University Students' Stress Coping Strategies and Future Anxiety: A Descriptive and Correlational Study

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Stresle Başa Çıkma Stratejileri ve Gelecek Kaygısı: Tanımlayıcı-İlişki Arayıcı Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the aim is to examine the relationship between university students' methods of coping with stress and their future anxiety. This descriptive and correlational study was conducted using data obtained from 334 associate and undergraduate students at Bartın University between February 1, 2023, and April 30, 2023. Each survey was planned to be completed in an average of 15 minutes. The data collection form included questions about sociodemographic characteristics in the first part, and the Stress Coping Styles Scale and Future Anxiety Scale for University Students in the second part. Data were collected through online survey tools. Analysis of the study data was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were reported with numbers, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Correlation analyses were used to compare research variables. The research found a relationship between students' future anxiety levels and various factors. It was concluded that women have higher levels of future anxiety compared to men, men score higher in the submissive approach sub-dimension than women, and some variables significantly influence anxiety levels. Based on these results, it is concluded that it is important to develop psychological counseling and guidance services to reduce students' future anxiety and to promote a healthy mental structure.

Keywords: Future anxiety, Stress, University students, Coping with stress, Nurse

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada üniversitede öğrenim gören öğrencilerin stresle baş etme yöntemleri ile gelecek kaygısı arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi amaçlandı. Tanımlayıcı-ilişki arayıcı tipteki bu araştırma 01 Şubat 2023- 31 Nisan 2023 tarihleri arasında Bartın Üniversitesinde öğrenim gören 334 ön lisans ve lisans öğrencisinden alınan bilgiler doğrultusunda yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın her bir uygulamasının ortalama 15 dakikada tamamlanması planlanmıştır. Veri toplama formunun, birinci bölümünde sosyodemografik özellikleri içeren sorular ile ikinci bölümünde Stresle Başa Çıkma Tarzları Ölçeği ve Gelecek Kaygısı Ölçeği ve Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Gelecek Kaygısı Ölçeği kullanılacak

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olup verilerin çevrimiçi anket araçları yoluyla toplanmıştır. Çalışma verilerinin analizleri Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0 versiyonu kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Tanımlayıcı istatistikler sayı, yüzde, ortalama ve standart sapma verilerek raporlandırılmıştır. Araştırma değişkenlerinin karşılaştırılmasında korelasyon analizleri kullanılmıştır. Yapılan araştırma sonucunda öğrencilerin gelecek kaygısı düzeyleri ile onların çeşitli durumları arasında bir ilişki bulunmuştur; kadınlarda erkeklere oranla gelecek korkusunun fazla olması, erkeklerin boyun eğici yaklaşım alt boyutunda kadınlara göre daha fazla puan alması, bazı değişkenlerin onların kaygı düzeyleri üzerinde önemli rol oynadığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu sonuçlardan hareketle öğrencilerin gelecek kaygılarını azaltmak ve sağlıklı bir zihinsel yapıyı gerçekleştirmek için psikolojik danışma ve rehberlik hizmetlerinin geliştirilmesinin önemli olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Gelecek kaygısı, Üniversite öğrencisi, Stres, Stresle baş etme, Hemşire

INTRODUCTION

The young population represents a significant segment of society in terms of both quality and quantity. A large proportion of this group, crucial due to their age, consists of university-aged individuals. University life presents numerous opportunities for young people. However, university students are also at high risk for mental health problems such as depression and stress (American College Health Association, 2018). Various factors, including adapting to university life, changing living environments, exams, projects, scientific studies, shifting social life, acquiring a new profession, job hunting post-graduation, future anxiety, and responsibilities, can all be sources of stress for them. For young people, coping effectively with the stress experience caused by university life makes it easier for them to adapt to the university environment. However, it can also affect their personal and academic development closely (Beiter et al., 2015; Drake et al., 2016). The ability of students to effectively manage these stresses can reduce the stress they experience and enhance their adaptation and success. Otherwise, this situation may negatively affect their harmony, interpersonal relations, and academic performance, potentially leading to various mental health problems (Çalışkan et al., 2018; Çetinkaya et al., 2019). In light of this information, it is evident that stress and anxiety have both positive and negative effects on the health of university students. To effectively manage this stress and anxiety, students need to develop skills to utilize functional coping styles.

