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Self-compassion and communication skills in predicting psychological help-seeking attitudes of psychological counsellor candidates

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Abstract

Individuals have different attitudes for overcoming psychological problems. There are several factors influencing the psychological help-seeking behaviour of pre-service psychological counselors, helped by psychological counsellors. The objective of this research is to examine the predictive role of self-compassion and communication skills in psychological help-seeking attitudes. Data were collected from 261 fourth-grade students (183 female and 78 male) from the guidance and psychological counselling undergraduate department. The data on the dependent variables were obtained using the Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help Scale. The data on the independent variables were obtained using the Self-Compassion Scale and Communication Skills Scale. Also, gender variable was used as the dummy variable. Pearson Moments Multiplying Correlation Coefficient and the Standard Multiple Regression Analysis were used for analysis of data. According to the research findings, it was found that the gender, communication skills basic principles and common humanity significantly predicted psychological help-seeking attitudes positively.

Keywords: Psychological help-seeking, self-compassion, communication skills, psychological counsellor candidates.

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1. Introduction

Individuals may encounter different problems throughout their lives. Some of these problems may be related to the characteristics of the developmental period, while others may be everyday problems or adjustment problems. Those who encounter problems in their daily lives may be able to solve some problems by their own methods, while some problems may need to get help. According to Ozbay (1996), seeking psychological help is an effort by the individual to seek help from professional people in the face of social-emotional and interpersonal problems. According to Fischer and Turner (1970), when an individual encounters a problem, his/her balance is distorted and he/she needs support to return to normal life. On the other hand, one's attitude towards seeking psychological help can affect the help-seeking process.

Among the factors that affect people's help-seeking attitudes are social stigmatisation (Deane & Chamberlain, 1994; Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson & Hackler, 2007); fear of treatment (Carlson, 2001; Komiya, Good & Sherrod, 2000; Topkaya, 2011); fear of discussing painful emotions (Vogel & Wester, 2003); feeling of discomfort while talking about personal problems (Vogel, Wester, Wei & Boysen, 2005); and prejudice against people offering psychological help (Nadler, 1990; Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994). Research has shown that there are many factors influencing individuals from seeking psychological help, and these factors lead to negative attitudes towards seeking psychological help. Moreover, there are some studies revealing that psychological help-seeking is related to self-construal and perceived social support (Yalcin, 2016), whether having received any help before (Erkan, Ozbay, Cihangir-Cankaya & Terzi, 2012) and social gender roles and gender (Kalkan & Odaci, 2005; Keklik, 2009; Kirimli, 2007).

When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that psychological help-seeking attitude is also related to the self-compassion of the person. In this connection, one of the variables investigated in relation to seeking psychological help in the current research is self-compassion. Self-compassion, according to Neff (2012), is closely associated with the concept of compassion. If an individual is compassionate, he feels sad for those suffering, thinks that their lives are difficult and has increased heartbeats. Selfcompassion means directing the compassion felt for others to the self. According to Neff (2003), selfcompassion is composed of three main components - self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. These components interact together to create self-compassion. Self-compassion can be effective when a person feels insufficient, makes mistakes and experiences painful life events outside his/her control. Tate, Adams, Allen and Hancock (2007) stated that individuals with higher levels of self-compassion are more likely to accept themselves, have more positive feelings and ideas about themselves, and solve their problems more easily. Moreover, there are studies indicating that selfcompassion has a positive relationship with happiness, optimism and emotional intelligence (Heffernan, Griffin, McNulty & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011). When the explanations in the literature on self-compassion are examined, it can be thought that the communication skills of people with high self-compassion can also be high.

Individuals first learn how to establish communication in the family. The way parents communicate with their children also affects their communication skills in their later ages (Unuvar & Calisandemir, 2014, p. 33). Communication skills are important in everyday life, and the success of people working in helping professions, particularly in those based on human relationships, depends on their ability to use effective communication skills (Mc.Whirter & Voltan-Acar, 1985). Communication means the individual's explaining himself/herself to the other side (Dokmen, 1994). In order for the person to communicate effectively, one must be able to express and understand the other person. Egan (1994) summarises effective communication skills as effective listening and effective response. Effective communication skills can facilitate relationships in all kinds of human interactions and professions. Especially working professionals require more contacts with people, hence, they need to have greater mastery over communication skills (Korkut, 2005).

