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Turkish High School Students' Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help*

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In this study, it is aimed to present whether or not Turkish high school students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help is effected by gender, whether or not having any prior psychological experience, perceived parental attitude and parents' education level. Research group is composed of total of 301 students, educated at high schools in Burdur. The data have been obtained by SAPPH (Attitude Scale towards Professional Psychological Help) developed by researchers. According to research results, girls those who previously obtained professional psychological help and with democratically perceived parental attitudes have more positive attitudes towards professional psychological help. No difference has been observed between attitudes toward professional psychological help based on parents' education level.

Keywords: high school students, seeking professional psychological help, attitude

Introduction

Seeking professional psychological help is defined as an attempt of an individual to seek professional help towards solving his/her emotional, social, interpersonal and suchlike psychological issues (Atkinson & Gim, 1989). Seeking professional psychological help is a process and can be effected by various factors. Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, and Ciaarochi (2005) have introduced the following model with regard to seeking professional psychological help. According to this model, individuals should be aware of the issue, able to express it, and reach source of help and be willing as:

Awareness and appraisal of problems ⇨ Expression of symptoms and need for support ⇨ Availability of sources of help ⇨ Willingness to seek out and disclose to sources

Seeking for help is a method that individuals refer to for the situations in which they could not overcome. The behaviour of seeking help is based on social relationship and interpersonal skills. Individuals look for suggestion, information, understanding and support from others for the solution of problems. People may demand this help from two sources being formal and informal. Informal sources are friends and parents and

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formal sources are professional occupation staff (Rickwood et al., 2005).

Professional psychological help can be needed in all the development periods. Especially during high school years that coincide with puberty, students face with various problems like adaptation to physical changes and environment, identity seek, coping with social and emotional clashes. High school students most of the time have difficulties in coping up with troubles on their own. Therefore, it may need others' help. Students may require this help from their parents, friends or teachers. This help which can be considered as social support does not eliminate the necessity of expert help. Because high school students' attempts to find solutions for personal, social, educational and professional issues, while struggling to form their identities, require professional psychological help.

Although behavioural and emotional challenges that start as of latest childhood increase during transition from puberty to young adulthood, students do not require this help due to various reasons. These reasons are: their fear of being tagged, propensities to hide themselves, gender differences, education levels, their believes, targets, stress levels, locus of control believes, loneliness perception, levels of displaying psychological symptoms, perceived self-sufficiency, denial as a coping style, unwillingness to discuss personal problems, lack of knowledge about counselling services and some sort of fallacies related to receiving help. Especially the fear of being tagged is shown as one of the obstacles in front of teenagers that hinder them from seeking professional psychological help. In many societies, receiving professional help is prevented, thinking that it would defame family surname (Özbay, 1996). Especially students prone to hiding information concerning their inconveniences had a negative attitude towards seeking professional help and had a weak social support network (Kahn & Williams 2003). Pamela (2000) mentioned that some teenagers were eager and volunteered to receive professional help only when they realized a serious suicide ideation in them. While some head for seeking professional help because of their personal fears, weaknesses and failures, others may easily volunteer to reveal themselves to a psychological consultant with regards to their basic issues (Özbay, 1996).

One of the closest people that high school students may approach to receive professional psychological help is school's psychological counsellors (Stern & Newland, 1994). Psychological counselling and guidance services aim to sooner reintroduce individuals to the society, having an effective and instructive function. The effectiveness of these services depends on individual's, in need of receiving help, readiness and willingness (Türküm, 2004). Özbay (1996) stated that individuals with strong social supports are more willing to benefit from such units providing professional psychological help. However, those deprived of an informal support source more easily tend to professional help sources due to their personal anxieties.

Use of school guidance and psychological counselling services is also affected by students' attitudes towards seeking help. Attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help can also affect help-seeking behaviour in question. Attitudes can not be observed, however, are assumed to lead to some observable behaviours, that is to say, it is a tendency that prepares an individual for behaviour. An individual's emotions against different objects, his/her ideas and information about it and how he/she reacts against it are mainly shaped by his/her attitudes. Therefore, obtaining information about attitudes allows foreseeing individual's future behaviours.

When factors that may affect attitude of seeking professional psychological help are set forth, obstacles that hinder seeking help are revealed. Psychological consultants who are aware of these obstacles endeavour to eliminate these obstacles in front of seeking help as much as possible. In this way, effectiveness of psychological consultancy services at schools can be increased (Kırımlı, 2007).

Attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help have been mostly examined in terms of gender, economical level, cultural differences, whether or not receiving prior help and parental attitudes. In most of the researches, it was determined that girls had more positive attitudes towards professional psychological help compared to boys (Fischer & Turner, 1970; Johnson, 2001; Türküm, 2005; Keklik, 2009; Komiya, Good, & Sherrod, 2000; Leong & Zachar, 1999; Mackenzie, Gekoski, & Knox, 2006; Neighbors & Howard, 1987; Soliman, 1993; Tata & Leong, 1994; Yeh, 2002). It has been found out in related researches that those with an experience of a previous professional psychological help had more positive attitudes compared to those without such experience (Atkinson et al., 1989; Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Komiya & Eells, 2001).

Like in many personality and personal differences, attitudes towards seeking psychological help may be effected by cultural aspects as well as universal factors (Türküm, 2004). Especially the differences between communitarian societies and individualistic societies are very explicit. Traditional values and believes of Asian countries are different from Western countries. Asian people's attitudes towards Western psychological help are not favourable. For example, Chinese and Japanese view that family as more important than the individual and seeking help for psychological problems is considered as causing shame for the family (Braun & Browne, 1998). ZHANG and Dixon (2003) probed attitude towards psychological help and acculturation and found out that acculturation level had an important impact on Asian international students. The results of this study displayed a positive relationship among Asian international students' acculturation level and resistance against tagging, trust in external sources and consultants' interventions.

Setiawan (2006) conducted a study examining factors that facilitate and hinder Indonesian students' receiving help. According to Setiawan, operation of services in which students receive psychological help at schools and being informed of counsellor's confidentiality are the factors that stimulate them to receive psychological help. The most important obstacle in front of seeking psychological help is having family members and friends whom they can receive help from and their believes in solving their problems on their own. Having a communitarian culture is the reason why Asian students prefer to receive help from their families and friends instead of formal sources. Turkey is a country straddling both Eastern and Western cultures. Although Turkey is assumed to have a communitarian culture by many researchers, it is a country where individualistic features especially in urban, high educated and young sectors widely prevail (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2006; Göregenli, 1995). Turkey serves as a cultural bride between east and west. Impacts of both cultures are observed in Turkey. Therefore, it is a wonder that which one is closer to high school students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help in Turkish culture. From this point of view in this study, we sought an answer to the question: Is there a difference in Turkish high school students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help based on gender, parents' education level, perceived parental attitude and whether or not to having prior psychological help experience?

Method

Descriptive research method has been used in this research to reveal whether or not Turkish high school students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological differ according to gender, whether or not to having received prior help, parental attitudes and parents' education level.

Participants

Research group is composed of total of 301 students educated at high schools in Burdur and volunteered to

participate to the research. In the research group, there are 155 (51.5%) girls and 146 (48.5%) boys. The age of the students varies at 14-19, and 153 of the students are (50.8%) between 14-16 and 148 are between (49.2%) 17-19 years old.

Instruments

The data have been obtained by ASPH-S (Scale of Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help for Secondary Students) developed by researchers. The scale is comprised of three dimensions and 15 items which are "belief and confidence in professional psychological help", "closeness towards psychological help" and "disbelief towards counselor and process". Both the first and second dimension includes six items, and the third dimension includes three items.

Explanatory and confirmatory factor analysis has been conducted for construct validity of the scale. Factor loads of 15 items in the three dimensions, following explanatory factor analysis, range from 0.54 to 0.74. Besides, three dimensions are observed to explain approximately 53% of the variance. Items' explaining more than half of the variance is a good rate in terms of social sciences.

Data fit of the model set according to the scale has been examined by CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis). Values related to compliance statistics are found as RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.03, RMR (Root Mean Square Residual) = 0.05 and the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) = 0.04, GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) = 0.95, AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) = 0.93, NNFI (Non-normed Fit Index) =0.98, and CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = 0.99.

Item discrimination indices of ASPH-S have been examined. Group averages of bottom 27% and top 27% have been compared. *T*-values calculated for average item score of groups in bottom 27% and top 27% are meaningful at the level of 0.05. Furthermore, item-total correlation coefficient of scores obtained from items in each dimension and scores from other items in the dimension, in which the item takes place, has been calculated. Total item correlation coefficients of the items in the scale were between 0.41 and 0.57. As the item-total correlation coefficient of items taking place in the scale is over 0.30, all items display a consistency with the whole test.

Coronach alpha coefficient has been calculated for internal consistency of the scale. According to this, Coronach alpha coefficient for the whole scale has been calculated as 0.85, the first dimension 0.81, the second dimension 0.80, and third dimension 0.59.

The scale has been applied to 58 students every two weeks for the stability level of the scale and Pearson correlation coefficient has been found as 0.81. Validity and reliability coefficients related to the scale proved its validity and reliability.

