Predictors of optimism in adolescents: self-esteem, subjective well-being

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Abstract

In this study, it was aimed to investigate the optimism of adolescents according to various variables, sex, self-esteem and subjective well-being. The study was carried out on a total of 305 high-school students, including 182 women and 123 men who attended different high schools in Burdur. In this research, personal information form developed by the researchers, adolescent subjective well-being developed by Eryilmaz and self-esteem scale adapted by culture and culture by Aksoy (1992), Piskin and life orientation inventory adapted by culture and culture (Aydin and Tezer and Karagoz). Pearson moment product correlation coefficient and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used in the analysis of the data. SPSS 15 program has been utilised. As a result of the research, it is understood that adolescent optimism is predicted by sex, self- esteem and subjective well-being. The findings of the study are discussed in the literature.

Keywords: Adolescents optimism, self-esteem, subjective well-being.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period manifesting itself with some physical-motor, social, psychological and cognitive changes and a period in which the cognitively maturing adolescent is engaged in various thoughts. These thoughts may be as pessimistic as to put the adolescent into a depressive state from time to time, or they may be optimistic to positively influence the adolescent.

Psychology has explored the difference between optimistic and pessimistic individuals for many years and has come to conclusion that the optimists and the pessimists' approaches to the world and the effects of these approaches on their lives are different. While it has been revealed that pessimistic and optimistic people cope with their problems differently, social and socio-economic support factors involved in their ways of coping have also been found to be different. While optimistic people expect good things to happen, pessimistic people expect bad things. Scientific definitions of optimism and pessimism focus on future expectations (Carver, Scheier & Segerstorm, 2010). Optimism, which is the subject of many studies, can be described as a tendency to perceive positive events rather than negative events and to expect to encounter these positive events (Harris & Middleton, 1994).

Self-esteem is the difference between what the individual can do now and what he/she will be able to do in the future. The greater the difference is, the lower the self-esteem of the individual will be, and the lower the difference is, the higher the self-esteem of the individual will be. Optimism and self-esteem are interrelated variables. The high self-esteem of the individual will bring about a more optimistic thinking about himself/herself and optimistic expectations. According to Leory (1996), self-esteem refers to self-worth, self-confidence and self-acceptance. At the same time, it emerges as an important indicator of all social interactions. The high self-esteem of the individual is important in his/her self-acceptance and social relations (Turnage, Hong, Stevenson & Edwards, 2012). People with high self-esteem believe that they are talented, successful, valuable and important (Salami, 2010).

One of the variables with which optimism is related is the individual's subjective perception of his/her well-being. The subjective well-being viewed as the individual's satisfaction with his/her life and the state of having positive opinions about life and not having negative opinions about it (Diener & Lucas, 1999, cited in Alexandrova, 2005) is a broad concept involving the individual's evaluations about his/her life. It includes the presence of positive cognitive and spiritual elements together with the absence of negative elements in life (Diener, 1984). The high level of subjective well-being, consisting of the elements of pleasant affection, unpleasant affection and life satisfaction, depends on the individual's pleasant affection being superior to his/her unpleasant affection and his/her cognitive judgment's being positive on his/her life (Tuzgol Dost, 2005).

When the literature on optimism is reviewed, it is seen that there are studies focusing on university students and adults (e.g., Aydin & Tezer, 1991; Kumbul Guler & Emec, 2006; Kutlu, Balci & Yilmaz, 2007; Parmaksiz, 2011; Sanli & Balci Celik, 2015; Sapmaz & Dogan, 2011; Souri & Hasanirad, 2011; Turkum, 2000–2001; Ugurlu, 2011; Yev, Lim, Haw & Gan, 2015; Yildiz, 2011); on adolescents (e.g., Acikgoz Cepni & Tabak, 2012; Calik, 2008; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Karagoz, 2011; Oliver et al., 2014; Singh & Mishra, 2014). In this literature, it is seen that though the number of studies on university students and adults is high, there is no much research exploring optimism among adolescents. In the studies focusing on adolescents, variables addressed together with optimism are the perception of school life (Calik, 2008), self-esteem, subjective well-being (Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011), pessimism (Singh & Mishra, 2014), depression and anxiety (Oliver et al., 2014) and depression and cognitive distortion (Karagoz, 2011).

The investigation of self-esteem and subjective well-being in tandem with optimism in adolescents is believed to make a contribution to the body of knowledge as regards the extent to which the individual's self-esteem and well-being affect his/her optimism and to shed light on preventive works to be conducted at schools as well. In this connection, the purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which adolescents' optimism is predicted by gender, self-esteem and subjective well-being.