The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between the psychological help-seeking attitudes of pre-service psychological counsellors and their self-compassion and communication skills. As is known, psychological counselling is among the professions that provide help; and it is a fact that pre-service psychological counsellors may also need psychological help from time to time. As the attitudes of the pre-service psychological counsellors towards psychological help-seeking will reveal their attitudes towards their profession, the results of the current study are believed to make contributions to the literature and researchers.

2. Method

This study employed the relational survey model. The relational survey model is used to determine the correlations between variables and to predict possible results. The level of correlation between two or more variables is measured through statistical tests (Metin, 2014).

2.1. Study group

The study group of the current research comprised 261 senior students (183 females and 78 males) attending the departments of guidance and psychological counselling at different universities.

2.2. Data collection tools

The Psychological Help Seeking Attitude Scale-R (PYTO-R) was constructed by revising the scale developed by Turkum (2001) in 1997. In the current study, PYTO-R was employed to elicit the preservice psychological counselors' attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. The scale consists of 18 items and is in the form of five-point Likert scale. The score to be taken from the scale varies between 18 and 90. A high score taken from the scale indicates that the individual's positive attitude towards psychological help-seeking is high. The factor analysis results of the scale showed that the 18 items are subsumed under two sub-dimensions. The first sub-dimension, including positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking, is made up of 12 items and its internal consistency coefficient is 0.92. The second sub-dimension, including negative attitudes towards psychological help-seeking, consists of six items and its internal consistency coefficient is 0.77. The internal consistency coefficient of the whole scale was found to be 0.90 and test-retest reliability was found to be 0.77.

In the current study, Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficient of the PYTO was found to be 0.95.

2.3. Self-compassion scale

In the current study, the Self-compassion Scale developed by Neff (2003) and adapted to Turkish by Akin, Akin and Abaci (2007) was used. For the scale consisting of 26 items, a construct explaining 68% of the total variance was obtained. The sub-scales of the scale are *Self-kindness*, *Self-judgment*, *Common humanity*, *Isolation*, *Mindfulness and Over-identification*. The internal consistency coefficients of the scale were found to be between 0.72 and 0.80 and its test-retest reliability coefficients are between 0.56 and 0.69. Moreover, it was found that corrected item-total correlations range from 0.48 to 0.71 and all the differences between the means of the 27% top and bottom groups are significant. Furthermore, in the factor analysis, it was seen that the scale is in good compliance with the original form (x2 = 779.01, x2 = 264, y2 = 0.00, y3 = 264, y3 = 0.056, y3 = 0.95, y3 = 0.95

2.4. Communication skills scale

The scale developed by Korkut-Owen and Bugay (2014) consists of 25 items and four factors. The factor loadings of the items vary between 0.30 and 0.70. The sub-factors of the scale are Principles of Communication and Basic Skills (IITB), Self-expression (KIE), Effective Listening and Non-verbal

Communication (EDSOI) and Eagerness to Establish Communication (IKI). The confirmatory factor analysis revealed the goodness-of-fit indices statistics of the model described as having four factors for 25 items that are in the acceptable range according to goodness-of-fit indices: $[\chi^2(268) = 377.73, p < 0.0001; \chi^2/df \ ratio = 1.40; \ CFI = 0.91, \ IFI = 0.91, \ TLI = 0.90, \ RMSEA = 0.046, \ SRMR = 0.068].$ As a result of the analysis conducted for similar scales validity, the correlation between the Communication Skills Scale and the extraversion sub-test of the Traits-based Personality Test (SDKT) was found to be significant at the level of r = 0.69 (p < 0.001). The correlations between the SDKT extraversion sub-test scores and the factors were found to be r = 0.65; r = 0.47; r = 0.54 and r = 0.43 (p < 0.001), respectively. For the internal reliability of the scale, Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated and the internal consistency of the 25-item scale was found to be 0.88. The internal consistency coefficients found for the sub-factors of the scale are as follows: 0.79 for IITB; 0.72 for KIE; 0.64 for EDSOI and 0.71 for IKI. According to the data collected from 78 participants at 4-week intervals for retest, the Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficients between two measurements were found to be 0.81 for the total score, 0.73 for IITB, 0.76 for KIE, 0.70 for EDSOI and 0.75 for IKI.