University education not only equips students with professional skills but also fosters their satisfaction with their roles in life, relationships with their environment, and self-awareness. Furthermore, it aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals who grasp the significance of higher education, find purpose in their lives, engage in creative thinking, and prioritize their overall well-being (Savcı and Aysan, 2014). In order to achieve these goals, it is important to determine the ways of coping with stress used by students and their current stress levels. In this way, it can be provided to students by reducing the factors that cause stress and by intervening in their useless methods. Considering that university students will serve the society in dozens of business lines after they graduate; it is very important for them to be mentally healthy and to support it. In the literature, it is seen that future anxiety and stress are related to each other (Savcı and Aysan, 2014; Leblebicioğlu, 2018). However, studies examining stress and future anxiety in university students are limited. Future anxiety is an effective stressor in university students. Studies examining the relationship between stress coping methods and future anxiety in university students are limited in the literature (Savcı and Aysan, 2014; Leblebicioğlu, 2018; Aydın and Tiryaki, 2017; Aşçı et al., 2015; Cihan et al., 2017; Kula and Saraç, 2016). The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the methods of coping with stress and future anxiety of university students.

In this study, answers to the following questions will be investigate:

1) What is the level of future anxiety on university students?

2) Are university students' styles of coping with stress related to their future anxiety?

3) Is there a significant relationship between the ways of coping with stress and some sociodemographic characteristics of university students? How effective is it in reducing future anxiety and stress symptoms?

MATERIAL and METHODS

This study is a descriptive and correlational study.

Participants

The universe of this research consists of 16947 students studying in associate and undergraduate programs at a state university in the Western Black Sea Region in the 2022-2023 academic year. The sample of the study was taken at the 95% confidence interval using the OpenEpi program, and the sample size of the known universe was calculated using a reference article and the sample size was calculated as 334 students (OpenEpi, 2023; Temel et al., 2007).

Inclusion criteria for the study;

- Being 18 years or older,

- Being a student in associate or undergraduate programs at the university where the study was conducted,

- No barrier to verbal communication,

- Willingness to participate in the research,

Students studying at faculties and vocational high schools were reached by sending the online data collection form to their e-mail addresses, student club groups and online class groups between 01/02/2023-30/04/2023. Finally, 352 students who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study.

Data Collection Tools

The data for the research were collected using the 'Descriptive Information Form', the 'Future Anxiety Scale for University Students and the Scale for Coping with Stress: Adaptation to University Students'.

Descriptive Information Form*:* In the introductory information form created by the researchers, sociodemographic information about the students such as education level, department, gender, department and age were included.

Future Anxiety Scale for University Students: The aim of the scale developed by Geylani and Yıldız is to determine the future anxiety levels of university students. The scale consists of 19 items in a 5-point Likert type grouped under two factors as "Fear of the Future" and "Despair from the Future". The total variance rate explained by the scale is 63.50% and the internal consistency coefficient is 0.91 (Geylani and Ciriş, 2022).

Adaptation of the Scale of Coping with Stress to University Students*:* The scale, which was adapted into Turkish by Şahin and Durak (1995), consists of a total of 30 items. Responses to each item are not suitable for me (0%); not suitable for me (30%); suitable for me (70%); It is distributed in the form of very suitable for me (100%).

Items 1 and 9 in the scale are reverse scored. Scale; it consists of a total of five sub-dimensions: Self-Confident Approach (7 items), Optimistic Approach (5 items), Helpless Approach (8 items), Submissive Approach (6 items), and Seeking Social Support (4 items). Subgroup scores are obtained by dividing the score obtained from each sub-dimension by the number of items. High scores from the sub-dimensions indicate that the individual uses this approach more (Şahin and Durak, 1995).

Statistical Analysis

SPSS for Windows 26.0 program was used to evaluate the data. Descriptive statistics of continuous variables were summarized in terms of mean and standard deviation, and descriptive statistics of categorical data were summarized in terms of frequency and percentage. In the study, the Kolmogrov Smirnov test was used to determine the compatibility of the scores with the normal distribution by calculating the scale scores. Accordingly, it was determined that the data were not normally distributed (p<0.05). Correlation analysis, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskall Wallis tests were used to compare research variables. Analysis results were evaluated at the 95% confidence interval p<0.05.

Ethical Statement

Ethics committee permission (Number: 2023-SBB-0021) and institutional permission were obtained before starting the research. In the online link form, the participants were informed about the subject and purpose of the research, that the data will be used for scientific purposes within the scope of the research, and that their identity information would be kept confidential, and those who ticked the "I agree to participate in the study" box in the informed consent form were included in the study.

RESULTS

The frequency and percentage values of the socio-demographic characteristics of the students participating in the research are given in Table 1 (Table 1).

When the sub-dimensions of the future anxiety scale were compared according to gender, no significant difference was found in the "Future Hopelessness" sub-dimension according to gender (Z = -0.06; p>0.05.). A significant difference was found in the fear of the future sub-dimension (Z= -2.26; p<0.05.). It is seen that women have more fear of the future than men. A significant correlation was found between the total scale scores of future anxiety in male and female genders (z= -1.99; p<0.05.) (Table 2).

Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Students (n=352)

Variables	n	Frequency (%)
Gender		
Female	263	74.7
Male	89	25.3
Departments of University		
Faculty of Health Science	118	33.5
Faculty of Educational Sciences	31	8.8
Faculty of Arts	14	4.0
Faculty of Science	5	1.4
Vocational High School	6	1.7
Faculty of Forestry	5	1.4
Faculty of Islamıc Studıes	30	8.5
Health Vocational High-School	116	33.0
Faculty of Sports Sciences	8	2.3
Faculty of Economics And Administrative Sciences	14	4.0
Faculty of Engineering	5	1.4
Degree		
1	89	25.3
2	150	42.6
3	49	13.9
4	61	17.3
Level of Income		
Less	64	18.2
Middle	251	71.3
High	37	10.5
Perceived Academic Achievement		
Less	41	11.6
Middle	258	73.3
High	53	15.1

Table 2: Comparison of the Sub-Dimensions of the Future Anxiety Scale with the Gender Variable of Students

Groups	Gender	Mean Rank	U	P
Despair of the Future Sub-Dimension	Female	176.30	11651.0	0.949
	Male	177.09		
Future Fear Sub-Dimension	Female	183.66	9821.5	**0.023**
	Male	155.35		
Future Anxiety Scale Total Score	Female	182.79	10050.000	**0.046**
	Male	157.92		

*p<0.05.

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations of the Future Anxiety Scale and Scale of the Ways to Cope with Stress Sub-Dimensions

Groups	Min.	Max	x	SS
Future Anxiety Scale				
Despair of the Future Sub-Dimension	6.00	30.00	15.38	4.80
Future Fear Sub-Dimension	13.00	63.00	39.50	11.17
Future Anxiety Scale	20.00	93.00	54.88	13.50
Scale of the Ways to Cope with Stress				
Self Confident Sub-Dimension	3.00	21.00	13.47	4.27
Optimistic Sub-Dimension	5.00	20.00	8.45	3.12
Submissive Sub-Dimension	8.00	31.00	11.36	4.51
Helpless Sub-Dimension	6.00	22.00	6.69	3.12
Seeking of Social Support Sub-Dimension	4.00	16.00	6.85	2.16

The mean score of the students participating in the study in the hopelessness sub-dimension was 15.38 ± 4.80 (Table 3). The mean score he got from the fear of the future sub-dimension was 39.50±11.17 (Table 3). The mean score he got from the self-confident approach sub-dimension was 13.47±4.27 (Table 3). The mean score he got from the optimistic approach sub-dimension was 8.45±3.12. The mean score he got from the helpless accusatory approach sub-dimension was 11.36±4.51. The mean score of the submissive approach sub-dimension was 6.69±3.12. The mean score he got from the sub-dimension of seeking social support was 6.85±2.16 (Table 3).

Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between future anxiety, which is the main question of the research, and the use of stress coping method. Analysis findings are given in Table 4. Table 4 shows Spearman correlation analyzes between variables. A strong positive correlation was observed between Ineffective Coping sub-dimension and Submissive and Helpless Blaming Approach (r=0.834, p< 0.01). A strong positive correlation was found between the submissive approach and the helpless accusatory approach variable and the ineffective coping approach (r=0.806, p< 0.01, r=0.913 p< 0.01). A moderately positive correlation was observed between the Helpless Blaming Approach and Fear of the Future and the total sub-dimension of the Future (r=0.532, p< 0.01, r=0.54, p< 0.01). The variable of Self-Confidence Approach was moderately negatively correlated with Future Hopelessness (r=-0.521, p< 0.05) and a weak negative relationship was found with Fear of the Future (r= -0.274, p< 0.01) (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

Youth period is a period in which life dynamism and conditions change rapidly. Especially university students are a difficult process in which future anxiety begins. Anxiety about the future is an important issue that university students often express today and affects their lives. The inability to predict the future causes future anxiety in people. The adolescence period of man brought; It is important to have effective coping skills in order to cope with problems such as identity confusion, desire for academic success, family and friend relations, inability to adapt to physical, physiological and psychological changes, and uncertainty of career choice. In addition, coping effectively with stressful situations is also related to personal characteristics. While there was no significant relationship between gender and styles of coping with stress in the study conducted by Şen et al. (2012). When the literature is examined, there are studies on the occupational status and work anxiety of university students, but studies on future anxiety and coping styles with stress are limited.

