THE EFFECTS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES ON SOCIAL WORK STUDENT'S LOCUS OF CONTROL AND WAYS OF COPING IN TURKEY

Sosyal Hizmet Öğrencilerinin Denetim Odağı ve Başetme Yolları Üzerinde Toplumsal Cinsiyet Farklılıklarının Etkileri

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to determine the effects of gender differences on H.U.School of Social Work Students' ways of coping and locus of control in Turkey. According to the findings, male students' internal locus of control is higher than female students'. The research also reveals that female students seek more social support and feel helpless than male students do. Additionally, male students are more optimistic than female students. Finally, research results show that there is no difference in submissive and self-confidence levels of the social work students.

Key Words: *Gender differences, ways of coping, locus of control, social work students*

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı Türkiye'de HÜ Sosyal Hizmetler Yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin başetme yolları ve denetim odakları üzerindeki toplumsal cinsiyet farklılıklarının etkilerini belirlemektir. Bulgulara göre, erkek öğrencilerin iç denetim odakları kız öğrencilerden daha yüksektir. Araştırma kız öğrencilerin erkeklere göre daha çok sosyal destek aradıklarını ve çaresiz hissettiklerini de ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca erkek öğrenciler kızlara göre daha iyimserdir. Son olarak, araştırma sonuçları göstermiştir ki, sosyal hizmet öğrencilerinin başeğme ve öz-güven düzeyleri arasında bir fark yoktur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Toplumsal cinsiyet farkları, başetme yolları, denetim odağı, sosyal hizmet öğrencileri*

The traditional Turkish socio-cultural context has been characterized by an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and close ties with family, relatives, and neighbors (Imamoglu, 1987:138-147; Kagitcibasi, 1984:151-184) and a focal mother acting as mediator between the father and the children (Kagitcibasi & Sunar, 1992:75-88). Consistent with Kagitcibasi and Sunar's (1992:75-82) argument concerning reliance on primary groups and external control of individuals, authority structure and obedience are stressed

in Turkish schools and in the family. The traditional socialization processes emphasize family integrity, harmony in relationships, and closeness, loyalty, duties and obligations to family and in-groups. Turkish society is accepted as highly patriarchal with clear-cut gender role differences. Because of the fact that gender roles are consistent with gender stereotypes in the Turkish family, the institution of family is also highly patriarchal (Kandiyoti, 1995:306-319). According to traditional Turkish gender roles, men are dominant, independent, competitive, and capable of leadership, and are expected to control the home. Women are submissive, dependent, caring, and good at domestic tasks and child rearing, and are expected to remain dependent on their husbands to protect the family structure (Geis, 1993:9-54).

However, because of the free market economy and trends toward liberalization and globalization in the world, Turkey has been undergoing a very rapid social change since the 1980s. Today, Turkish society is now in a transition period in which there is dynamic tension between Eastern and Western attitudes, values, and lifestyles; this period is propelled by an effort to become a fully accepted member of the European community. As a result, Turkish people tend to express more Western views and show more individualism in their attitudes, values, and self-construals, especially in the 1990s and later. Two opposing views of cultures and lifestyles exist simultaneously in Turkish society today; the Western versus the Eastern, modern versus traditional, and urban versus rural. Turkish people combine spiritual, altruistic, other-centered, community-oriented, and inter-dependent values, which are often associated with the Eastern cultures, with individualistic, rational, logical, pragmatic, and materialistic values which tend to be associated with the Western cultures (Mocan-Aydin, 2000:281; Çileli, 2000; Karakitapoglu-Aygün, 2002; Karakitapoglu-Aygün, 2004:457).

Gender and Locus of Control

Locus of control conceptualizes how individuals see their own actions affecting the events that surround their lives and is a cognitive personality construct that has been found to be related to many aspects of interpersonal functioning (Lefcourt, 1982:3). It represents the extent to which individuals believe the outcome of events in their life is attributable to their own actions and the range extends from strong personal control (internal locus of control) to weak or no personal control (external locus of control) (Rotter, 1966:609). Individuals with relatively more internal locus of control orientations believe that outcomes of life events are a function of their own relatively permanent abilities, attributes, and skills. Those individuals with an external locus of control feel that ultimate control of their life rests outside of themselves, in the hands of fate, chance, other individuals, or large social institutions (Camp & Ganong, 1997:624).

Results on gender differences in locus of control have varied. Some studies found that females are more external in their locus of control than do males (Cairns et al., 1990:937; Linder, 1986:278; Roodin et al. 1974:671) while other studies did not find differences in locus of control (Adame, Johnson, & Cole, 1989:400-402; Dellas & Jernigan, 1987:587). However, according to

Archer and Waterman (1988:65), there is not enough evidence in the research to show that there are gender differences.