Getting a high score from the whole scale signifies positive attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help; on the other hand, getting a lower score signifies a negative attitude. Items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 14 in the scale are reverse-scored. Minimum 15, maximum 75 scores are taken from the scale.

Data such as gender, whether or not to have received prior help, parental attitudes and parents' education levels are obtained by personal data form.

Procedure

Data acquisition tools have been applied to the students of the working group during course hours, taking their classroom-teachers' permission. Before the application, the students were informed that the data would be used for a scientific study, they did not need to write down their names and they should be sincere in their

replies. Analyses were based on data obtained from 301 students. In data analysis, *t*-test was used for comparing averages of independent sampling groups and ANOVA (one-way analysis of variance), used for comparing more than two group averages, have been used. For post hoc comparisons, LSD (Least Significant Difference) Multiple Comparison Test was used. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all of the statistical tests.

Results and Discussion

Findings with regards to whether or not Turkish high school students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help differ according to gender, whether or not to have received prior help, parental attitudes and parents' education levels are listed below in order.

Students' Attitudes Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Gender

T-test, used to test independent sampling groups' average scores, has been used to analyze whether or not student's attitudes towards professional psychological help differ based on gender. Findings related to the analysis are listed in Table1.

Table 1

Results of T-Test Related to the Students' Attitudes Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Gender

Gender	*N*	$\overline{X}$	S	*df*	*t*	*p*
Girl	155	55.02	9.16			
Boy	146	49.29	10.97	299	4.94	0.00

Note. $^{*}p < 0.05$.

As seen in Table1, there is a meaningful difference between students' attitudes towards professional psychological help, based on gender ($t_{(299)} = 4.94$, $p < 0.05$). While girls' average attitude score is $\overline{X} = 55.02$, boys' average score is $\overline{X} = 49.29$. Girls' average attitude score is higher than boys'. In other words, girls' attitudes towards professional psychological help are more positive compared to boys'. This finding supports findings of Fischer and Turner (1970), Johnson (2001), Türküm (2005), Keklik (2009), Komiya et al. (2000), Leong and Zachar (1999), Mackenzıe, Gekoski, and Knox (2006), Neighbours and Howard (1987), Soliman (1993), Tata and Leong (1994), and Yeh (2002). According to this, it can be said that girls' probabilities to ask for professional help are higher compared to boys (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Phillips & Segal, 1969). This finding can be explained not only by biological gender difference but also gender roles assigned to girls and boys. Social pressures and expectations like boys should be strong whatever happens and overcome problems on their own may lead boy to develop a negative attitude towards professional psychological help.

Students' Attitudes Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Whether or Not to Have Received Prior Psychological Help

T-test, used to test independent sampling groups' average scores, has been used to analyze whether or not students' attitudes towards professional psychological help differ based on whether or not to have received prior psychological help. Findings related to the analysis are listed in Table2.

As seen in Table 2, in terms of their attitudes towards professional psychological help, there is a meaningful difference between students who previously received psychological help and who did not ($t_{(299)} = 2.07$, $p < 0.05$). When the table is examined, it is seen that average attitude score of those who previously received psychological help is $\overline{X} = 55.28$ whereas average attitude score of those who did not receive is $\overline{X}$

= 51.74. This observed difference is in favour of those with prior psychological help experience. In other words, students with prior professional help experience have more positive attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help. This finding shows parallelism with those of Atkinson et al. (1989), Dadfar and Friedlander (1982), Komiya and Eells (2001), who examined attitudes towards psychological help in different cultures based on whether or not to have received prior psychological help. Due to receiving prior professional help and overcoming obstacles in front of professional psychological help, such as being tagged, belief that others can not help themselves or confidentiality issue, students may have had more positive attitudes. It can be said that face-to-face experience may have positively changed attitudes towards professional psychological help.

Table 2

Results of T-test Related to Students' Attitudes Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Whether or Not to Have Received Prior Psychological Help

Receiving prior help	*N*	$\overline{X}$	*S*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Yes	43	55.28	8.82	299	2.07	0.04
No	258	51.74	10.64			

Note. $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Students' Attitudes Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Perceived Parental Attitudes

Whether of not students' attitudes towards professional psychological help differ based on their perceived parental attitudes are tested by one-way ANOVA. Findings related to the analysis are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

ANOVA Result Related to Students' Attitude Scores Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Their Perceived Parental Attitudes

Variance source	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean squares	*F*	*p*
Inter-group	5	1,508.479	301.696	2.807	0.017
Within group	288	30,951.103	107.469		
Total	293				

Note. $^{*}p < 0.05$.