2.5. Data collection and analysis

The data of the study were collected in the 2016–2017 academic year. Administration of the scales was on a volunteer basis and the researchers went to classes and explained how to fill in the scales. Completion of the scales lasted 30 min on average. The predicted variable of the study is psychological help-seeking attitude and predicting variables are gender, communication skills and self-compassion level. Also, gender was determined as a dummy variable.

Prior to the analyses, the conditions of the univariate normal distribution (skewness and Kurtosis) and before the path analysis, the conditions of the multiple normal distribution and homoscedasticity were examined. Prior to the analysis of the data, five data with missing information were discarded from the dataset. Moreover, for the analysis of the one-way outliers, standardised z values were examined. Nine data whose standardised z values are outside the range of –3 and +3 were discarded from the dataset. There should not be a relationship between the error terms in the model. In this regard, first Durbin Watson value expected to be between 1.5 and 2.5 and used to test the autocorrelation in the model (Kalayci, 2006) was tested and it was found to be 1.99; thus, it is seen that there is no autocorrelation in the model and the standard errors of b coefficients are very small and the regression hypothesis is satisfied. The correlation between the variables of the study was examined through Pearson's Correlation coefficient and then gradual multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which gender, communication skills and self-compassion level predict the pre-service psychological counsellors' attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. The significance level in the current study was set at 0.0.

3. Findings

The results of the descriptive statistics and the correlation coefficients showing bilateral correlations between variables, which is conducted before the standard multiple regression, aiming to determine whether communication skills, self-compassion and gender are predictors of the pre-service psychological counselors' attitudes towards psychological help-seeking are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter-correlations of variables and descriptive statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	М	SD
1. Psyc.help. seeking	-	0.443	0.341	0.361	0.400	0.339	-0.250	0.355	-0.258	0.350	-0.176	76.60	7.23
2. IITB	0.443	-	0.468	0.662	0.556	0.365	-0.272	0.283	-0.234	0.417	-0.268	41.07	4.17
3.KIE	0.341	0.468	-	0.656	0.647	0.369			-0.208	0.374	-0.218	16.41	2.07
4.EDSOI	0.361	0.662	0.656	-	0.603	0.376	-0.167	0.272	-0.138	0.376	-0.122	24.44	2.69
5. IKI	0.400	0.556	0.647	0.603	-	0.355	-0.236	0.325	-0.228	0.410	-0.197	19.93	2.67
6. Self-kidness 7. Self- judgement	0.339 -0.250	0.365 -0.272	0.369 -0.255	0.376 -0.167	0.355 -0.236	- -0.623	-0.623 -	0.706 -0.455	-0.480 0.736	0.802 -0.560	-0.527 0.781	16.26 11.48	3.84 3.94
8. Common humanity	0.355	0.283	0.242	0.272	0.325	0.706	-0.455	-	-0.361	0.658	-0.386	13.57	3.14
9. Isolation	-0.258	-0.234	-0.208	-0.138	-0.228	-0.480	0.736	-0.361	-	-0.477	0.706	10.18	3.32
10. Mindfulness	0.350	0.417	0.374	0.376	0.410	0.782	-0.560	0.658	-0.477	-	-0.557	13.58	2.86
11. Over-identification	-0.176	-0.268	-0.218	-0.122	-197	-0.527	0.781	-0.386	0.706	-0.557	-	10.38	3.49

^{**}P < 0.01

Table 1 shows that the independent variables have correlations with each other and the dependent variables range from 0.12 to 0.78. The correlation values should not exceed 0.90 due to multicollinearity risk (Cokluk, Sekercioglu & Buyukozturk). As there was no multicollinearity problem, the regression analysis was continued. The results of the standard multiple regression analysis conducted to determine whether gender, the sub-dimensions of communications skills – IITB, KIE, EDSOI, IKI and the sub-dimensions of self-compassion – Self-kindness, Self-judgment, Common humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness and Over-identification – predict the psychological help-seeking attitude that are presented in Table 2.

