

ADOLESCENTS' LIFE SATISFACTION: RISKY BEHAVIORS AND HOPELESSNESS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to determine the contribution of risky behaviors and hopelessness in predicting adolescents' life satisfaction. Data of the study is obtained from a total of 290 students including 150 girls (51.7%) and 140 boys (48.3%) attending high school. In this study, Life Satisfaction Scale, Beck Hopelessness Scale and Risky behaviors Behaviour Scale are employed. As for data analysis, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient and the Hierarchical Regression Analysis are employed. According to analyses, it was determined that adolescents' hopelessness and risky behaviors predicted their life satisfactions positively. This result reveals that adolescent' risk behaviors and hopelessness decrease as their life satisfaction increases. In this sense, it is possible to contribute to decrease adolescents' risky behaviors and hopelessness by means of school-based prevention programs that focus on increasing adolescents' life satisfaction.

Key Words: Adolescence, life satisfaction, risky behaviors, hopelessness.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, it can be seen that several studies have been conducted related to the positive psychology that focuses on the positive features of individuals. Rather than focusing on individual problems, positive psychology focuses on strong aspects of individual. According to Snyder & Lopez (2002), concepts such as hope, happiness, meaning in life, optimism, life satisfaction and humor are among the topics of positive psychology. As a concept, life satisfaction was first defined by Neugarten, Havinghurst and Tobin (1961) as the result obtained by a person through comparing his/her expectations, namely what s/he wants, with his/her holdings, namely, what s/he owns. Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) indicate that life satisfaction and happiness consist of their dimensions including life satisfaction, finding meaning in life and connecting to a situation, person or lifestyle. Considering these definitions, we can say that life satisfaction covers general satisfaction of an individual from life. Life satisfaction is an individual's subjective judgment regarding his/her life and includes a detailed and comprehensive evaluation about life (Veenhoven, 1996). According to Diener and Seligman (2004), life satisfaction emphasizes cognitive aspect of subjective well-being.

Life satisfaction includes processes such as positive effect, satisfaction, self-renunciation, involvement and meaning of life (Diener & Seligman, 2004). According to Yetim (2001), if an individual Life satisfaction experiences and positive feelings more and negative feelings less, then this means his/her subjective well-being level is relatively high. An analysis of studies on life satisfaction reveal that high life satisfaction of infant and adolescents is positively related to their social, emotional and educational adaptation (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004). It was found that high life satisfaction increases positive feelings experienced by individuals and facilitates coping with stressful situations (Gilman & Huebner, 2006); that adolescents with higher life satisfaction tend to be more successful and they have better attendance and attitudes towards school (Suldo & Shaffer, 2008); that it is negatively associated with problems such as anxiety, Drug and alcohol abuse and aggression among adolescents (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Ash and Huebner (2001) identified that negative events experienced by students reduce their life satisfaction; adolescents with higher life satisfaction, do not show any emotional and behavioral problems, concordantly, Gilman and Huebner (2006) in their research, suggested that adolescents exhibiting bullying behaviors are weak in terms of their well-being and they experience difficulty in social adaptation, and high levels of anxiety, depression, suicide (Karaman Kepenekçi & Çinkır, 2006). In addition, it has been emphasized that life satisfaction is associated with violent behaviors, gun carrying, gun carrying at school, physical assault at school, drunk driving, intentional harm at school, not feeling safe at school and shooting (Valois, 2001).

During adolescence period, there is an increase experienced in tendency to risky behaviors (Aras, Günay, Özcan & Orçın, 2007; Bulut, 2010; Jessor, 1991; Ögel, Tari & Eke-Yılmazçetin, 2006; Siyez, 2007; Bayar & Sayıl 2005). In related studies, among risky behaviors; lead to unintentional injuries (not to wear seat belts, drunk driving, etc.) and behaviors that cause violence (to bear arms, to be involved in a fight), tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, risky sexual behaviors that cause pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, unhealthy eating habits, physical inactivity, truancy at home or school, lying, theft, depression, suicide, anti-social behaviors are notably emphasized (Adams & Berzonsky, 2003; Haugaard, 2001). The Problem Behavior Theory (Jessor 1991), describe problem behaviors (drinking, smoking, illicit drug use, anti-social behaviors, precocious sexual intercourse) and based on protective and risk factors (Jessor, 1991; Jessor, Turbin & Costa, 1998; Siyez, 2006; 2007; 2009).

While emphasizing positive status of life satisfaction in terms of life as a whole (Veenhoven, 1996); negative thoughts, expectations of failure are concepts that accompany the concept of hopelessness (Dilbaz & Seber 1993; Abramson *et al.*, 1989). In certain studies examining the life satisfaction, it can be seen that there is a significant relationship between hopelessness and life satisfaction (Gündoğar *et al.*, 2007). Hopelessness can be associated with life satisfaction regarding the fact that an individual develops negative expectations about the future and hopelessness means attributing wrong meanings to life without any realistic reasons (Beck *et al.* 1974).

