



Psychological Well-Being in Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Loneliness, Social Support, and Sibling Relationships in Turkey

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Abstract

The current study was conducted to examine the psychological well-being of Turkish emerging adults in terms of loneliness, dimensions of perceived social support, and attitudes towards sibling relationships. The sample consisted of 422 university students from three universities located in Istanbul, Turkey. According to the results of the study, loneliness, attitudes towards sibling relations, and perceived social support from family were significant predictors of psychological well-being. Perceived social support from friends and a significant other were not significant predictors of psychological well-being. All variables explained 40% of the total variance of psychological well-being.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, psychological well-being, loneliness, social support, sibling relationship

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Introduction

Psychological well-being is accepted as an important indicator of positive mental health; it is based on the positive functioning, productivity, and development of the individual (Eraslan Çapan, 2016; Keyes, 2002; Satıcı, Uysal, & Akin, 2013). Well-being is conceptualized in different ways by researchers in the literature. However, all of these theories explaining well-being emphasize that having rewarding and positive social relationships is one of the most important components of mental health and well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011).

Individuals need close relationships in all stages of their lives, including emerging adulthood. During the transition into adulthood, very few young people walk alone on this path (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008, pp. 50-54). Although emerging adulthood is a period characterized by more independence and self-focus, there are various studies in the literature investigating the relationship between individuals' relationships with their family and friends and their mental health in this critical period (e.g., Arnett, 1998; Bernardon, 2012; Demir, 2008; Finan, 2016; Kenny & Şirin, 2006; Miething et al., 2016; O'Connor et al., 2011; Ponti & Smorti, 2018). Studies have shown that emerging adults who have satisfying and supportive relationships with family members, friends, and romantic partners have higher self-esteem and adaptation to university life. Also, these individuals experience less loneliness (Bagwell et al., 2005; Shulman, Kalnitzki, & Shahr, 2009; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Emerging adults may feel lonely for various reasons such as changing cities due to university, being away from family and friends, and not being able to adapt to a new social environment (Bıyık, 2004; Çeçen, 2007; Duy, 2003). Loneliness is a painful experience, and it harms individuals' happiness and well-being (Çetin Dağlı & Gündüz, 2017; Duru, 2005). Loneliness felt during this period is related to depression (Wei et al., 2005), low self-esteem (Sarıçam, 2011), automatic thoughts (Oruç, 2013), low psychological resilience (Kılıç, 2014), alienation (Duru, 1995), and problematic alcohol use (Derdioyok, 2015).

With the change brought about by emerging adulthood, social support resources help individuals to deal effectively with the challenges they face and to adapt to their new life (Baron, Cutrona, Hicklin, Russel, & Lubaroff, 1990; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cohen, 2004). Social support is an important mechanism in maintaining the physical and mental well-being of individuals (Thoits, 1985, p. 63). Studies have revealed that there is a negative relationship between social support, depression, and anxiety levels in emerging adulthood (Gençöz & Özlale, 2004; Sarason, Saranson, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987; Yavuzer, Albayrak, & Keldal, 2018). Also, dimensions of perceived social support are significantly related to emerging adults' well-being (Ateş, 2016; Malkoç & Yalçın, 2015; Yalçın, 2011; Ullah, 2017; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Wetzel, 2007).

Family relations are related to the well-being of individuals throughout their lives. This includes the emerging adulthood period. During this period, perceived social support from the family shows a positive correlation with subjective well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction, but negatively correlates with depression (Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi, & Stein, 2013; Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Guan & Fuligni, 2016; Sheets & Mohr, 2009; Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001). However, when studies about emerging adults' family relationships are examined, it was found that literature on sibling relationships at emerging adulthood is scarce. Sibling relationships are the longest relationships individuals maintain throughout their lives and play a key and central role in family dynamics (Cicirelli, 1995). Compared to other

bonds established through marriage or parenthood, sibling bonds often last much longer and have a tremendous impact on individuals' lives (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro 2005; Dunn, 2014, p. 69; Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005). In many ways, the relationship between siblings is unique and it is one of the biggest factors that play a role in one's development (Dew, Llewellyn, & Balandin, 2004; Jenkins & Dunn, 2009). Individuals see their siblings as their primary source of emotional and physical support throughout their lives (Cicirelli, 1995; Gözü, 2016; White & Riedmann, 1992). Siblings learn many social skills from each other through their interaction. They also support and guide each other (Yavuzer, 2016, p. 166).

