Perceived social support and self-esteem in adolescence

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Abstract

This study investigates the relation between perceived social support levels and self-esteem levels of adolescents. It is a descriptive study. Participants were 257 adolescents from different high schools from Burdur, in Turkey. Data were collected by Social Support Appraisals Scale For Children and Adolescents with Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory Short Form. Results showed that according to gender, there is a statistically significant difference on the perceived peer and teacher support levels however there is no difference on self-esteem levels. A statistically significant positive relation between perceived social support levels and self-esteem levels of adolescents was found.

Keywords: adolescence, social support, self-esteem, gender

1. Introduction

By middle to late adolescence, teenagers place more emphasis on social virtues, such as being friendly, considerate, kind and cooperative. Adolescents are very preoccupied with being liked and viewed positively by others, personal and moral values appear as key themes in their self concepts (Berk, 1993). The evaluative side of self-concept is self-esteem, one of the important measures of a healthy personality. Through being accorded respect and successful life experiences one develops a good measure of self esteem, preparing young person for constructing an identity. Theoretical work until Cooley (1902) has emphasized the importance of social acceptance as one of the determinants of self-concept (Hoffman, et al., 1988), indeed establishing productive and congenial relationship with others as well as group membership and identification are the other measures of a healthy personality (Berk, 1993).

Social support can be emotional, instrumental, financial or informational (Reevey & Maslach, 2001) that people who are involved in supportive social relationships experience benefits in terms of their health, morale, and coping. Conversely, low levels of social support have been repeatedly linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes (Cohen et al., 2000). The effects of support and stress among adolescents has been limited and inconsistent. Gad and Johnson (1980) found no interaction between these factors, in contrast, Greenberg et al. (1983) reported an interaction involving support from parents: increasing support was associated with higher esteem only among those adolescents suffering from high levels of life stress. These inconsistencies suggest the potential benefit of further study in this area.

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1.1. Purpose

Researches indicate the debilitating effect of stressful transitions and crises may have an equally deleterious impact in adolescent life and well-being (Johnson, 1982; Swearingen & Cohen, 1985b) at the last decade. As a common claim in this stress literature, it was indicated that social support becomes particularly critical when the individual feels threatened or overwhelmed. Indeed, Norris and Murrell (1984) note no less than five differing causal models show that social support effects are interrelated with the level of stress. Having access to social support can mediate the negative effects of perceived stress (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007). Therefore the impact of social support on adolescent self-esteem is an important research area (Kessler et al., 1985) and researches indicated that support from mother, father or friends is correlated with adolescent self-esteem and well-being (Greenberg et al., 1983; Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984). According to all of the above, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between social support and self-esteem in adolescents in high schools.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 163 female (% 63.4) and 94 male (% 36.6) 257 adolescents from different high schools from Burdur, in Turkey. In schools, participants are chosen randomly from different levels (9th, 10th and 11th, 12th grade) and via using “random numbers table”, students from different levels were determined.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Social Support Appraisals Scale For Children and Adolescents

This scale was developed by Dubow ve Ullman in 1989 to assess the perceptions of children about the social support they receive from their parents, peers and teachers and standardized to Turkish population by Gökler (2007). SSASFCA consists of 41 items on a scale in which the items are rated through 1–5 from never to always. The internal consistency analyzed by Cronbach Alpha value .93. According to test-retest reliability studies, it was found .49 (p< 0.01); split-half (Guttman) was found .82.

2.2.2. Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory Short Form

This scale was developed by Coopersmith in 1967 to assess the general self esteem level according to peer relations, in relation with parents, school life and personal properties and standardized to Turkish population by Pişkin (1996). In this study the short form of the scale with 25 items was used. The increase in the score of the scale means a higher self-esteem. The internal consistency reliability values are ranging from .75 to .83. According to test-retest studies, values are ranging from .70 to .80.

2.3. Procedure

The instruments were administered in classrooms by the researchers. The students were told about the purpose of the research that the information they provided would be secured and they were free to participate into the research. All of the students accepted to participate in the study. It takes approximately 25 to 30 minutes to complete the measures.

2.4. Data analysis

Data were analysed by descriptive statistics, correlational analyse and t-test. And statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 15.0. An alpha level of .01 was used for all statistical analysis.
3. Results

First of all, the perceived social support levels and self-esteem levels of the adolescents were investigated according to gender by t-test and results are given on Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t- test</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support from friends</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>77.54</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>74.24</td>
<td>10.91</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support from family</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>49.39</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>49.37</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>-.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support from teacher</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>36.68</td>
<td>7.36</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>33.69</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>15.90</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.  **p < .01.

