs of students should be provided consistently by educators and healthcare professionals, and a supportive and safe school environment should be established to address students' emotional needs.

Keywords: Adolescent, school, burnout, depression

*Corresponding author: Hakan Evcili, email: hakanevcili@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Burnout is defined as "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment observed in individuals who are in intense relationships with others as part of their work." Burnout, which occurs when an individual depletes their physical, mental, social, emotional, or economic resources, leads to numerous biopsychosocial problems. Physical problems caused by burnout include fatigue, headaches, sleep disorders, weakened immune system, loss of appetite, gastrointestinal problems, cardiovascular problems, and skin diseases. Psychosocial problems caused by burnout include irritability, anxiety disorders, decreased self-confidence, hostility, indifference, deterioration in relationships, depression, feelings of guilt, helplessness, job dissatisfaction, and decreased academic

performance (Maslach and Jackson, 1986; Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout is commonly observed among professionals working in fields such as health and education, including teachers, caregivers, and healthcare workers. However, burnout is also frequently encountered among students in the school environment. School burnout is defined as a state of tension observed when a student or others cannot meet educational expectations (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009; Barnett and Flores, 2016). The causes of school burnout can be complex and multifaceted. Factors such as high achievement expectations, intense academic demands (such as exams, assignments, and project work), competition in the school environment, peer pressure, time management problems, inadequate social support, ineffective communication, physical health problems, sleep problems, and irregular eating habits can all contribute to feelings of burnout in students (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009; Barnett and Flores, 2016; Çam and Öğütülmüş, 2019). School burnout is a prevalent problem among adolescent high school students and can be associated with the characteristics of the adolescent period. The adolescent period is a phase of rapid development, change, exploration, and experimentation (WHO, 2014). During this period, individuals need to complete their physical, sexual, emotional, cognitive, and social development in a healthy manner in order to become productive in biological and societal terms, establish their own values and goals, and be capable of taking responsibility for their lives (WHO, 2014). However, adolescents may experience significant levels of stress, academic expectations, excessive work demands, and continuous and intense stress caused by emotional exhaustion while they are in the process of exploring their identities, determining their values and goals. This can trigger the emergence of mental health problems. At this point, students may also face symptoms of depression, such as feelings of failure, hopelessness, worthlessness, and loss of interest (Özhan and Yüksel, 2021).

Depression is defined as a state of low mood characterized by symptoms such as decreased appetite or overeating, insomnia or excessive sleeping, lack of energy and fatigue, decreased self-esteem, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, and feelings of hopelessness (APA, 2013). Research has shown that depression is a common disorder among adolescents and that there is a close relationship between adolescent depression and personal, social, familial, and academic experiences (Eskin et al., 2008; Bodur and Küçükkendirci, 2009). In a study, the prevalence of depression among students aged 16-18 was found to be 26.2% (Bostancı et al., 2005). Depression depletes students' energy, reduces their motivation and overall life satisfaction. Diminished self-confidence and self-esteem can exacerbate the severity of depression. There is a mutual relationship between school burnout and depression. School burnout can increase the risk of depression, and depression can further deepen school burnout (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009; Çam and Öğütülmüş, 2019). Preventing and managing school burnout and depression in adolescent students, who are considered a vulnerable and at-risk group, is of utmost importance. Insufficient preventive interventions and delayed diagnosis can lead to the deepening and intractability of the situation. Therefore, it is crucial for both educators and healthcare professionals to be aware of the symptoms of school burnout in students, make timely diagnoses, and take necessary measures. Strategies such as stress management techniques, maintaining balance, effective time management, and creating a supportive environment can help prevent school burnout and cope with depression. The provision of effective guidance and counseling services is essential in raising awareness among students about self-awareness, clarifying their goals, and seeking professional help when needed (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009; Seçer and Gençdoğan, 2012; Demir, 2015; Özgen, 2016; Deniz and Karbeyaz, 2018). At this point, the first step is to determine the relationship between school burnout and depression in students based on their age and developmental stage. The obtained data can be used to contribute to the development of interventions that prioritize students' needs.

MATERIAL and METHODS
Purpose and Type of the Study

This study, which is of descriptive research type, was conducted to determine the relationship between school burnout and depression among adolescent high school students.

Sampling and participant

The research was carried out in a high school located in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey during the 2022-2023 academic year. The population of the study consisted of 841 students enrolled in a public high school during the 2022-2023 academic year. With the known population, the sample size was calculated to be 386 with a 95% confidence level ($\alpha=0.05$ error) using the formula for examining the frequency of occurrence. Then, a certain number of students were selected from each grade using simple random sampling method to be included in the research. The sample of the study consisted of 402 students who were willing to participate and completed the data collection tools accurately.

