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# Empathy and self-efficacy, and resiliency: an exploratory study of counseling students in Turkey

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the degree of empathy, self-efficacy, and resiliency among first grade counseling students. Participants consisted of 132 students enrolled in guidance and psychological counseling programs at three different universities in Turkey. The participants completed the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, Self-Efficacy Scale, Resiliency Scale and Information Sheet. Results show that most of the participants preferred the department of psychological counselling and guidance in the first row in the university entrance exam. Students' career preferences differentiated significantly according to gender.

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*Keywords:* Counseling students; empathy; resiliency; self-efficacy.

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## 1. Introduction

Counselors work in a variety of settings such as schools, colleges, community agencies, private practices and hospitals. On the other hand, most of the counselors work in school settings in Turkey. School counselors are specialists in human behavior who provide assistance to students through four primary interventions: a) counseling (individual and group), b) large group guidance, c) consultation, d) coordination (Thompson, 2002). School counselors confront with a variety of problems such as vocational issues, family-friend relationships, mood disturbances and addictions etc. in school settings. And recent studies show that prevalence of substance use and general deviant behaviors are increasing. So the need for component school counsellors is rising.

The component school counselors are able to demonstrate appropriate interpersonal skills (e.g. empathy, listening), possess a strong self-efficacy and leadership skills in order to create appropriately challenging therapeutic environments. At the same time it should be noted that these skills are not yet enough for being component counselors. Other skills for being component counselors are the capacity to accept others, the ability to understand and assessing the client's problems, personal soundness, sensitivity to social world, and being open to new knowledge (Corey, 2009; McLeod, 2003). On the other hand, in the O\*NET (2009) it is stated that the following skills are expected to be a counsellor: active listening, social perceptiveness, time management, and have the abilities such as oral expression, problem sensitivity and speech clarity. In Turkey, after high school, students take

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the university entrance examination. And in students' career choice, academic performance is more prominent than their abilities, skills and interests.

### 1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the degree of empathy, self-efficacy, and resiliency which are accepted as the key skills being counselors among first grade counseling students.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 132 first grade trainee counselors (103 girls, 32 boys), aged from 17 to 21 years old ( $M=18.31$ ,  $sd=.70$ ), from three universities participated in this study.

### 2.2. Instruments

**2.2.1. Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI):** IRI which is developed by Davis (1980) is a self report questionnaire consisting of four 7-item subscales, including fantasy, perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress. Participants are requested to indicate the degree to which each item describes them using a 5 point Likert type scale, which varied from 0 (does not describe me well) to 4 (describes me very well). A higher score reflects a higher functioning.

IRI was translated into Turkish by Engeler & Yargıç (2007). Turkish form of IRI consisted of 28 items and four subscales. Internal consistency coefficients for subscales ranged from .60 to .77. In addition, test re-test correlation of subscales ranged from .66 to .80.

**2.2.2. The Self-Efficacy Scale (SES):** SES, which is developed by Aysan (2002), is a self-report questionnaire and consisted of 7-items. This scale is designed to assess self beliefs to cope with a variety difficult demands in life. And higher scores reflect higher self-efficacy.

**2.2.3. The Resiliency Scale (RS):** This scale is designed to assess the ability to successfully cope with change or misfortune. RS consists of 50 items and 8 factors (personal power, initiative, positive Outlook, relationships, foresighted, purpose in life, leadership, and investigative). Internal consistency of subscales ranged from .78 to .87 (Gürkan, 2006).

**2.2.4. Information Sheet:** A brief questionnaire was prepared for this study which asked students to supply their gender, age, reasons for preference and preference order of this career, and characteristics of this department.

### 2.2. 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.

**2.3. Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics, chi-square, and t-test were used to examine the data regarding sample. And statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 15.0. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical analysis.

**3. Results**

**3.1. Career Preferences**

Overall, 68.9% of the participants (n=91) who responded to the information sheet indicated that department of psychological counselling and guidance was their first preference in university entrance exam. Moreover, 23.5% of them stated that this department was their second – fifth preference and only 7.6% of them stated this department was their sixth or later preference.

Participants were also asked to explain orderly preference reasons for this department. Answers are categorized as factors related to occupation, factors related to personality, and factors related to environment. Results are given in Table 1. Also Chi-square test for the differences between girls and boys are given in this table.

