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Examining the Relationship of Social Skills, Problem Solving and Bullying in Adolescents*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the relationships among social skills level, problem solving and bullying in adolescents. The research is carried out according to the surveying model with a sample of 392 students (210 female and 182 male) who completed a measurement package which contained the Turkish versions of Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY), Problem Solving Inventory for Children and Bullying Questionnaire. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients and stepwise regression analysis were utilized in analyzing the data. While the study concluded a positive and significant relationship between positive social skills degrees and subcategories of 'trust' and 'avoidance', a negative significant relationship is observed between negative social skills degrees and 'trust', 'self-discipline' and 'avoidance' subcategories of problem solving. Moreover, as a negative significant relationship is explored positive social skills degrees and bullying behavior degrees, a positive significant relationship is found between negative social skills degrees and bullying behavior and being bullied degrees.

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Social skills, problem solving, bullying and adolescents

Introduction

During adolescence, it is crucial for individuals to have social skills and use these skills effectively effectively as well as in all life periods. Adolescence is a period which requires solving daily problems, carrying out personal responsibilities and tasks and developing social relationships. Adolescents are constantly in interaction with their families, peers and teachers. They constantly use their social skills throughout these interactions (Gulacti, 2009; Uzamaz, 2000). Effective use of social skills encourages individuals to enter positive social relationships and helps maintaining them, enables them to be accepted by their peers and makes them socially compatible (Gresham, Sugai & Horner, 2001). Social skills can also be regarded as learned behaviors that help the individual to understand other people's feelings, to defend personal rights, to seek help from others when necessary, to gain compromising skills, to overcome stressful situations and to solve problematic situations (Yukay-Yuksel, 2009).

Kelly (1982) defines social skills as learned behaviors which are resorted to for interpersonal relationships and which provide positive reinforcements from others, accepts them as a bridge to attain goals and addresses to them as behaviors that provide positive reinforcements, emerge in interpersonal relationships and can be defined objectively. Walker, Colvin and Ramsey (1995) define social skills as; entire skills that students require to enter in and sustain positive social relationships with other students, their peers, teachers, families and members of the public. Social skills can also be defined as behaviors that enable the individual to successfully interact with others (Bacanli, 2000).

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Calderralla and Merrell (1997) state that social skills of adolescents can be grouped into five dimensions as (1) peer relationships skills, (2) self-management skills, (3) academic skills, (4) compliance skills and (5) assertion skills. Studies underline that having social skills has positive relationships with self-respect, compliance, happiness (Yigit and Yilmaz, 2011) and soundness of friendship (Crawford and Manassis, 2011); and has negative relationships with illogical beliefs (Civitci and Civitci, 2009).

Social skills are also a crucial element in social and psychological development of children. Children who lack social skills have less choice in solving problems they encounter than children with social skills and therefore resort to inappropriate behaviors. Because children who have high level of social skills are better at solving problems related to interpersonal relationships, they are better at social relationships as well (Bacanli and Erdogan, 2003). Thus, it can be said that adolescents' sufficient level of social skills is closely related to their problem solving skills. Social skills can be regarded as a process which enables the individual to solve problems on easy terms by using the convenient communication channels.

Problem solving is one of the primary tasks the individual has to succeed in during the adolescence period. In order for the adolescent to successfully overcome obstacles and effectively solve problems which he encounters during this critical period, he needs to have a strong problem solving skill which can also be defined as coping skills (Andrews, Ainley and Frydenberg, 2004). The term problem solving can be defined as an identifying and exploring the problem or coping approach individuals resort to against stressful daily situations (Nezu, Nezu & Peri, 1989). According to Arslan (2001) problem solving is identifying the source of the problem, skill for finding an alternative solution and making a decision in order to comply with oneself and the surroundings.