When the sub-dimensions of the future anxiety scale were compared according to gender, when the 'hopelessness about the future' sub-dimension was examined, there was no significant difference between men and women, while a significant difference was found between men and women in the 'fear of the future' sub-dimension. Accordingly, women are more likely to fear the future than men. In the Turkey-Kyrgyzstan sample, it was reported that the mean scores of future anxiety

Table 4: Scale of the Ways to Cope with Stress and Future Anxiety Scale Correlation

		Mn.	Sd.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	**Self Confident**	13.4716	4.27399	1									
2	**Optimistic**	8.4545	3.12023	.681**	1								
3	**Submissive**	11.3693	4.51588	-.210**	-.160**	1							
4	**Helpless**	6.6903	3.12478	0.023	.162**	.519**	1						
5	**Seeking of Social Support**	6.8523	2.16046	.122*	0.095	-.150**	-0.026	1					
6	**Effective Coping**	28.7784	7.43034	.889**	.834**	-.232**	0.081	.395**	1				
7	**Ineffective Coping**	18.0597	6.74394	-.149**	-0.041	.913**	.806**	-.105*	-.128*	1			
8	**Despair of the Future**	15.3807	4.80473	-.521**	-.452**	.300**	.033	-.169**	-.551**	.224**	1		
9	**Future Fear**	39.5	11.17639	-.274**	-.266**	.532**	.183**	-.171**	-.323**	.440**	.327**		
10	**Future Anxiety Scale**	54.8	13.50962	-.392**	-.360**	.541**	.161**	-.201**	-.443**	.438**	.602**	.942**	1

** *p<0,01,* ***** *p<0,05.*

according to gender were higher in males (Tayfun et al., 2022). The number of female university students participating in this study is approximately 2.5 times the number of male university students. For this reason, it is predicted that the mean scores of future anxiety among female and male students are higher in females.

According to a general review of the literature (Kula and Saraç, 2016; Akgün et al., 2007; Dursun and Aytaç, 2009; Yılmaz et al., 2014), women generally exhibit higher levels of hopelessness compared to men. However, some studies (Eskici, 2022; Bakioğlu and Kiraz, 2019) have found opposite results. It is seen that the gender factor is also effective in the future anxiety of situations such as men and women's different expectations from life, life goals, gender, and the role of women in society. In this study, no significant difference was found between men and women in terms of hopelessness for the future. It is thought that this result was reached because the women participating in the study were more numerous than the men. In another study conducted in Turkey, it was seen that men's hopelessness levels for the future were higher than women's. It has been interpreted that men's hopelessness levels may be high because their gender roles impose more responsibilities on them in finding a job and building a future (Bakioğlu and Kiraz, 2019).

When the sub-dimensions of the Methods of Coping with Stress Scale are compared according to gender, it is seen that the Submissive Approach scores higher in men than in women. Contrary to this finding, in a study conducted with university students in the literature, the use of self-confident and optimistic approach was found to be significantly higher in males (Ergin et al., 2014). In another study, it was found that women's scores for seeking social support, which is one of the ways of coping with stress, were higher than men (Biber et al., 2019). As examined in the literature, it is seen that male and female genders affect coping styles in many different ways (Gümüş Demir, 2023).

In the research findings, significant differences were found in the sub-dimensions of coping styles in terms of gender variable. It is seen that the self-confident approach has a higher average in male participants, while the helpless approach has a higher average in female participants. When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are research results consistent with the findings obtained (Ertoğan and Kocaekşi, 2017). There are also studies that found no significant relationship between gender and coping styles (Bakır et al., 2023). No significant relationship was found between cognitive emotion regulation strategies and gender. Although it is thought that these results may be related to the development of gender roles, it would not be appropriate to generalize about the result obtained because gender equality could not be achieved in the sample group of the study (Gümüş Demir, 2023).

CONCLUSION

University students face many concerns throughout their education life, such as academic performance, anxiety about finding a job in the future, and financial difficulties. These factors are often perceived as highly stressful by students and can cause their academic success and even their physical and/or mental health to deteriorate.

In this study, it was found that students' use of effective coping and ineffective coping methods in coping with stress did not differ according to their sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, class and department.

When the sub-dimensions of the future anxiety scale were compared according to gender, a significant difference was found between men and women in the 'fear of the future' sub-dimension. Accordingly, women are more likely to fear the

future than men. Factors such as different expectations of men and women from life, life goals, gender, and the role of women in society are thought to be influential in the formation of future anxiety.

In the study, it is seen that there is no significant relationship between the methods of Coping with Stress and the total scale scores of the Future Anxiety scales. Accordingly, it is thought that university students' use of effective or ineffective methods of coping with stress does not have a sufficient effect on reducing their future anxiety.

Based on these results, it is thought that it is important to increase the psychological counseling and guidance services that can help students to have a healthy mental structure by reducing their future anxiety levels, and to increase the studies to be done on students with future anxiety. It is anticipated that studies with larger samples are needed to evaluate whether university students' use of effective or ineffective methods of coping with stress has a sufficient effect on reducing their future anxiety. It is thought that future anxiety and ways of coping with stress may negatively affect their self-esteem. For this reason, it is recommended to look at the effect of future anxiety on self-esteem in university students in future studies and to increase studies on university students' future anxiety.

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