Data Collection Tools

The data for the study were collected using the Personal Information Form, the School Burnout Scale, and the Beck Depression Inventory.

Personal Information Form

This form, prepared by the researchers, consists of 17 questions. The form includes questions to determine some socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (age, grade, marital status, income status).

School Burnout Scale (SBS)

The scale was developed by Aypay (2012) to determine the level of school burnout in secondary school students. It is a 4-point Likert-type scale consisting of 34 items and 7 subscales (rated on a scale of 1- "Strongly Disagree" to 4- "Strongly Agree"). The subscales of the scale include lack of interest in school (6 items), exhaustion from studying (6 items), exhaustion from family-related factors (5 items), exhaustion from homework (5 items), frustration and boredom from teacher attitudes (4 items), need for rest and recreation (4 items), and feelings of inadequacy at school (4 items). Higher scores on each subscale indicate a higher level of burnout in that specific area. The scale also provides a total burnout score. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient for the scale subscales ranges from 0.67 to 0.86. In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.91.

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)

The Beck Depression Inventory was developed to assess individuals' risk of depression and quantify the severity of depression in an objective manner (Beck et al., 1961). The scale is a self-report measure used to assess cognitive, emotional, somatic, and motivational symptoms commonly seen in depression. The validity and reliability study of the Turkish version of the scale was conducted by Hisli in 1988. The Beck Depression Inventory is a 21-item 4-point Likert-type scale. Scores on the scale range from 0 to 63. For each of the 21 symptom categories, four response options ranging from 0 to 3 are available. The cutoff score for the scale is set at 17, and scores above 17 indicate the presence of depression. The scale has a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.80, and the test-retest reliability coefficient is 0.74 (Hisli, 1988). In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.82.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows 22.0 (IBM Corp., 2013) statistical software package. Descriptive statistical analyses (mean, standard deviation, frequency, minimum, maximum) were performed on the data, and parametric tests such as independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson chi-square test, and Pearson correlation analysis were used to evaluate the relationships between variables. The results were interpreted at a 95% confidence interval, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$ level in a two-tailed manner.

Ethical Approval

Institutional approval for conducting the research was obtained prior to the commencement of the study. Participants were provided with relevant information about the subject and purpose of the research. Data collection instruments were administered to participants who agreed to participate in the research online.

RESULTS

The average age of the students is 16.18 (4.26), and 47.7% of them are female. 37.3% of the students are in the tenth grade, and 81.0% come from nuclear families. Moreover, 89.0% of the students live in the city center. Regarding the parents' education levels, 39.3% of the mothers and 31.3% of the fathers have completed middle school or lower. In terms of income status, 45.2% of the students define it as "moderate". Additionally, 70.6% of the students express experiencing career anxiety.

The average scores for the School Burnout Scale (SBS) and its sub-dimensions among the students are as follows: total SBS score is 106.86 (10.46), lack of interest in school is 6.18 (3.06), exhaustion from studying is 5.16 (2.18), exhaustion from family-

related factors is 8.26 (3.46), exhaustion from homework is 8.78 (3.24), frustration and boredom from teacher attitudes is 9.40 (3.10), need for rest and recreation is 11.04 (4.18), and feelings of inadequacy at school is 10.82 (4.60) (Table 1). When examining the distribution based on the presence of depressive symptoms according to the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), it is determined that 73.2% of the participants do not exhibit depressive symptoms, while 26.8% have depressive symptoms (Table 1).

A statistically significant positive relationship is found between the age of the students and the total SBS score and sub-dimension scores ($p < 0.05$; Table 2).

Table 1. Mean total and sub-dimension scores of SBS and distribution according to BDI (n=402)

SCALE TOTAL and SUB-DIMENSION	Scale Min – Max Score	m (sd)
sbs		
Lack of interest in school	**6-24**	6.18 (3.06)
Exhaustion from studying	**6-24**	5.16 (2.18)
Exhaustion from family-related factors	**5-20**	8.26 (3.46)
Exhaustion from homework	**5-20**	8.78 (3.24)
Frustration and boredom from teacher attitudes	**4-16**	9.40 (3.10)
Need for rest and recreation	**4-16**	11.04 (4.18)
Feelings of inadequacy at school	**4-16**	10.82 (4.60)
Total	**34-136**	106.86 (10.46)
BDI	**n (%)**	
No depression symptoms	294 (73.2)	
Yes depression symptoms	108 (26.8)	
Total	**402 (100.0)**	

Abbreviations: SBS, School Burnout Scale; BDI, Beck Depression Inventory; m, mean; sd, standard deviation

Table 2. The correlation between the mean total and sub-dimension scores of the SBS and the age of the participants (n=402)