Problem solving skill helps the individual and the groups to actively adapt to the environment. Thus, every individual has to learn how to solve problems in order to actively adapt to their environments. The environment has social clues and problems which require social skills. From this viewpoint, students who have low level or insufficient levels of social skills and problem solving skills are more likely to display bullying behaviors than other students (Gokler, 2009; Kapikiran & Fiyakali, 2005). Elliot (1991) states that students who are exposed to bullying do not have a sufficient level of social skills which will ease their daily lives. Olweus (2005) defines bullying as repeatedly exposing negative behaviors towards one or more students. Negative behavior refers to behaviors which aim at intentionally abusing or attempting to abuse someone. These behaviors include; verbally threatening, insulting, and giving a nickname, teasing, excluding someone from the group along with behaviors that contain physical contact such as hitting, kicking and pinching someone (Hiloglu & Cenkseven-Onder, 2010; Olweus, 2005).

An adolescent with a high level of social skills can easily enter friendship relationships and maintain them and solve problems without resorting to or being exposed to bullying behaviors. Individuals with a low level of social skills will face problems in both their academic and social lives (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998). Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between adolescents' social skills, problem solving skills and bullying behaviors. With this context, the following questions were asked for the study;

- What is the relationship between social skill levels of adolescents and their problem solving skills?
- What is the relationship between social skill levels of adolescents and their bullying behaviors?
- What is the relationship between problem solving skills of adolescents and their bullying behaviors?

Method

Research Design

This is a quantitative study and is designed with the relational screening model. The relational screening model is a model which aims at determining the existence or the extent of change which occurs among two or more variables together (Creswell, 2012). Although the relationships that are determined with the screening model are not cause and effect relationships, it enables identifying the other variable once the state of a variable is explained (Karasar, 2014).

Particpants

Participants of this study were 392 students enrolled at 3 different public secondary school in Konya. Of the participants, 246 were 6th grade students, 45 were 7th grade students, and 101 were 8th grade students. The

study group was selected with the simple random sampling method. The study group consisted of 210 (53.6%) females and 182 (46.4%) males. The age of study grup was ranged from 12 to 15 (m = 12.9, sd = 0.96)

Measures

The Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY) scale. The purpose of the scale developed by Matson, Rotatory and Helsel (1983) was to evaluate the social skills of children between the ages 12-14 (Bacanli and Erdogan, 2003). The Turkish adaptation of the scale, which was carried out by Bacanli and Erdogan (2003), consists of 47 items. The scale is a 5 point Likert scale. The scale is scored as; "totally not applicable for me" 1 point, "less applicable for me" 2 points, "moderately applicable for me" 3 points, "rather applicable for me" 4 points and "totally applicable for me" 5 points. The lowest score that can be gained from the scale is 47 and the highest is 235. The scale consists of two sub-dimensions namely "positive social behaviors" and "negative social behaviors". The Croanbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients calculated by Bacanli and Erdogan (2003) are; .81 for the "negative social behavior" sub-scale, .83 for the "positive social behavior" sub-scale and .94 for the total social skill variable.

Problem solving inventory for children. The Problem Solving İnventory for Children which was developed by Serin, Bulut, Serin and Saygili (2010) to evaluate problem solving skills of secondary school students consists of 24 items and three factors. These factors are Trust in Problem Solving Skills, Self-Control and Avoidance. Croanbach alpha reliability coefficient of the inventory was .80. The "test-retest" reliability was evaluated for the scale and the correlation coefficient was determined as .85. Correlation coefficients for the sub-scales was; .84 for the "Trust in Problem Solving Skills", .79 for "Self-Control"and .70 for "Avoidance" respectively. The positive items in the inventory were scored as "I never behave like this (1)", "I rarely behave like this (2)", "I sometimes behave like this (3)", "I often behave like this (4)" and "I always behave like this (5)"(Serin, Bulut Serin and Saygili, 2010).