Adolescence is one of the most important development period in individual is also known as an interim period from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents, in this period, grow and mature physically, mentally, cognitively, socially and emotionally. In this period when a rapid change is experienced in various domains, it is also necessary for adolescents to cope with several problems. According to Jessor (1991), adolescent's risky behaviors are those preventing him/her to perform development tasks and roles expected from him/her, from feeling sufficient and successful, and from passing onto adulthood period properly. Risky behaviors restrains adolescents to become responsible adults by threatening adolescents' well-being (Lindberg, Boggess & Williams, 2000; McWhirter *et al.*, 2004).

It can be said that risky behaviors affect adolescents' life satisfactions. Psychological counselors at schools and especially those working with adolescents may feel need to evaluate adolescents' risky behaviors and hopelessness levels and increase their life satisfactions. Furthermore, in terms of planning of both preventive guidance and crisis intervention exercises, it is also important that psychological counselors working with adolescents are familiar with risky life experiences regarding adolescence period. Based on these facts, this study will be contributed to psychological counselors working in the field and to literature. The purpose of this research is to reveal whether adolescents' risky behaviors and their levels of hopelessness significantly predict their life satisfaction.

METHOD

Research design

This study was designed in the relational screening model.

Participants This research was conducted with the attendance of a total of 290 adolescents comprising of 150 girls (51.7%) and 140 boys (48.3%) who attend 9th, 10th and 11th grades in various high schools around Burdur Province as of 2013-2014 academic year. Grade-based distribution of adolescents was as follows: 104 of them (35.9%) attending 9th grade, 95 (32.7%) attending 10th grade and 91 (31.4%) attending 11th grade.

Data collection instruments and data collection *Life Satisfaction Scale*: was developed by Diener *et al.*, (1985) and composed of five items relating to life satisfaction, each of which was graded in 7 rates. Aiming at scaling general life satisfaction, the scale is suitable for all ages ranging from adolescents to adults. Adaptation of the scale into Turkish culture was implemented by Köker (1991). Test-retest reliability coefficient of the test was found to be .85. Though in the study conducted by Yetim (1993), Cronbach's alpha internal coefficient of the test and test-retest reliability were found to be .86 and .73 respectively. Within the scope of this study, Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was found to be .88.

Risky behaviors Behavior Scale: was a 25-item scale developed by Bayar and Sayil (2005). The scale includes risky behaviors (ie., unlicensed driving, smoking, carrying cutters like knife, jack-knife etc., spending more than necessary, a high-risk sex practice) aiming at measuring in adolescents in 12 to 21 age range. The scale is rated as one-dimensional and 5 point Likert. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was determined as .81. High score obtained from the scale suggests occurrence of high risky behaviors. Within the scope of this study, Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was found to be .86.

Beck Hopelessness Scale: was developed by Becker *et al.* (1974) and is used to determine an individual's negative expectations for the future. Adaptation of the scale into Turkish culture was conducted by Seber *et al.* (1993) and Durak (1993), and in the in the research done towards determining validity and reliability of the scale, Durak (1993) found the alpha reliability coefficient as $\alpha=0.85$ and item-test correlations (as $r=0.31$, $r=0.67$). Seber *et al.* (1993), in their reliability study for implemented hopelessness scale, revealed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha=0.86$, item-total point correlations varied between 0.07 and 0.72 and point variation (range) was between 0-20 in the scale consisting of 20 items. Questions constituting the scale cover emotional, motivational and cognitive dimensions. The Scale consists of three factors including feelings about the future, loss of motivation, and hope (Beck *et al.*, 1974). 11 of items in the scale get 1 point for the "yes" option and 9 of them gets 1 point for the "no" option. When received points are high, hopelessness in the individual is considered as high.

Data Analysis

In the study, Regression Analysis was applied to reveal how much risky behaviors and hopelessness variables predict adolescents' life satisfactions. To provide regression assumption for the analysis of research, primarily the Durbin Watson value was considered to test autocorrelation in the model and this value desired to be between 1.5 and 2.5 (Kalaycı, 2008) was found to be 1.580 in this study. Accordingly, it can be seen that there are no autocorrelation in the model, standard errors of b coefficients are very small and regression assumption is attained. Furthermore, end data in the data set were examined and 15 determined ends were removed from the data set.

FINDINGS

In accordance with purposes of the study, findings related to descriptor statistics and correlation values, and the regression analyses respectively were provided.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Life Satisfaction, Risky behaviors and Hopelessness

Variables (n=290)	X	Ss	1	2	3	4	5	6
1- Life Satisfaction	22.37	6.37	1					
2- Feelings about the future	2.75	1.03	-.396	1				
3- Motivation loss	2.67	1.73	-.332	.643	1			
4- Hope	6.99	.143	.218	.012	.046	1		
5- Hopelessness	12.74	3.62	-.222	.649	.687	.096	1	
6- Risky behaviors	42.55	15.08	-.180	-.013	.008	-.043	-.043	1

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

As can be seen in Table 1, while negative oriented significant correlation between adolescents' life satisfaction scores and risky behaviors behavior ($r=-.180$, $p<0.01$), hopelessness ($r=-.222$, $p<.01$) and among hopelessness subscales, feelings about the future ($r=-.396$, $p<.01$) and motivation loss ($r=-.332$, $p<.01$) was found; among hopelessness sub-dimensions, positive oriented significant correlation was found with hope ($r =.218$, $p <.01$).