As seen on Table 1, there is a statistically significant difference on the levels of perceived social support from friends and teachers according to gender that means of the girls are higher than the boys. The levels of perceived support from parents don’t differ. Besides, there is no statistically significant difference on the self-esteem levels of the adolescents according to gender.

The relation between the perceived social support levels and the self-esteem levels is analyzed by Pearson Moment Correlation, results are given on Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived support from friends</th>
<th>Perceived support from family</th>
<th>Perceived support from teachers</th>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support from friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.449**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support from family</td>
<td>.480**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support from teachers</td>
<td>.516**</td>
<td>.516**</td>
<td>.435**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>.404**</td>
<td>.507**</td>
<td>.435**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

As seen on Table 1, it was found that there is a statistically significant positive relation between self-esteem levels of the adolescents with perceived social support levels from friends \( r = .404, p < .01 \), with perceived social support levels from family \( r = .507, p < .01 \) with perceived social support levels from teachers \( r = .435 p < .01 \).

4. Discussion

Findings indicate that perceived social support of girls from friends and teachers are higher than the boys in parallel with the researches that takes place in Turkish culture besides the relevant literature. According to Ozen (1998), girls perceive more emotional support; more environmental support (Sirvanli, 1998) and more social support than boys (Zimet et al., 1988; Cauce et al., 1992; Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000; Johnson & Kirk, 2000). In spite of the finding which indicates that the levels of perceived support from parents don’t differ according to gender, Basturk (2002) indicates that girls perceive more social support from friends and family than boys; Holler & Hurrelmann (1990) indicate a difference between boys and girls in considering the importance of the “resources of social support” in relation with their general well being and welfare. Also, it was found that girls give more psychosomatic reactions to the misunderstandings or the conflicts that takes place within the family than boys. Some past studies (Burke & Weir, 1978) have reported that girls receive greater support from friends than do boys but less support from fathers. Yet a review suggests that these past sex differences have centered primarily on issues of intimacy and mutuality Considering these gender differences mentioned above, both in the realm of emotional
problems and social relations, it have to be accepted that there is a difference on the association between social support and psychological well being according to gender. Sex variations have also been found to arise in the impact of differing support sources on varying facets of mental health (Burke & Weir, 1979; Siddique & D'Arcy, 1984).

According to this study, although there is no statistically significant difference on the self esteem levels of the adolescents according to gender, there is a statistically significant positive relation between self esteem levels of the adolescents with the levels of all of the perceived social support agents. Therefore it can be said that independently from gender, when social support levels of adolescents increases, their self-esteem levels increases accordingly. This result is parallel with the results indicating that higher levels of self-esteem and more peer support results in better academic and social adjustment, besides, who more frequently utilized student support services and counseling reported higher social adjustment (Grant-Vallone et. al., 2004). Congruently, Smokowski, Rose & Bacallao (2010) revealed familialism as a cultural asset associated with fewer internalizing symptoms and higher self esteem of adolescents. Internalizing symptoms were also minimized by the adolescent’s involvement in the US culture whereas bicultural adolescents with high culture-of-origin involvement reported higher self-esteem.

Parent–adolescent conflict is seen as a strong risk factor for lower self-esteem. In recent literature parental support and cooperation (Decovic & Meeus, 1997), emotional warmth from parents (Veenstra et al. 2006) and relations with parents (Hay & Ashman, 2003) seemed to be the protective factor from the development of dysfunctional self during adolescence.; perceived dysfunctional parental rearing is associated with a lower self-concept (Nishikawa, Sundbom &Haaggloë, 2010).

Parents and peers are both important providers of social support. Adolescents obtain different provisions, or aspects of social support, from different types of relationships and when one relationship is lacking in social provisions, other relationships become increasingly important provision resources (Gaertner, Fite & Colder, 2010). Likewise, friendship quality has been found to buffer the influence of parenting behavior on adolescent problem behavior (Lansford et al. 2003) and thus maintain their self-esteem levels.

As Wrightsman in 1972 and previous theorists have posited, currently it can also be postulated that low self-esteem is related to personal disjunctions; that is, a person who believes that he will not be able to get what he values highly is very likely to have some derogatory views of his own competence and attractiveness. Congruently, self perception of adolescents and how they perceive other persons effects their perception of social support and on the contrary the social support they perceive and its quality from the significant persons in their lives effects their self perception.

References