Gender and Ways of Coping

According to Folkman et al. coping was defined as the person's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage (reduce, minimize or tolerate) the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, Delongis, & Gruen, 1986:992). In other word, coping strategies or ways of coping are plans and actions for dealing with stressful situations to lower distress (Auerbach & Gramling, 1997:1). Various factors such as demographic, personal, socio-cultural and environmental have an influence on which coping strategies are mobilized under the specific circumstances. Mainly, it derives in part from inherent personality characteristics and in part from learning, as coping processes are developed and modified through experience (Aldwin, 1991:174-180). A number of studies indicated that women and men have differences in both quantity and quality of psychosocial problems and women are more prone to depression (Compas, Orosan, & Grant, 1993:331). According to Nolen-Hoeksema (1991:569), this latter may be explained by the gender differences of the ways of coping. In fact most studies that address the issue of male and female coping report gender as a clear predictor of coping behavior, such as findings on gender differences in coping adolescence is greater use of social support by girls than by boys (Belle, 1991:21-35; Frydenberg, & Lewis, 1991:199-133). Traditional gender role stereotypes also suggest that men are socialized to emphasize instrumental behavior and to suppress emotions and are thus more likely to use problem-focused coping. In contrast, women are socialized to express emotion and seek social support and may therefore rely more on emotion-focused strategies (Folkman, & Lazarus, 1980:219).

Analyses of gender differences in coping have produced mixed results. Some studies have found results consistent with the socialization hypothesis (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980:219-239; Ptacek et al., 1994:421-30), still other studies have found no differences in the way in which men and women cope (Hamilton & Fagot, 1988; Porter, & Stone, 1995:184).

The purpose of the present study

In the present study we searched the gender differences on the ways of coping and locus of control. We focused on social work students because they are tomorrow's social service givers for different types of clients. In higher education process, coping skills also affect the students' academic success and help them develop increasingly more successful methods for learning academic material and for coping with interpersonal conflict (e.g., Duval & Silvia, 2002:46; Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998:53). If students' coping skills help them construct accurate pictures of themselves and ways to overcome their weaknesses, they should have more tools for successful adaptation to college than students without such coping strategies (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992:989-1003; Feenstra, Banyard, Rines, & Hopkins, 2001:106-113). We thought that if

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we know the students ways of coping styles and locus of control, we can use this data in educational process. So, the purpose of this research is to determine the effects of gender differences on social work students' ways of coping and locus of control in Turkey. On the basis of results of earlier studies, we formed the following hypothesis:

1. Male student group will be higher in internal locus of control than the female student group.

2. Female student group will be higher in seeking of social support than the male student group.

3. Female student group will be higher in submissive than the male student group.

4. Female student group will be higher in helpless than the male student group.

5. Male student group will be higher in optimistic than the female student group.

6. Male student group will be higher in self-confident than the female student group.

Method

Participants

Participants were 194 female (53.4%) and 169 male (46.6%), ages 18 to 33 years (M = 21.97, SD = 2.24, Md = 22) who came from a social work program located in the Inner Anatolian Region of Turkey. During the research there were 441 students in total, who attended the social work program actively (first grade n = 136, second grade n = 71, third grade n = 52, and fourth grade n = 104). Three hundred seventeen students could be reached (71.8% of the total), and this number was thought to be representative. Of these, 11.3% came from rural areas, 17.0% from semi rural/urban areas, and 71.6% from urban areas of Turkey. Regarding the family structure of them, 84.3% said they come from nucleic families, and 15.7% of them are the member of extended families.

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. Five questions were asked about sex, class, age, where they lived most, family structure.

Coping Style Scale (Sahin & Durak, 1995:56-73). Coping Style Scale was derived from the Ways of Coping Inventory of Folkman and Lazarus and supposed to measure the coping styles of university students. The reliability, validity and the factor structure of the Scale studied by Sahin and Durak (1995:56) and the results showed that the Scale is a reliable and valid instrument to measure coping styles. It has five subscales: self-confident, optimistic, submissive, helpless styles and seeking of social support. Each subscale has eight items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I completely disagree) to 5 (I completely agree). Higher numbers indicate the use of this kind of coping style more.

Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966:609). Although the locus of control scale is constituted by 29 pair items, 23 pair items are taken in its grading. Six items are placed as the filling up items in order to conceal the purpose of the scale. For the grading, it is obligatory to choose either A or B for every item. Of the 23 items that are chosen for evaluation

the options of externality are graded. The points in the scale range between 0 and 23, and increase in the points indicates increase in the belief of external locus of control. In the adaptation of the scale to Turkish, test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.83. In addition, the reliability coefficient that is calculated by the KR-20 technique was found 0.68 and the cronbach alfa internal consistency coefficient was found 0.70 (Dag, 1991:10-16).