SBS	Age	
	r	p
Lack of interest in school	0.258	**0.000**
Exhaustion from studying	0.486	**0.000**
Exhaustion from family-related factors	0.346	**0.000**
Exhaustion from homework	0.368	**0.000**
Frustration and boredom from teacher attitudes	0.482	**0.000**
Need for rest and recreation	0.310	**0.000**
Feelings of inadequacy at school	0.208	**0.000**
Total	0.664	**0.000**

Abbreviations: SBS, School Burnout Scale; BDI, Beck Depression Inventory; r, Pearson corelation coffient

In terms of the participants' sociodemographic characteristics, significant differences are observed in the average SBS scores based on gender, grade

level, mother's education level, father's education level, income status, place of residence, career anxiety, and presence of depressive symptoms

according to BDI [1] (p < 0.05). Male students, students in the twelfth grade, students with mothers who have a middle school education or lower, students with fathers who have a middle school education or lower, students with a "low" income status, students living in rural areas, students experiencing career anxiety, and students with depressive symptoms according to BDI exhibit significantly higher levels of school burnout (p < 0.05; Table 3).

When comparing the presence of depressive symptoms according to BDI based on the participants' sociodemographic characteristics, significant differences are observed in terms of gender, grade level, mother's education level, income status, place of residence, and career anxiety (p < 0.05). Male students, students in the twelfth grade, students with mothers who have a middle school education or lower, students with a "poor" income status, students living in rural areas, and students experiencing career anxiety exhibit significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms according to BDI (p < 0.05; Table 3).

Table 3. Mean scale scores according to some variables (n=402)

Characteristics	SBS	BDI	
	Total m (sd)	No depression symptoms n (%)	Yes depression symptoms n (%)
Gender			
Female (n=192)	82.20 (4.28)	92 (47.9)	100 (52.1)
Male (n=210)	96.48 (6.16)	82 (39.0)	128 (61.0)
	[1]p= 0.036	[3]p= 0.040	
Grade			
9. grade(n=118)	82.26 (5.44)	98 (83.0)	20 (17)
10. grade(n=150)	86.82 (6.62)	116 (77.3)	34 (22.7)
11. grade (n=102)	94.06 (5.70)	16 (15.6)	86 (84.4)
12. grade (n=32)	94.40 (5.48)	8 (25.0)	24 (75.0)
	[2]p= 0.000	[3]p=0.032	
Family Type			
Nuclear family (n=326)	86.06 (6.48)	216 (66.2)	110 (33.8)
Extended family (n=76)	87.82 (5.20)	68 (89.4)	8 (10.6)
	[1]p= 0.342	[3]p=0.086	
Maternal Education Level			
Middle school or below (n=158)	83.38 (6.68)	62 (39.2)	96 (60.8)
High school or above(n=244)	88.12 (6.40)	218 (89.3)	26 (10.7)
	[1]p=0.000	[3]p= 0.028	
Paternal Education Level			
Middle school or below (n=126)	80.19 (6.06)	84 (66.6)	42 (33.4)
High school or above (n=276)	87.10 (6.14)	206 (74.6)	70 (25.4)
	[1]p= 0.000	[3]p=0.051	
Income Level			
Low (n=112)	96.02 (6.12)	16 (14.2)	96 (85.8)
Medium (n=182)	96.18 (5.48)	85 (46.7)	97 (53.3)
High (n=108)	93.10 (6.20)	87 (80.5)	21 (19.5)
	[2]p= 0.046	[3]p=0.018	
Place Live			
Urban(n=358)	90.24 (4.40)	290 (81.0)	68 (19.0)
Rural (n=44)	94.18 (5.12)	8 (18.1)	36 (81.9)
	[1]p= 0.0420	[3]p=0.048	
Career Concern			
Yes, I have (n=284)	94.02 (5.08)	84 (29.5)	200 (70.5)
No, I haven't (n=118)	85.46 (4.18)	97 (82.2)	21 (17.8)
	[1]p= 0.000	[3]p=0.026	
BDI			
No depression symptoms (n=294)	80.12 (6.12)		
Yes depression symptoms (n=108)	96.08 (5.10)		
	[1]p= 0.000		

Abbreviations: SBS, School Burnout Scale; BDI, Beck Depression Inventory; m, mean; SD, standard deviation; [1]Independent samples t-test, [2]One-Way ANOVA test, [3]Pearson chi-square test.