Cicirelli (1995, p. 218) points out that the biggest gap in sibling relationships is in the examination of relationships in emerging adulthood. Even though emerging adults spend less time with their siblings compared to childhood or adolescence; with emerging adulthood siblings maintain their relationship voluntarily. Their relationship becomes warmer and more peaceful (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Conger & Little, 2010; Myers & Bryant, 2008; Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). When social support from family and friends is insufficient, siblings play a compensatory role (Milevsky, 2005). Positive sibling relationships during this period was found to be associated with lower levels of substance use (Brook, Brook, & Whiteman, 1999), loneliness, and depression (Campione-Barr, Lindell, Giron, Killoren, & Greer, 2015; Milevsky, 2005).

The relationship between social relationships and psychological well-being is complex (Sherman, Lansford, & Volling, 2006). According to Sullivan, individuals strongly need social relationships, and it is extremely difficult to protect mental health when an individual is separated from others for a long time (Yazgan İnanç & Yerlikaya, 2013, p. 136). In his opinion, since others are the source of an individuals' mental problems, only others can heal them (Geçtan, 1995, p. 272). According to Maslow, people who are psychologically healthy have deep and rewarding friendships even in small numbers (Burger, 2016, p. 439). Fromm states that, establishing affectionate bonds and building a relationship based on sharing and interdependence with the others without destroying one's individuality is an indicator of psychological health (Fromm, 2011). These explanations indicate the significance of social relationships on individuals' well-being. Studies dealing with the psychological well-being of emerging adults from an interpersonal perspective are increasing (Feeney & Collins, 2014; Wang, Chua, & Stefanone, 2015). Especially the relationship between individuals' social support sources and well-being has been investigated extensively (Ateş, 2016; Malkoç & Yalçın, 2015; Yalçın, 2011; Ullah, 2017; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008; Wetzel, 2007). However, although it is closely related to the social support (Arkar, Sarı, & Fidaner, 2004; Demir, 1990; Duru, 2005; Lee & Goldstein, 2016; Yılmaz, Yılmaz, & Karaca, 2008) and widely experienced by the nature of the emerging adulthood period, it has been noticed that there are very few studies examining the relationship between loneliness and well-being in emerging adulthood (Bozorgpour & Salimi, 2012; Doman & Le Roux, 2012; Hasnain, 2012). Also, research on the role of sibling relationships in emerging adults' well-being is scarce likewise loneliness (Colleen, 2015; Marotta, 2015).

The experiences emerging adults face during transitioning to adulthood are sensitive to personal and social contexts. The meaning of being an adult differs across cultures. In many culture and society, the onset of adulthood is defined by transitions such as completing higher education, starting a full-time job, getting married, and becoming a parent (Arnett, 2003). Timings of these transitions are mainly influenced by the social effects (Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer, & Erickson, 2002). According to the limited number of studies examined emerging

adulthood in Turkey, individuals ages between 19-26 who are educated and living in urban areas are showing characteristics of emerging adulthood (Atak & Çok, 2010). However, emerging adulthood is a relatively new concept for Turkey and the topic has not been a subject of comprehensive research (Atak, Tatlı, Çokomay, Büyükpabuşcu, & Çok, 2016).

Given this evidence, the purpose of this study is to understand the relative importance of social variables in predicting Turkish emerging adults' psychological well-being. Based on this purpose, the following research questions are examined: (1) Are loneliness, attitudes towards sibling relationships, and perceived social support from family, friends, and a significant other associated with psychological well-being? (2) What is the relative influence of loneliness, attitudes towards sibling relationships, and perceived social support from family, friends, and a significant other on psychological well-being of Turkish emerging adults?

Method

Participants

Participants were selected from three universities in Istanbul. Students with at least one sibling were included in the study. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in the Table 1.

Measures

A demographic information form was prepared by the researchers and consisted of 13 questions. Questions were aimed to gather information about age, gender, birth order, and some other demographic variables. Also, questions about participants' siblings were included.

A Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener et al., 2010) was used to measure the psychological well-being levels of participants. The 7-point Likert-type scale contains eight items and provides an overall score about participants' positive functioning. Higher scores from the scale indicates higher psychological well-being level. FS was adapted to Turkish by Telef (2013). Results of confirmatory factor analysis showed acceptable fit indexes ($\chi^2/df=4.645$, RMSEA=0.008, SRMR=0.04, GFI=0.96, NFI=0.94, RFI=0.92, CFI=0.95, & IFI=0.95). The reliability study of the scale was performed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and the test-retest method. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found 0.80. The results of test-retest method showed a positive and significant relation between the first and second applications of the scale ($r=0.86$, $p<0.01$) (Telef, 2013). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found as 0.86.

A Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) was used to measure participants' perceived social support. The 7-point Likert-type scale consists of 12 items and gathers information about different social support resources through three subscales as a family, a friend and a significant other. Higher scores on the scale indicates higher perceived social support. The Turkish adaptation studies of the scale were first performed by Eker and Arkar in 1995. In 2001, Eker et al. developed the revised form of the MSPSS. As a result of the factor analysis performed for the construct validity of

the scale, it was seen that the scale consists of 3 factors as expected and explains 75% of the total variance. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale were found 0.85 for the family subscale, 0.88 for the friend subscale, 0.92 for the significant other subscale, and 0.89 for the total scale. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale were found 0.83 for the family subscale, 0.89 for the friend subscale, 0.95 for the significant other subscale, and 0.88 for the total scale (Eker et al., 2001).

The Short Form of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8; Hays & DiMatteo, 1987) was used to measure loneliness levels of participants. The 4-point Likert-type scale consists of eight items. Higher scores on the scale indicates higher level of loneliness experienced by individuals. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Doğan, Çötök and Tekin (2011). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were applied to test the construct validity of the scale. According to the results of the exploratory factor analysis, the scale consists of one dimension and explains 36.69% of the total variance. Results of confirmatory factor analysis showed acceptable fit indexes ($\chi^2=56.03$, $df=18$, $\chi^2/df=3.11$, GFI=0.97, NFI=0.92, CFI=0.94, IFI=0.94, AGFI=0.94, RMSEA=0.066). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.72 (Doğan et al., 2011). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.79.

The Lifespan Sibling Relationships Scale (LSRS; Riggio, 2000) was used to examine individuals' attitudes towards their sibling relationships. The 5-point Likert-type scale contains 48 items, and six subscales consist of eight items for each subscale (i.e., adult affect, adult behavior, adult cognition, child affect, child behavior and child cognition). Higher scores indicate that individuals' evaluations of their relationships with their siblings are positive. Adaptation studies of LSRS into Turkish in the sample of university students were carried out by Öz Soysal, Yurdabakan, Baş and Aysan (2016). After a confirmatory factor analysis to test the construct validity of the scale, the fit index values obtained from LSRS were calculated as: $\chi^2/df=3.23$, NFI=0.96, NNFI=0.97, SRMR=0.06, CFI=0.97, RMSEA=0.07. The test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.95. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.90 for the adult affect subscale, 0.87 for the adult behavior subscale, 0.90 for the adult cognition subscale, 0.83 for the child affect subscale, 0.80 for the child behavior subscale, 0.89 for the child cognition subscale and it was calculated as 0.96 for the total scale (Öz Sosyal et al., 2016). In present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.86 for the adult affect subscale, 0.89 for the adult behavior subscale, 0.90 for the adult cognition subscale, 0.83 for the child affect subscale, 0.84 for the child behavior subscale, 0.89 for the child cognition subscale and it was calculated as 0.96 for the total scale.

Procedure

The data were collected by the researchers from three different universities' various faculties located in İstanbul, Turkey. The necessary permissions were obtained from the faculty members at universities. Researchers distributed the informed consent forms and questionnaires at the start of a lecture. The students were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. They were also told to give honest responses. It took approximately 20 minutes for participants to complete the survey.

Analysis

The SPSS (Statistical Packet for Social Sciences) was used for statistical analysis in the study. Before conducting the analysis, assumptions of regression analysis were tested. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), to perform multiple linear regression analysis, the multivariate normal distribution condition should be provided, there should be a linear relationship between the dependent variable and the predictor variables, and there should be no multicollinearity problem between the independent variables. Mahalanobis distance values and skewness-kurtosis coefficients of variables indicated that multivariate normality was met for this study. Scatter diagrams of variables described a linear relationship. Finally, VIF values, CI values and correlations between variables showed no multicollinearity problem between independent variables. Table 2 contains descriptive statistics and kurtosis-skewness coefficients of the variables used in the study.

Results

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to test the relationships between psychological well-being and loneliness, perceived social support, and sibling relationships (Table 3). Hierarchical regression analysis was performed to reveal the role of loneliness, dimensions of social support and sibling relationships in explaining emerging adults' psychological well-being. The results are presented in Table 4.

Analysis was carried out in three blocks. Sibling relationships variable was added to first block then, dimensions of social support were added to second block. Loneliness was added to third block. Results of analysis showed that, attitudes toward sibling relationships, perceived social support, and loneliness as predictors appear to explain approximately 40% of the total variance of emerging adults' scores for psychological well-being ($R=0.63$, $R^2=0.40$, $p<0.05$). According to the standardized regression coefficients (β), the predictor variables' relative order of importance on the psychological well-being is loneliness, attitude towards sibling relationships, perceived social support from family, a significant other, and a friend. According to the t -test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficients, loneliness, attitude towards sibling relationships and perceived social support from the family were significant predictors on psychological well-being. It has been observed that perceived social support from a friend and a special person are not significant predictors.