Table 1. Factors related to career preference according to gender

		Total n (%)	Girls (n= n (%))	Boys (n= n (%))	Chi-Square
First reason	Factors related to personality	98 (74.2)	82(79.6)	16(55.2)	9.67*
	My ideal				
	I like helping people				
	I want to develop my personality				
	I like talking to people				
	Factors related to occupation	24 (18.2)	14 (13.6)	10 (34.5)	
	Salary				
	Business opportunity				
	Factors related to environment	4 (3)	2 (1.9)	2 (6.9)	
	Effects of my parents				
Effects of my teachers					
Second reason	Other factors	4 (3)	3 (2.9)	1(3.4)	3.77
	My academic achievement not enough				
	other departments that I want				
	Factors related to personality	82 (62.1)	62 (60.2)	20 (69)	
	I like human psychology				
	I like talking to people				
	I like helping people				
	Factors related to occupation	43 (32.6)	36 (35)	7 (24.1)	
	Popular job				
	Salary				
Business opportunity					
Factors related to environment	3 (2.3)	3 (2.9)	-		
My parents' expectations					
Effect of environment					
Other factors	4 (3)	2 (1.9)	2 (6.9)		
Results of my universty entrance exam					

\* p<.05

As seen in Table 1, participants' first reason in their career preferences was differentiated according to gender (chi-square=9.67, p<.05). As the first reason in their career preferences girls indicated the personality factors as the while boys indicated occupational factors.

### 3.2. Preliminary Analyses

Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each IRI domain, RS domain and SES (see Table 2).

Table 2. Means and SD for scores on IRI, SES and RS

Scales	Students		Score Range
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
IRI			
Fantasy	21.81	4.76	7-35
Perspective Taking	24.17	4.23	7-35
Empathic Concern	23.40	6.57	7-35
Personal Distress	18.67	5.25	7-35
SES	18.12	2.63	7-21
RS			
Personal Power	65.68	11.16	18-90
Initiative	34.42	4.71	9-45
Positive Outlook	21.22	3.25	5-25
Relationships	16.14	3.43	4-20
Foresighted	11.22	2.05	3-15
Purpose in life	16.76	2.59	4-20
Leadership	18.69	3.46	5-25
Investigative	8.55	4.64	2-10

As seen in Table 2, it was determined that counseling students' the mean scores of the subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index were fantasy  $M=21.82$  ( $SD=4.76$ ), perspective taking,  $M=24.17$  ( $SD=4.23$ ), empathic concern,  $M=23.40$  ( $SD=6.57$ ) and personal distress,  $M=18.67$  ( $SD=5.25$ ). The mean scores of the Students' Self-Efficacy Scale was  $M=18.12$  ( $SD=2.63$ ). The mean scores of the subscales of the Resiliency scale were personal power,  $M=65.68$  ( $SD=11.16$ ), initiative,  $M=34.42$  ( $SD=4.71$ ), positive outlook,  $M=21.22$  ( $SD=3.25$ ), relationships,  $M=16.14$  ( $SD=3.43$ ), foresighted,  $M=11.22$  ( $SD=2.05$ ), purpose in life,  $M=16.76$  ( $SD=2.59$ ), leadership,  $M=18.69$  ( $SD=3.46$ ) and investigative,  $M=8.55$  ( $SD=4.64$ ).

### 3. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the degree of empathy, self-efficacy, and resiliency which are accepted as the key skills for being counselors among first grade counseling students. According to these results, most of the participants preferred the department of psychological counselling and guidance in the first row in the university entrance exam. Students' career preferences in terms of gender differences are significant. In this respect, as the first reason in their career preferences girls indicated the personality factors as the while boys indicated occupational factors.

According to other results, counselling students' Interpersonal Reactivity, Self-Efficacy and Resiliency in general, higher levels of perceptions were determined. In a study conducted by Mehrabian et al (1988), similar results have an emotional empathy that varies according to the profession, particularly in the field of psychology students' empathy scores higher than other areas that are specified. On the counselling research side, counsellor's level of empathy (Strohmer, Biggs, Haase, & Purcell, 1985; Bohart & Greenberg, 1997) and self-efficacy are important components of counsellor development (Bischoff, 1997; Leach, et al, 1997). On the other hand, resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Garmezy, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1992). Self-efficacy is explained by individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to organize and carry out specific courses of action to attain some goal or situation-specific task; these beliefs have significant influence on self-regulation and the quality of human functioning (Bandura, 1995). Counsellors' self-efficacy is an important determinant of their ability to assume their roles as professionals with success and confidence (Bodenhom et al, 2005; Murdock, Wendler, & Nilsson, 2005). Research has indicated that counsellor training can have a positive influence on perceived self-efficacy over time (Melchert, Hays, Wiljanen, & Kolocek, 1996; Greason & Cashwell, 2009).

Some limitations of the study should be noted. A need exists to replicate the findings reported here with different universities and second to fourth grade students. And the data rely solely on self-reports. So quantitative researchs should be carried out evaluate counselling skills of counselling student.

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