Bully/victim questionnaire. The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (ROBVQ) was developed by Olweus (1996) who explored the bullying behaviors and victimizing experiences of pupils. This assessment instrument identifies the type and frequency of the bullying behavior, where it occurred, by whom it was displayed, how often students tell their families and teachers about bullying behaviors and determines what teachers do when they try to prevent bullying behaviors. The original form of the instrument was conducted on over 5000 students in order to test the internal reliability. In these assessments; the Croanbach alpha coefficient for the "being victimized" and "displaying bullying behaviors" items was at .80 and over values. The Turkish translation of the questionnaire was carried out by Dolek (2002) and no validity and reliability tests were identified. The internal consistency coefficients for the "being victimized" and "displaying bullying behaviors" items were .71 and .75 respectively in another study (Atik, 2006) in which the translated form was used.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The study was conducted in the spring term of the 2012-2013 academic period. Permissions were asked from the authors of the scales that were to be used in the study. The schools in which the study was to be conducted were selected with the random selection method. The data were collected based on the voluntariness principle. The research subject was explained to the students before each practice. In order for the students to sincerely answer the questions, they were informed about the purpose and importance of the study and reminded that their personal identity information was not required and the data was going to be kept secret. How the data collection instruments were to be answered was made clear. The students were observed to complete the questionnaire in 40 minutes.

Data were analyzed with the SPSS 21.0 statistic software. The Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression analysis were used in order to determine whether there was a relationship between the sub-dimensions of the students' social skills and their problem solving and bullying behaviors.

Results

Descriptive Data and Inter-Correlations

Correlation values between the variables were examined in order to determine the relationship between social skills of students and their problem solving and bullying behaviors. The means, standard deviation and intyer-correlation of the variables are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Descripte statistics and inter-correlations of the variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Positive social behavior	-						
2. Negative social behavior	-.312*	-					
3. Trust	.443*	-.282*	-				
4. Self-control	-.019	-.430*	.202*	-			
5. Avoidance	.235*	-.486*	.317*	.597*	-		
6. Being victimized	-.026	.174*	-.180*	-.235*	-.178*	-	
7. Displaying bullying behaviors	-.170*	.398*	.180*	-.199*	-.202*	.368*	-
Average	3.96	1.72	3.64	3.39	3.82	1.47	1.23
Standard Deviation	0.57	0.51	0.86	0.95	0.98	0.62	0.48

* p< .01

According to the questions on Table 1, the averages regarding the positive social skills sub-dimension of the students' social skills dimension are at a high level with the value of $\overline{X}$= 3.96 and the averages regarding the negative social skills sub-dimension are at low level with the value of $\overline{X}$= 1.72. For the sub-dimensions of the Problem Solving scale, averages for the Trust dimension are at high levels with the value of $\overline{X}$= 3.64, averages for the Self-control dimension are at medium level with the value of $\overline{X}$= 3.39 and the averages for the Avoidance dimension are at high levels with the value of $\overline{X}$= 3.82. For the sub-dimensions of the Bullying Behavior scale, averages for the being victimized dimension is at low levels with the value of $\overline{X}$= 1.47 and the averages for the displaying bullying behaviors dimension is at low levels with the value of $\overline{X}$= 1.23 respectively.

According to Table 2, there is a positive significant relationship between positive social skills scores and the trust and avoidance sub-dimensions of the inventory (p<.01). A negative significant relationship was identified between negative social skills and the sub-dimensions of the problem solving inventory (p<.01). According to the findings there is also a negative significant relationship between positive social skills and displaying bullying behaviors (p<.01). A positive significant relationship was determined between negative social behaviors and the sub-dimensions of bullying behaviors (p<.01).

Multiple Regression Analysis

Two stepwise multiple regression analysis have administered to determine which dimensions of social skills and problem solving skills were best predictors of displaying bullying behaviors and being victimized.