As seen in Table 3, a meaningful difference has been found between students' attitudes towards professional psychological help based on their perceived parental attitudes ($F_{(5\text{-}288)} = 2.807, p < 0.05$). LSD test has been conducted to find the source of difference and results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

LSD Test Results Related to Comparison of Parental Attitude Levels

Groups	$\overline{X}$	Tolerant-loose	Protective	Strict	Indifferent-inconsistent
1. Democratic	53.76	7.76*	1.97	6.08**	1.37
2. Tolerant-loose	46.00		-5.78	-1.67	-6.39
3. Protective	51.78			4.10	-0.61
4. Strict	47.68				-4.71
5. Indifferent-inconsistent	52.39				

Notes. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$.

According to Table 4, statistically a meaningful difference has been observed between average attitude score of those with democratically perceived parental attitudes and average attitude score of those with tolerant and loose perceptions. The average attitude score of those with democratically perceived parental attitudes ($\overline{X}$ = 53.76) is higher than average attitude score of those with tolerant and loose perceptions ($\overline{X}$ = 46). Based on this, those with democratically perceived parental attitudes have more positive attitudes towards professional psychological help.

Likewise, there is a meaningful difference between average attitude score of those with democratically perceived parental attitudes and average attitude score of those with strict perceptions. The average attitude score of those with democratically perceived parental attitudes ($\overline{X}$ = 53.76) is higher than average attitude score of those with strict parental perceptions ($\overline{X}$ = 47.68). Research findings display that children of parents with democratic attitudes have more positive attitudes towards professional psychological help. Parents with democratic attitudes agreed that their children might have different needs and they had different individualistic features. Therefore, when their students had an issue they could not cope up with, it is believed that they would support receiving professional help instead of solving it within the family. However, over tolerant and loose parents even may not be aware that their children can have such a need. Likewise, children of strict parents may not be sharing their problems due to having issues of establishing effective and sincere relations with their parents. This type of parents may not even accept the fact that their children have a problem; they may consider it as a weakness. For these reasons, the attitudes of students of parents with strict behaviours may be more negative towards receiving professional psychological help compared to student of parents with democratic attitudes.

Students' Attitudes Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Their Parents' Education Level

ANOVA was used to test whether students' attitudes towards professional psychological help differ depending on their parents' education levels. Findings related to the analysis are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

ANOVA Result Related to Students' Attitude Scores Towards Professional Psychological Help Based on Their Parents' Education Level

Variance source	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean squares	*F*	*p*
Inter-group	49	33.501	0.684	0.973	0.529
Within group	246	172.820	0.703		
Total	295	206.321			

Note. $p > 0.05$.

As seen in Table 5, no difference related to students' attitudes towards professional psychological help depending on their parents' education levels ($F_{(3\text{-}292)} = 0.429$, $p > 0.05$). Likewise, students' attitudes towards professional psychological help does not differ depending on their parents' education level ($F_{(4\text{-}288)} = 0.448$, $p > 0.05$). It was thought that as the education level of the parent increases, parents may be more informed related to such services, way to reach them and the services provided. Thus, it is believed that parents would more properly inform and courage their children to receive psychological help. However, research findings displayed that parents' education levels do not lead to a difference in students' attitudes concerning professional psychological help. This finding shows a parallelism with those of Goh, Xie, Wahl, Zhong, Lian, and Romano (2007).

Conclusions

In this research, Turkish high school students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help have been researched. When researches conducted in different and similar cultures are examined, mostly findings related to university students have been encountered. However, as high school students are coping up with puberty issues in addition to troubles caused by academic and professional decisions during this period, they extremely need expert's help.

According to research findings, high school girl students' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help are more positive than boys. Another variable in the research is whether or not to have received prior professional psychological help. According to this, attitudes of students with prior professional experience towards professional psychological help are more positive comparing to those without such an experience: According to another result obtained based on research findings, attitudes of students with democratically perceived parental attitudes, towards professional psychological help is more positive than students with tolerant, loose and strict parental perceptions. Students' attitudes towards professional psychological do not differ based on their parents' education levels.

It is recommended to give training to all students particularly boys in order to remove fallacies concerning professional psychological help by counselling and guidance services at high schools. For this help of their peers who have prior professional psychological help experience and positive attitudes may be required. Because research findings display that those with prior help experience have more positive attitudes. Students may be positively affected by their peers with positive attitudes related to their professional psychological help. Therefore, students should be encouraged to receive professional psychological help when they need by their families, colleagues, teachers and friends. Besides, seminars can be conducted at schools to increase awareness of parent related to their own attitudes. It is believed that being aware of students' attitudes towards professional psychological help and factors causing such attitudes will increase the quality of service to be provided to them. Results obtained shows a parallelism with research results conducted in eastern and western cultures. This research has been conducted on students living in the city centre. It is projected to conduct similar studies in rural settlement areas.

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