^{*}*P* < 0.05

Table 2. Summary of the regression analyses

Variables	В	Sh	в	t	р
Psych. help-seeking					
IBTI	0.489	0.130	0.282	3.763	0.000
KIE	0.341	0.272	0.098	1.253	0.211
EDSOI	-0.127	0.229	-0.047	-0.554	0.580
IKI	0.489	0.130	0.282	3.763	0.244
Self-Kindness	0.017	0.194	0.009	0.086	0.931
Self-Judgement	0.018	0.185	0.010	0.095	0.925
Common humanity	0.475	0.176	0.207	2.696	0.007
Isolation	-0.274	0.179	-0.126	-1.530	0.127
Mindfulness	0.167	0.244	0.066	0.685	0.494
Over-Identification	0.233	0.194	0.113	1.201	0.231
Woman (Gender)	2.725	0.883	0.173	3.087	0.002
R = 0.565					
$R^2 = 0.319$					
$F_{(11-249)} = 10.594$					

As can be seen in Table 2, gender, self-compassion and communication skills explain 32% of the total variance in psychological help-seeking attitude (R=0.565, $R^2=0.319$ F (11-249) = 10.594 p < 0.01). T-test results concerning the significance of the regression coefficients show communication skills and the sub-dimension of IITB (t=3.763, p < 0.01); the sub-dimension of common humanity (t=2.696, p < 0.05) and gender (t=3.087, p < 0.05) positively and significantly predict the psychological help-seeking attitude. On the other hand, the sub-dimensions of communication skills that are KIE, effective listening, eagerness to communicate; and the sub-dimensions of self-compassion that are self-kindness, self-judgment, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification do not significantly predict the psychological help-seeking attitude. According to the standardised regression coefficients, the significant predictors of psychological help-seeking can be listed in order of importance as IITB ($\theta=0.282$); common humanity ($\theta=0.207$) and gender ($\theta=0.173$). The findings obtained from the standard multiple regression analysis can be summarised as follows: the psychological help-seeking attitudes of the female pre-service psychological counsellors whose IITB and common humanity scores are higher are significantly higher than those of the others.

4. Discussion and recommendations

The findings of the study showed that the IITB sub-dimension (t = 3.763, p < 0.01) positively and significantly predict the psychological help-seeking attitude. This indicates that the pre-service psychological counsellors with a high level of IITB have more positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. Sahin and Ozbay (2003) stated that help-seeking behaviour requires certain communication skills. Komiya et al. (2000) suggested that individuals with high levels of KIE have more positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. Similarly, Serim and Cihangir-Cankaya (2015) reported that self-hiding negatively and KIE positively predict help-seeking. As expressing emotions and KIE require communication skills, the findings of the current study seem to be in compliance with the literature.

Another finding of the current study is that the common humanity sub-dimension (t = 2.696, p < 0.05) positively and significantly predict the psychological help-seeking attitude. In other words, the pre-service psychological counsellors with higher common humanity have more positive help-seeking attitudes. According to Germer and Neff (2013), people with high levels of common humanity accept that they are not perfect, positive and realise that negative life experiences are not only lived by them but experienced by all humans. Moreover, people with high levels of common humanity know that failures and defects are normal for all humans. As stated before, people having positive

psychological help-seeking attitudes are at the same time not afraid of talking about painful emotions (Vogel and Wester, 2003); and feel comfortable explaining their personal problems (Vogel, Wester, Wei & Boysen, 2005). Thus, the finding that people with higher common humanity levels have more positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking concurs with the literature.

The last finding of the study is that gender (t = 3.087, p < 0.05) positively and significantly predicts the psychological help-seeking attitude. In this regard, the female pre-service psychological counsellors' help-seeking attitudes are more positive. Much research in the literature has reported that females have more positive attitudes towards psychological help-seeking (Fisher & Turner, 1970; Komiya et al., 2000; Serim & Cihangir-Cankaya, 2015; Turkum, 2005; Vogel et al., 2007). This may be because females' feel more comfortable in expressing themselves (Kelly, 1998; Komiya et al., 2000) and are able to express their emotions better (Ciarrochi, Deane, Wilson & Rickwood, 2002).

In short, the current study was developed to investigate the pre-service psychological counsellors' psychological help-seeking attitudes. Similar studies can be conducted on individuals in their early adolescence or adults. Moreover, in the undergraduate programme educating psychological counsellors, greater emphasis can be put on psychological help-seeking attitudes. Moreover, preservice psychological counsellors' attitudes towards psychological help-seeking can be enhanced through training.

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