Table 2. Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting Displaying Bullying Behaviors

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	R	R^2
Model 1							
Negative Social Skills	.38	.04	.40	8.58	.00	.40	.16

Table 2 showed the results of multiple regression analysis where the independent variable were dimensions of social skills and the dependent variable was displaying bullying behaviors. Negative social skills entered the equation, accounting for %16 of the variance in predicting negative social skills (R^2 = .16; FReg = 73.57; p< .00).

Table 3. Summary of stepwise multiple regression analysis for variable predicting being victimized

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	R	R^2
Model 1							
Self-control	-.15	.03	-.24	-4.77	.00	.24	..06

Table 3 showed the results of multiple regression analysis where the independent variable were dimensions of problem solving skills and the dependent variable was being victimized. Self control accounted for %6 of the variance in predicting negative social skills (R^2 = .06; FReg = 22.72; p< .00).

Discussion and Conclusion

Adolescence is the most difficult developmental phase throughout the individual's life. Individuals go through various biological and social changes throughout this period. Together with these changes, the individual explores different emotional and behavioral stimuli related to world of adults (Uysal & Bingol, 2014). Adolescence is the period in which the individual gain autonomy, spends less time with his parents and tends towards his peers (Hortacsu, 2003). In order to enter into healthy relationships with peers and other members of the society, the adolescent needs social skills and problem solving skills but can resort to bullying behaviors during some situations. Thus in this study, the relationship between adolescents' social skills, problem solving skills and bullying behaviors was examined.

According to the analyses, there is a negative relationship between adolescents' positive social skills and their tendencies to displaying bullying behaviors and a positive relationship between their negative social skills and their tendencies to displaying bullying behaviors. Positive social behaviors include looking at the face while talking, having lots of friends, defending friends, sharing etc. and negative social relationships include scaring other people, breaking one's promise, irritating other people, slapping people in the face when angry etc. (Bacanli and Erdogan, 2003). Students who tend to display bullying behaviors can have difficulty in showing empathy towards others. They show less tolerance in their relationships with others and can behave thoughtlessly in their social relationships (Hantler, 1994). Studies on bullying behaviors in schools indicate that adolescents who bully around lack the primary social skills which enable them to enter into effective communications with their peers and sustain them (Hiloglu, and Cenkseven-Onder, 2010). According to Ozabaci (2006), the lack of social skills in adolescents causes aggression and a tendency to commit a crime. On the other hand, a social and emotional skill in adolescents was related to the decrease in getting involved in violence and bullying (Polan, Sieving and McMorris, 2013). Hiloglu and Cenkseven-Onder (2010) stated that negative social behaviors are predictors for being a bully.

Findings of this study indicate that there is a negative relationship between the level of problem solving skills of adolescents and getting involved in bullying behaviors. Lack of problem solving skills is accepted as one of the most crucial risk factors for adolescents displaying bullying behaviors (Gofin, Palti and Gordon, 2002). Studies suggest that both bully and victim students have low levels of problem solving skills and claim that especially male students resort to bullying because they don't know how to solve problems (Atik and Kemer, 2008; Cinkir and Karaman- Kepenekci, 2003). According to Ayas (2008), bully students cannot show empathy towards victim students, they lack problem solving skills and tend to solve the problems they encounter through violence. In addition, a positive correlation was identified in this study between social skill levels and problem solving skills. Problem solving skills can be regarded also as a component of social skills (Postigo, Gonzalez, Mateu and Montoya, 2012). It is evident that the findings are in line with the literature.

In conclusion, the increase in adolescents' social skills and problem solving skills may decrease in their interference with bullying behaviors. It can be said that guidance services aiming at advancing social skills and problem solving skills of adolescents can be effective in preventing and interfering in bullying behaviors which have become critical problems within schools. Within the context of preventing bullying behaviors, training programs concerning problem solving and social skills such as anger control, showing empathy and expressing oneself can be given to adolescents. Also, in order to advance social skills of adolescents, guidance services can organize activities aiming at advancing skills such as arranging cultural activities, group solidarity and collaboration with their families and peers they enter social relationships with and they can hold consultations on these issues with the families.

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