DISCUSSION

Students may face various challenges at every stage of education. In high school years, factors such as entering adolescence, increased academic responsibilities, and intense concerns about their future can increase the risk of school burnout. Therefore, it is important to investigate the problems associated with school burnout during high school years (Koçak & Seçer, 2018). This study aims to address the relationship between school burnout and depression among adolescent high school students. In this section, the findings will be compared with the literature to contribute to existing research. Existing studies in the literature indicate that depression predicts school burnout (Çapri & Sönmez, 2013; Seçer, 2015; Salmela-Aro et al., 2017; Koçak & Seçer, 2018), school burnout can lead to depression (Fiorilli et al., 2017; Salmela-Aro et al., 2017), and there is a relationship between academic failure, low grade point average, and depression (Undheim & Sund, 2005). The relationship between school burnout and depression is negatively associated with students' psychosocial well-being, and positively associated with school absenteeism and dropout (Çam et al., 2014). In this study, students with depressive symptoms according to the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) had higher average scores of school burnout. Based on the data, it can be said that school burnout can have an impact on depression due to its nature of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low accomplishment. In this regard, depression can be considered a significant risk factor for school burnout in adolescents.

Findings in the literature show that there are relationships between depression, school burnout, and gender. However, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion from these findings. Gender can be considered as a variable in the relationship between both depression and school burnout. In our study, male students had higher levels of depressive symptoms and school burnout compared to female students. Another study found that the prevalence of severe depression among high school girls was 9.6%, while it was 5.4% among boys (Ertem & Yazıcı, 2004). Similarly, studies on the relationship between gender and school burnout also present mixed findings. Some studies indicate that school burnout is more prevalent among female students compared to males (Atalayın et al., 2015; Demir, 2015; Bayrakdar, 2016), while other studies found that school burnout levels were similar or higher among male students compared to females (Balkıs et al., 2011; Seçer & Gençdoğan, 2012; Çapulcuoğlu & Gündüz, 2013; Çapri & Sönmez, 2013; Akıl & Yazar, 2014; Özgen, 2016; Deniz & Karbeyaz, 2018; Akbaş & Okutan, 2019). The higher stress levels, lower self-esteem, negative self-image, and social pressures experienced by female students, as well as the concerns of male students about success in the business world, achieving financial goals, and career choices, may contribute to their experience of school burnout and depression (Akbaş & Okutan, 2019). Therefore, it can be said that the relationship between school burnout and gender is complex and multifaceted. Gender alone is not sufficient to understand these relationships.

The educational level of parents can influence the experience of depression and school burnout. In this study, it was found that students with mothers who have a high school education or higher had fewer depressive symptoms and experienced less school burnout compared to other groups. Another study found that the average school burnout scores of middle school students were associated with parental attitudes (Çengel, 2021). Having parents with a higher educational level may lead to providing more resources and support to their children. This situation can help children develop a better awareness and planning ability regarding their future career choices and job prospects. Similarly, having parents with a lower educational level can result in children having limited resources and support, facing uncertainties about their future, and experiencing concerns about finding a job. This can increase the risk of school burnout and lead to the manifestation of depressive symptoms. Particularly, the mother plays an important role as a role model for children. The mother's attitudes towards her own career, work discipline, and motivation can influence the child's academic life and interest in school.

Family economic status can be another factor that affects a child's career anxiety. If the family's income level is high, individuals have the opportunity to

receive education in their desired fields and careers (Kuzgun, 2014; Aytaç & Keser, 2017). If the family is financially stable, the child may develop a belief that they will be financially secure in the future. This can reduce the tendency to experience school burnout and depressive symptoms. In this study, students who defined their income status as "high" had lower levels of depressive symptoms and school burnout compared to those who defined it as "low". Some studies in the literature also show that depression, anxiety, and school burnout are affected by the family's income level. Students from families with a lower income level have higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to students from families with a higher income level (Ayyıldız, 2015; Şanlı Kula & Saraç, 2016; Gökçe & Traş, 2017; Akbaş & Okutan, 2019). Expectations from students from economically disadvantaged families to enter the workforce as soon as possible and their inability to express themselves accurately regarding the careers they want to pursue can lead to future anxiety and, consequently, increase the risk of school burnout and depressive symptoms.

CONCLUSION

This study found a positive relationship between school burnout and depression among adolescent students. It was determined that as school burnout increased, the severity of depressive symptoms in students also increased. Factors such as gender, grade level, family type, mother's education level, family income status, and place of residence were found to have an impact on career anxiety and school burnout. Measures should be taken to help adolescent students, who are a sensitive and at-risk population, cope with the risk of school burnout and depression. Guidance and counseling services that students need should be provided continuously by educators and healthcare professionals, and a supportive and safe school environment should be created to meet students' emotional needs. Providing students with a space where they can express themselves, activating social support mechanisms through collaboration with parents and the community, teaching stress coping strategies, relaxation techniques, and promoting healthy lifestyle habits can help reduce the risk of school burnout and depression.

Conflict of Interest

This study is authored by a single author. There is no conflict of interest.

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