2. Methods

The study was conducted according to the relational survey model. In this model, the current state is described in terms of the relationships between variables.

2.1. Study group

The study group of the current research is comprised of 305 high-school students attending high schools in the city of Burdur in 2016–2017 school years. Of the students participating on a volunteer basis, 182 (59.7%) are females and 123 (40.3%) are males and 125 are 9th graders, 128 are 10th graders and 52 are 11th graders.

2.2. Data collection tools

In the current study, in order to determine the students' level of optimism, 'The Life Orientation Inventory' developed by Scheier and Carver (1985), adapted to Turkish by Aydin and Tezer (1991) on university students and whose reliability and validity were tested on high-school students by Karagoz (2011) was used; in order to measure their optimism, 'The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory' developed by Coopersmith (1967) and adapted to Turkish by Aksoy (1992) and Piskin (1996) was used and 'The Scale of Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale' developed by Eryilmaz (2009) was used to evaluate their subjective well-being.

2.2.1. Life orientation inventory

The Life Orientation Inventory developed by Scheier and Carver (1985), adapted to Turkish by Aydin and Tezer (1991) on university students and then whose reliability and validity were tested on high-school students by Karagoz (2011) consists of 12 items designed in the form of a five-point Likert scale. Four items in the scale are not taken into evaluation. The reliability and validity studies of the scale were re-conducted on 410 high school students, and the exploratory factor analysis revealed that the scale is a single-factor scale. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient calculated to test the reliability of 'The Life Orientation Inventory' was found to be 0.82, and its test and retest reliability was found to be 0.73 after being conducted twice with a four-week interval. In light of all these findings, the reliability and validity of the scale were considered to be high enough to be used in the study (Karagoz, 2011). In the current study, Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.71.

2.2.2. Coopersmith self-esteem inventory short form

The Self-Esteem Inventory was developed by Coopersmith (1967), and its reliability and validity studies in Turkey were conducted by Aksoy (1992) and Piskin (1996). In the reliability studies conducted in Turkey, Piskin (1996) found the reliability coefficient of the short form (KR-20) of the inventory as 0.76. The reliability study conducted by Aksoy (1992) by using the 'similar scale reliability' method found a high correlation between two scales prepared with the self-conception inventory (r = 0.65). Respondents to scale are asked to select one of the two options 'Yes' or 'No' for each item in the scale. When respondents mark 'Yes' for some items and 'No' for some others, they get points. In the current study, the KR 20 value was found to be 0.62.

2.2.3. Subjective well-being scale

The Scale of Adolescent Subjective Well-Being was developed by Eryilmaz (2009). The scale items were administered to a total of 250 adolescents of which 156 are females and 94 are males aged 14–18 years. As a result of the analyses, a scale consisting of four dimensions and 15 items and whose explained variance is 61.64% was obtained. The internal consistency of the scale is 0.86 and the

Spearman Brown value is 0.83; the reliability value calculated on the basis of test-retest method is 0.83. As a result of the analyses, it was determined that the scale of adolescent subjective well-being is reliable and valid enough to be used with adolescents. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90.

2.3. Data analysis

In the analysis of the data obtained in the current study, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine whether there is a significant correlation among adolescent self-esteem, subjective well-being and optimism; multiple-regression analysis (step-wise method) was employed to determine whether the variables of gender, self-esteem and subjective well-being significantly predict optimism scores. Prior to the analyses, in order to ensure the suitability of the data, outliers were explored. 12 outliers were discarded from the dataset. Then, the normality analysis conducted revealed that the data have a normal distribution. In order to satisfy the multiple regression assumption, first it was investigated whether the correlation between the variables is linear by using the scatter diagram, and it was found that the correlation is linear and there are no values scattering out of the set. Moreover, in order to satisfy the regression assumption, there should be a correlation between the error terms in the model (Kalayci, 2008). In this regard, the first Durbin Watson value used to test auto-correlation in the model was examined. This value is expected to be ranging between 1.5 and 2.5 (Kalayci, 2008), and it was found to be 1.685; thus, it can be argued that there is no auto-correlation in the model and the standard errors of *b* coefficients are very small and regression assumption is satisfied. The gender variable is coded as 1 for female and 0 for male and turned into a dummy variable to be included in the multiple regression analysis. The data were analysed in the SPSS 20.0 program package. The significance level was set to be 0.05 for the statistical results.