Discussion

Results of this study revealed that loneliness, attitude towards sibling relationships, and perceived social support from the family are significant predictors of psychological well-being in emerging adulthood, while perceived social support from a friend and a significant other yielded no significant results. Loneliness appeared to be the strongest and negative predictor

of psychological well-being. There are studies in the literature that reveal similar results with this finding (Bozorgpour & Salimi, 2012; Hasnain, 2012). Individuals suffering from loneliness do not have the satisfactory social relationships they desire. As a social being we live in a social world and need satisfying relationships with other people. Social relations are considered as an essential dimension in the psychological well-being theories (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). Also, personality theorists emphasize the importance of having satisfactory social relationships in their definitions regarding psychologically healthy individuals. For example, according to Maslow, psychologically healthy individuals have deep and rewarding relations with their friends (Burger, 2016, p. 439). According to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, emerging adults are in the conflict between isolation and establishing the intimacy stage. The way individuals overcome this conflict directly affects their psychological health. Developing close relationships during this stage is vital for individuals (Burger, 2016, p. 164).

The results of the study showed that attitudes toward sibling relationships were a significant and positive predictor of well-being. The literature on sibling relationships in emerging adulthood is scarce, studies on the effects of positive sibling relationships on emerging adults' mental health are also limited. Milevsky's (2005) research showed that sibling support was associated with lower loneliness and depression and with higher self-esteem and life satisfaction during emerging adulthood. Marotta's (2015) study which examined the effect of the quality of sibling relationships on the psychological well-being of adults, showed that warmth in sibling relationships was a significant predictor of positive affect and self-esteem. However, Colleen's (2015) study which examined the effects of sibling support and relationship quality on the psychological well-being of individuals, revealed that the quality of relationship with siblings and support received from siblings are not significant predictors of psychological well-being. In the present study, the second variable that positively predicts the well-being of emerging adults was found as attitudes towards sibling relationships. This result is in line with the results of previous studies highlighting that positive sibling relationships, characterized by warmth, affection, and emotional and instrumental support, are linked to an individual's well-being (Ponti & Smorti, 2018; Waite et al., 2011). Arnett (2001) emphasizes that, with emerging adulthood, individuals' interests about family decreases while their interest in friends and romantic partner increases. Therefore, according to Myers and Bryant (2008), sibling relationships place lower than friends and romantic partners in the priority of individuals. However, Scharf and colleagues (2005) found that even though emerging adults spend less time with their siblings than adolescents, they report more warmth toward their siblings. Results of this study showed that even though siblings do not involve joint activities as much as they did in adolescence, with emerging adulthood their emotional closeness increase (Scharf et al., 2005).

Results of the present study showed that attitude towards sibling relationships and perceived social support from the family were significant predictors on psychological well-being but perceived social support from a friend and a significant other are not significant predictors. Even though it was found that only perceived social support from the family was a significant predictor of the psychological well-being of emerging adults, when the dimensions of perceived social support were included in the hierarchical regression analysis, it was seen that these variables contributed 12% to the variance in psychological well-being. In addition, moderate correlations were found between dimensions of perceived social support and psychological well-being scores. The effect of social support on individuals' positive mental

health has been emphasized by various researchers (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Baron et al., 1990). Results of the studies examining the well-being of university students shows that, different combinations of social support resources predict well-being of emerging adults (Ateş, 2016; Malkoç & Yalçın, 2015; Saygın, 2008; Ullah, 2017; Wang & Castañeda-Sound, 2008; Wetzel, 2007; Yalçın, 2011). However, perceived social support from the family is a significant predictor in all these combinations.

In this study, majority of the participants are first and second-year university students. First and second-year university students in Turkey might be more dependent on family members. Several research conducted with Turkish university students showed that, students who reside with their family had less psychological symptom and anxiety scores than students who reside away from their family (Amado, 2005; Çam Çelikel & Erkorkmaz, 2008; Özdemir, 2013). Findings obtained from present research should be examined in consideration of Turkish culture and family structure. In Turkey individuals do not fully separate from their root family after age of 18. Strong emotional bonds between family members remain even after moving to another city for higher education and the sibling bond is one of the most valued family ties in Turkish culture (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996, 2019). For this reason, it can be said that compared to friends and romantic partners, siblings and other family members play a more important role in the psychological well-being of participants. The present study is appeared to be the first study conducted in Turkish culture investigating emerging adults' sibling relationships in well-being. Therefore, there is not sufficient data to interpret these results comparatively in Turkey.