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Results towards the Relationship between Adolescent Life Satisfaction and, Risky behaviors and Hopelessness

Model	R	R2	R2 Change	F	F Change
1	.48	.23	.23	20.727*	20,727
2	.50	.25	.03	19.319*	10,829

*p<.01

Analyzing results of regression analysis in Table 2, Models I and II constructed in the study were observed to be significant ($F = 20.727$, $F = 19.319$, $p<.01$). It can be seen that all variables predict life satisfaction with a 25% variance explanation percentage. It can be seen that hopelessness variable included in the first step contributed with an explanation percentage of 23% and in the second step, risky behaviors variable contributed significantly to the model with 3%. Analyzing total point of hopelessness entered in the first step and which ones among hopelessness sub-dimensions contributed to the model (future related feelings and expectations, loss of motivation and hope), it can be seen that feelings about future and expectations, motivation loss and hope variables significantly contribute to the model (respectively $\beta=-.2136$ $t=-4714$, $\beta=-.743$, $t=-2636$, $\beta=9736$, $t=4.184$, $p<.01$), the total score of hopelessness was found not to contribute significantly ($\beta=.212$, $t=1.549$, $p>.05$). Risky behaviors variable entered in the second step is observed to contribute significantly to the model ($\beta=-.072$, $t=-3291$, $p<.01$).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the relationship between adolescents' life satisfaction and risky behaviors and hopelessness is analyzed. According to the research findings that adolescent' life satisfactions are predicted on a significant level by risky behaviors and hopelessness variables and all variables explain life satisfaction with a 25% variance explanation percentage. Considering the significant contributions of variables to the model, emotional and expectations regarding the future, motivation loss and hopelessness variables contribute to the model significantly, however, hopelessness total point does not contribute significantly.

Comparing these findings with the relevant literature, initially it was determined that there is a significant level of relationship between adolescents' life satisfaction and risky behaviors, and as life satisfaction increases, risky behaviors decreases. As highlighted in findings of researches in which this result is supported, it was determined that risky behaviors are related with adolescents' well-being (Lindberg et al., 2000; McWhirter et al., 2004); high life satisfaction in children and adolescents is important for their adaptation progress (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Huebner et al., 2004); make it easier to cope with stressful events

(Gilman & Huebner, 2006); and negatively correlated with problems such as anxiety, substance abuse, alcohol usage, aggression (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). Similarly in a research by Suldo & Shaffer (2008), it was revealed that high life satisfaction is correlated with school success, attendance and positive attitude towards school.

In parallel with all these research results, it was determined that adolescents with lower life satisfaction display clinically emotional and behavioral problems (Gilman & Huebner, 2006); and they experience psychological problems including high level of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and social adaptation problems such as excessive bullying behaviors, dislike for school, and loneliness (Karaman et al., 2006; Rigby, 2002; 2004; You et al., 2008).

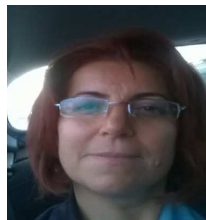
In other findings of the research, it was determined that there is a significant level of relationship between adolescents' life satisfaction and hopelessness, and as life satisfaction increases, hopelessness also decreases. Regarding this result, life satisfaction is correlated with positive evaluations and results about life (Diener & Seligman, 2002); hopelessness is related to negative results such as negative expectations for future, believing in impossibility of defeating failures and problem solving (Beck *et al.* 1974; Dilbaz & Seber 1993; Abramson *et al.* 1989). In this respect, hopelessness is expected to affect life satisfaction in adolescents because it is related to pessimism, being unable to act, the inability to sustain jobs and feelings of guilt. This case, regarding risky behavior, can be related from the point of behaviors such as violent behaviors, gun carrying, gun carrying at school, physical assault at school, drunk driving, intentional harm at school, not feeling safe at school and shooting (Valois, 2001). Based on the above mentioned findings, in this study, adolescents' subjective well-being and life satisfaction that have important role in development progress of adolescents were analyzed from the point of their risky behaviors experiences and hopelessness. However, the need to examine the issue multidimensionality is emphasizes once again with this research.

In conclusion, this study reveals that adolescent' risky behaviors and hopelessness decrease as their life satisfaction increases. In this sense, it is possible to contribute to decrease adolescents' risky behaviors and hopelessness by means of school-based prevention studies that focus on increasing adolescents' life satisfaction. Accordingly, school psychological counselors can take into account the contribution of life satisfaction of adolescents and hopelessness while evaluating risky behaviors in adolescents.

Among limitation to this study, in addition to the fact that all adolescents in the study are from those attending high school, there are not enough number of studies in Turkey to compare research findings with distinct sample groups. Despite these limitations, this research may contribute to studies conducted towards reduction of risky behaviors mainly for experts operating in fields of psychological counseling and guidance in our country.

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