2.4. Findings

2.4.1. Findings related to the correlation among the variables of optimism, self-esteem and subjective well-being and multiple regression analysis

The correlation of adolescents' optimism, self-esteem and subjective well-being was tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient results related to the variables of optimism, self-esteem and subjective well-being

Variables	χ	Ss	1	2	3
1. Optimism	25.92	4.88	-	0.37**	0.34**
2. Self-esteem	12.40	3.57	0.37**	-	0.42**
3. Subjective well-being	48.31	10.53	0.34**	0.42**	-

**p < 0.01

As can be seen in Table 1, there are positive and significant correlations among the students' optimism, self-esteem and subjective well-being scores (*r* = 0.37, *p* < 0.01, *r* = 0.34, *p* < 0.01). As these correlations are not too high (not higher than 0.70), it was decided that there is no problem of multiple-correlation; thus, multiple regression analysis was performed.

In order to examine whether the adolescents' optimism scores are predicted by self-esteem, subjective well-being and gender, multiple regression analysis was run and step-wise model was used. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Multiple regression (step-wise) analysis results related to whether optimism scores are predicted by self-esteem, subjective well-being and gender

Model	*R*	*R*2	*R*2 change	*F*	*F* change	*p*
1. Self-esteem	0.371	0.138	0.138	48.319**	48.319	0.000
2. Self-esteem and subjective well-being	0.425	0.180	0.043	33.257**	15.829	0.000
3. Self-esteem, subjective well-being and gender	0.443	0.196	0.016	24.462**	5.814	0.000

**$p < 0.001$

Table 2 shows that the model constructed in the study is significant (F = 48.319, F = 33.257, F = 24.462, $p < 0.001$, respectively). It was found that self-esteem entered in the first step explains 13.8% of the variance in the model and thus makes a significant contribution to the model; in the second step, subjective well-being is entered together with self-esteem and two of them explain 18% of the variance in the model and in the third step besides self-esteem and subjective well-being, gender is entered and they together explain 19.6% of the variance in the model. When the significance of the contribution made by the self-esteem variable entered in the first step to the model is examined, it is seen that it has a significant contribution (β = 0.371, t = 6.951, $p < 0.001$); when the subjective well-being variable is added to the self-esteem variable in the second step (self-esteem β = 0.276, t = 4.824, $p < 0.001$; subjective well-being β = 0.228, t = 3.979, $p < 0.001$), it is seen that both of them make a significant contribution to the model. When the gender variable (state of being female) is added to the self-esteem and subjective well-being variables in the third step (self-esteem β = 0.277, t = 4.878, $p < 0.001$; subjective well-being β = 0.235, t = 4.133, $p < 0.001$; gender (state of being female) β = −0.125, t = −2.411, $p < 0.05$), it is seen that three of them make a significant contribution to the model. When the beta value of the gender variable is examined, it is seen that it is negative and as the state of being female is coded as 1, the state of being male is a predictor of the optimism score. Moreover, the optimism means score of the male participants is higher than that of the female participants.

2.5. Discussion

In the current study, it was investigated whether adolescents' optimism scores are predicted by self-esteem, subjective well-being and gender.

The findings of the study showed that there are positive and significant correlations among adolescent optimism, self-esteem and subjective well-being and that the adolescents' optimism is positively and significantly predicted by self-esteem and subjective well-being and negatively and significantly predicted by gender (state of being female). This indicates that optimism is affected by self-esteem, subjective well-being and state of being male, and the male participants' optimism mean score is higher than that of the females. Thus, it can be maintained that when individuals' self-esteem and subjective well-being are good, their optimism is positively affected. When the relevant literature is reviewed, it is seen that in their study exploring the correlation between adolescent subjective well-being and optimism and self-esteem, Eryilmaz and Atak (2011) found that optimism is highly correlated with self-esteem and subjective well-being. In addition to this, Sapmaz and Dogan (2011) found that optimism and life satisfaction, a component of subjective well-being, is positively and significantly correlated with each other. Mishra (2013) reported a positive and significant correlation between optimism and well-being. In relation to gender, in the literature, Singh and Mishra (2014) found that adolescents' optimism does not vary significantly by gender. Calik (2008) conducted a study on 6th, 7th and 11th graders and found that the female students are more optimistic than the male students, contradicting with the finding of the current study. This might be due to the measurement tools used or the characteristics of the study groups.

2.6. Conclusion and suggestions

As a result, in the current study, it was found that the adolescents' optimism, self-esteem and subjective well-being are correlated with each other and the adolescents' optimism is significantly predicted by the self-esteem, subjective well-being and gender variables. In light of the findings of the current study, some suggestions can be made: as adolescent years are highly turbulent, it can be further investigated whether their optimism is related to some other variables. One of the concepts of positive psychology, optimism has been highly studied on adults in Turkey; yet, there is a limited amount of research on optimism in early ages. Therefore, there is a need for more comprehensive studies. Studies can be planned to improve optimism in early ages at schools.

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