Results

Six hypotheses were tested using analysis of t test. Four hypotheses were supported; two were not.

Hypothesis 1. Male student group will be higher in internal locus of control than the female student group. This hypothesis was supported (t = 2.043, p <0.05).

Hypothesis 2. Female student group will be higher in seeking of social support than the male student group. This hypothesis was supported (t = 2.496, p <0.001).

Hypothesis 3. Female student group will be higher in submissive than the male student group. This hypothesis was not supported (t =.578, p >0.05).

Hypothesis 4. Female student group will be higher in helpless than the male student group. This hypothesis was supported (t = 1.987, p <0.05).

Hypothesis 5. Male student group will be higher in optimistic than the female student group. This hypothesis was supported (t = 2.496, p <0.01).

Hypothesis 6. Male student group will be higher in self-confident than the female student group. This hypothesis was not supported (t =.037, p >0.05).

Table 1. Gender differences in the locus of control and ways of coping of students

Subscales	Gender	N	Mean	t
Locus of control	Female	192	11.27	2.043*
	Male	168	10.40	
Seeking of Social Support	Female	194	2.16	4.152***
	Male	168	1.93	
Submissive	Female	194	.64	-.578
	Male	168	.67	
Helpless	Female	194	1.20	1.987*
	Male	168	1.10	
Optimistic	Female	194	1.71	-2.496**
	Male	168	1.85	
Self-confident	Female	194	2.09	-.037
	Male	168	2.09	

* p <0.05 ** p <0.01 *** p <0.001

Discussion

Results of this study showed that traditional gender role expectancies are more effective than social work education on students' locus of control and ways of coping strategies. This general view also supported by some research, such as Kandiyoti noted that even university education did not fundamentally change women's traditional perceptions of female roles (Kandiyoti 1984:101-120).

According to the research findings, scores of male students' internal locus of control are higher than those of female students in line with the supported first hypothesis. This means male students believe that the events which affect themselves and/or their lives are more under their own control. In other words, male students are more self-confident on problem solving and taking control of events. Taking a look at the issue from a gender viewpoint will reveal that such a result may be evaluated as an expected one in parallel with the country's dominant traditional culture and the meaning attached to the role patterns of masculinity and femininity, and reflections of this on child rearing practices. According to the traditional point of view in Turkey, man must always be the one who is powerful, perfect, and keeps control; and he is raised in this direction from his childhood onwards, is exposed to less control, and his entrepreneurship, creativity, and self-confidence are always strengthened (Kagitcibasi & Sunar, 1992:75-88; Kagitcibasi, 1997:1-50). Girls, on the other hand, are led towards others' leadership and the attitude of attributing primary importance to others' acceptance even at the cost

of their personal needs. In this sense, external locus of control in the early periods of life survives without much change in the spouse's home after the father's. Karakitapoglu-Aygün & Imamoğlu (2001:1) suggested that family environment shapes self-development in terms of both autonomy and relatedness in the Turkish culture. In the researches on the effects of sex differences on the locus of control in Turkey the following results have been found. For instance, females' locus of control is found higher than males' (Aydin, 1999).

An individual with internal locus of control believes that he owns the present power in solving, interpreting and controlling the problems confronted; and takes more responsibility. Individuals with external locus of control, on the contrary, attribute the source of present events to external powers, and believe that they are controlled by those powers.

The result in line with the supported second hypothesis of the research in fact seems to be similar with the first hypothesis. It is not a surprise that female students whose external locus of control is higher and who do not find the power of control on their life in themselves are more inclined towards seeking social support than male students are. Because needing too much social support may be viewed as the statement of a lack of self-confidence and not being able to feel powerful enough. On the other hand, the fact that female students are more naive and emotional, which is believed to be peculiar to their sex (Sunar, 1982:445; Kandiyoti, 1995:306-319), may bring about the fact that they need support in every case. The comparisons done

according to sex indicate that women use the mechanism of applying to social support more (Day, & Livingston, 2003:73; Guida, & Ludlow, 1989:178; Folkman, & Lazarus, 1980:219).

Amongst the positive results of seeking social support are the abilities of assessing the problems faced from various angles and of finding alternative solutions; and these may be seen as the indicator of aptitude towards teamwork. In addition, this is important in terms of demonstrating social aspects of personality. Whereas people in the Western culture seek social support only when there is a problem, in the Turkish culture seeking social support appears out to be emerging independent of whether there is a problem or not (Şahin, & Durak, 1995:56-73).