Limitations and Recommendations

The current research has several limitations. Firstly, it has limitations that can be listed for a quantitative research design. Secondly, this study was conducted with the data obtained from university students. However, emerging adulthood is a period including all individuals ages between 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2001). Studies conducted with different participant groups are needed to understand more comprehensively the sources of the well-being in emerging adulthood.

In the current study, individuals' attitudes towards sibling relationships as a predictor of their psychological well-being were examined. There is a large gap in the literature regarding lifelong sibling relationships. For this reason, studies can be conducted on the course of sibling relationships in different developmental stages and their effect on individuals. The positive effects of sibling relationships on individuals were examined in the study. However, as the other side of the coin, research can be conducted on issues such as negative sibling relationships and sibling abuse, which are characterized by conflict and competition. Thus, it may be possible to examine all aspects of this relationship. Studies that provide more in-depth information on this subject can be put forward with qualitative or mixed-method research. The data obtained from the present study might contribute to emerging adulthood literature in Turkey and to the studies that examine emerging adulthood in the international context. Also, the results of this study might be useful for the institutions (e.g., psychological counseling and guidance centers of universities) that work with emerging adults.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the role of social variables in Turkish emerging adults' well-being. Results of the study showed that, loneliness, attitude towards sibling relationships, and perceived social support from the family were significant predictors of Turkish emerging adults' psychological well-being. However, perceived social support from a friend and a significant other were not significant predictors.

Note: This study was based on Ezgi Alabucak Cinalioğlu's (2019) master's thesis entitled "Psychological well-being in emerging adulthood: The role of loneliness, social support, sibling relationships and some demographic variables" under Esra İşmen Gazioğlu's supervision at İstanbul University-Cerrahpaşa, İstanbul, Turkey. Findings of the first author's thesis was verbally presented at "3rd Eurasian Congress on Positive Psychology" held in İstanbul, Turkey (May, 2019) and published in the book of abstracts.

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Table 1:**Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Socio-demographic Characteristics	N (422)	%
Gender		
Male	136	32.2
Female	286	67.8
Age		
18 and younger	36	8.5
19-20	164	38.9
21-22	164	38.9
23 and older	58	13.7
Grade		
1 st grade	113	26.8
2 nd grade	170	40.3
3 rd grade	89	21.1
4 th grade	50	11.8

Table 2:**Descriptive Statistics and Skewness-Kurtosis Coefficients of Variables**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Psychological Well-Being	422	44.76	7.47	-0.763	0.680
Loneliness	422	12.25	3.54	0.933	0.402
MSPSS - Family	422	23.80	4.73	-1.245	1.043
MSPSS - Friends	422	22.90	5.13	-1.104	0.752
MSPSS - Significant other	422	18.85	8.71	-0.462	-1.266
Sibling Relationships	422	179.61	32.38	-0.317	0.386

Table 3:**Correlations Among Variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Psychological Well-Being	1					
2. Loneliness	-0.56*	1				
3. MSPSS - Family	0.41*	-0.34*	1			
4. MSPSS - Friends	0.36*	-0.50*	0.45*	1		
5. MSPSS - Significant other	0.33*	0-.37*	0.37*	0.31*	1	
6. Sibling Relationships	0.40*	-0.30*	0.47*	0.18*	0.29*	1

N=422, * $p < 0.01$

Table 4:**Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results to Predicting Psychological Well-Being**

Model	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE_β</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	95% C. I.	
							Lower	Upper
1	Constant	28.07	1.88		0.16	0.16		
	Sibling Relationships	0.09	0.01	0.4			0.073	0.113
2	Constant	19.551	2.12		0.28	0.12		
	Sibling Relationships	0.06	0.01	0.26			0.038	0.081
	Family	0.224	0.08	0.14			0.061	0.388
	Friend	0.3	0.07	0.21			0.164	0.435
	Significant Other	0.12	0.04	0.14			0.042	0.196
3	Constant	40.33	3.00		0.40	0.12		
	Sibling Relationships	0.04	0.01	0.19			0.024	0.064
	Family	0.22	0.08	0.14			0.067	0.366
	Friend	0.06	0.07	0.04			-0.080	0.190
	Significant Other	0.05	0.04	0.06			-0.024	0.121
	Loneliness	-0.89	0.1	-0.42			-1.077	-0.694