The data on the third hypothesis which was not supported and the fourth one which was supported of the research present a consistent result. The data of the third hypothesis which indicate that female students are more submissive than male students and the data of the fourth hypothesis which indicate that female students experience more helplessness than male students do seem to be consistent with each other. Gender differences do not appear in approaches of submission and helplessness in some researches in literature (Şahin, & Durak, 1995:56-73). In another research in which Turkish and American girls are compared, it is seen that Turkish girls perceive that they have the control in their hands about the solution of problems, and they escape less from the problems (Şahin, & Heppner, 1993:379). According to the results of Şahin and Durak's research, the group whose depressive symptoms are high

shows more submission and helplessness, and the group whose depressive symptoms are lower shows more confidence and optimism. Another research which focuses on the dimensions of personality found a positive relationship between the scores of "aptitude to stress" and "general optimism" and the coping styles on problem solving; and a negative relationship between the coping styles on emotions (helpless and submissive approaches). As a result, the positive correlation among the following seems consistent with the literature: high self-confidence, internal locus of control, psychological strength, A-Type personality, and (helpless) approaches toward emotions (Şahin, & Durak, 1995:56-73).

A look at the relationships between the methods of coping and situational variables will reveal that the ones who perceive the situation they are in as unchangeable use the methods towards emotions more (Şahin & Durak, 1995:56-73). In other words, the more the methods towards problems (self-confident and optimistic approaches) are used the less the perceived situational stresses emerge; and the more the methods towards emotions (submissive and helpless) are used the more the perceived situational stresses emerge. Furthermore, whereas the perception of environmental pollution, noise, traffic, work atmosphere, technological devices that are outside the person's control as stressful increases there emerges no change in optimistic approach, it was seemed that self-confident and emotional, submissive and helpless approaches increase together. This not only makes one think that the perception of environmental problems

as problems is related with the person's self-confidence and maturity, but also that it arouses feelings of helplessness in the same persons because they are problems which are out of control.

Based on the research data under examination, the data on the third and fourth hypotheses of the study show that among the reasons why female students use emotional coping methods (submissive and helpless approach) come both their personal characteristics and the fact that they find environmental factors which are out of their control unchangeable because they perceive them more stressful. Likewise, according to the research results of Şahin & Durak (1995:56-73), the individuals whose skills of coping with stress are insufficient recourse to more submissive and helpless approaches.

According to the fifth hypothesis of the research, which was supported, it was identified that the male are more optimistic. This may be originated from the fact that, as stated before, men have internal locus of control, seek less social support, are less submissive, and feel less helplessness. According to the study of Şahin & Durak (1995:56-73), it was determined that the ones who could cope with stress effectively use more self-confident and optimistic approaches. The roles attributed to men in Turkish society may be viewed as entrepreneurship, risk-taking, leadership, and self-confidence. Moreover, men are given more flexibility, roles, and opportunities, and supported more compared to women. In addition, men must always be the ones who have the power, authority, and control according to the traditional worldview. It is natu-

ral that men are more optimistic than women are since they are grown in that direction from childhood onwards. The additional factors for the fact that male students are more optimistic are the following: they are exposed to less control, their entrepreneurship and creativity are encouraged, and their self-confidence is strengthened.

According to the last hypothesis of the research, it was not supported that male students have more self-confidence than female students do. As stated before, the barriers female students encounter in social life are more than male students do. In this sense, the probabilities of equality of opportunity, reaching resources, and making use of resources for girls are so few compared to male students. Furthermore, female students' experience and struggle due to discriminative attitude and the roles attributed to them are much more meaningful. Under these circumstances, the fact that female students have reached university education means they have lots of life experiences which would improve and strengthen their self-confidence. The result is not surprising when evaluated from this angle. Moreover, that fact that female students are more successful in the social sphere, which is peculiar to their sex, and interpersonal relationships, (İl, 2003:339) and that they are taught the education of a discipline which takes these features as its bases have contributed to this result.

Although Turkey is a changing and developing country, the gender based view continues to directly affect the coping ways of students. The same reason affects the internal and external locus of control directly. The fact that

the great majority of the students have internal locus of control may be thought as positively affecting their relationship with clients.

It is understood that a part of the students of the School of Social Work have helpless and submissive styles. This has the capacity of negatively influencing the relationship with clients. Therefore, social work education has to develop strategies for this.

One of the most important limitations of this research is its style of data collection. It may help to use focus group interviews and in-depth interviews instead of paper-pencil testing in order to collect more detailed information. It is understood that the dimensions which are evaluated separately in the research are interrelated and complementary. Therefore, the studies to be done must be multi-dimensional and holistic.

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