

Determining the Relation Between Relational Interdependent Self-Construal and Psychological Resilience of University Students in the COVID-19 Pandemic Process

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Abstract:

Objective: The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between relational interdependent self-construal and psychological resilience of university students who continued their education during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Design and Methods: The study was designed with a quantitative design and a correlational survey model was used. The study data were collected by using an online questionnaire, a personal information form that contained demographic information, the Relational Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (RISCS), and the Adult Psychological Resilience Scale (APRS).

Participants: The sampling consisted of 363 university students who were selected with the convenience sampling method.

Results: As a result, Spearman's correlation coefficient was found to be positive (0.361) at a significance level of 0.01 between RISCs and APRS scores. In this respect, it can be argued that as the relational interdependent self-construal levels of students increases, their psychological resilience also increases.

Conclusion: The study results can guide practitioners in terms of intervention focuses by contributing to uncovering the importance of relationality and social support resources.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the world and Turkey, has necessitated some changes in almost every aspect of human life. Social life, business life, and educational life are some of these areas. No doubt, all stages of the educational institutions, which include millions of students, are at the forefront of the structures that have been affected by this process. The university education process, which has an important place in the lives of individuals, brings with it many changes and transformations that might affect the individual in life, not only in terms of education, but also in terms of friendships, newly established relations, and new environments. The individual and social problems faced by university students, who have experienced university years differently with the effect of COVID-19, which corresponds to an important process in terms of acquiring a profession and directing life, in the developmental periods of individuals, brought with it some issues that need to be examined. The prolongation and uncertainties of this process, which was at first considered to be short, increased the levels of anxiety, hopelessness, and stress in students. One of the most important effects of the pandemic has been the damage it caused to the physical and psychological health of people. In this social isolation process, it has had great importance to protect individual and societal psychosocial well-being and to improve psychological resilience strategies in the face of negative situations that stemmed from the pandemic process (Özer, 2020; Özer & Suna, 2020). In a study that was conducted in China to evaluate the psychological health of young people after COVID-19 and to investigate the factors that affected the psychological health of young people, it was shown that approximately 40.4% of young people tended to have psychological problems. It was also argued that low educational levels, PTSD symptoms,

and negative coping styles were among the factors that affected young people's psychological health (Liang et al., 2020). In a study that was conducted by Tönbül (2020) in our country, it was reported that the pandemic also affected psychological resilience.

Psychological Resilience

One of the concepts regarding psychological health and psychological resilience, which is more on the agenda under today's circumstances, was defined by Walker (2020) in the simplest way as the ability to cope with unexpected conditions and to continue working in the same way under these conditions. Hunter (2001) on the other hand, emphasized the concepts of "adaptation" and "success" when he defined psychological resilience. According to Block & Kremen (1996), the adaptive competencies of individuals vary greatly in their ability to perceive and balance the ever-changing world. In this respect, according to them, the distinctive feature of psychological health is the complementary combination of external abilities and constraints with the internal motivations and needs of the individual. In light of this information, the characteristics of the individual (being social, intelligence, communication skills, self-efficacy perception, etc.), as well as relations with family members, communication status with others such as friends, teachers, neighbors, and environmental conditions can also be considered as the determining variables for psychological resilience.

Self and Relational Interdependent Self-Construal

The factors affecting how people define themselves, and how they think, feel, and interact with each other are expressed with the concept of "self-construal" (Cross et al., 2002).

Self-construal is also referred to as "*the past, present, and future behavior patterns of the indi-*

vidual, and cultural differences in the way individuals perceive and interpret the world”, and is conceptualized under two titles, which are; intertwined/dependent self-construal and independent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individuals who have dependent self-construal attach more importance to relations and encode and organize information in terms of relations. It is seen that individuals who have an independent sense of “self” emphasize their uniqueness or individuality (Cross & Madson, 1997).

Individuals who have high dependent self-construal tend to define themselves over their relations, prioritizing maintaining an existing relationship, and agreeing with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). Also, Suh (2007) argued that individuals who have a dominant dependent self-construal attach great importance to maintaining adjustment in the relations and following social rules; and therefore, he added that some psychological factors (for example, self-esteem and expressing emotions) might be an obstacle to the happiness of such individuals.

In this context, the purpose of the study was to determine the dependent self-construal and psychological resilience levels of university students and the relations between these two variables during the COVID-19 pandemic period. In line with this main purpose, differences among the participants’ gender, perceived socio-economic level and the scores received from the scales were evaluated.

Methods

Design and sampling

This study was conducted by using the quantitative research method with the correlational screening model, which aims to describe a past or present event as it exists (İslamoğlu & Alınacı, 2016). The universe of the study consists of individuals who were undergraduate students in any city in Turkey and have access to a phone or computer. Convenience sampling, which is characterized by low cost and ease of application, was used as the sampling method (İslamoğlu & Alınacı, 2016). To determine the sampling size, the formula ($N = N \cdot t^2 \cdot p \cdot q / d^2(N-1) + t^2 \cdot p \cdot q$) is used in descriptive studies when the number of people in the population is known. As a result of this calculation, it was found that it was neces-

sary to reach a minimum of 384 people. Considering the possible data losses, the purpose was to reach 400 individuals, but 380 people were reached and 363 people constituted the sampling of the study because the questionnaires of 17 people were excluded from the evaluations. The data were analyzed with a 95% Confidence Interval and at a 0.05 significance level.

Data collection

The data of the study were collected between 20.02.2021 and 20.04.2021 with an online survey method. The questionnaire form used to collect data consisted of the personal information form prepared to collect information on the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, the “Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale” developed by Cross, Bacon & Morris (2000) whose Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Akın, Eroğlu, Kayış & Satıcı (2010), and the Adult Psychological Resilience Scale, which was developed by Friborg et al. (2005) whose Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Basım & Çetin (2011).

Data analysis

The IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 22 program was used when the data obtained at the end of the study were evaluated. Firstly, descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, standard deviation, frequency) were determined, the Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used, the skewness-kurtosis values were examined, and it was determined that the dataset was not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$).

Ethical consideration

To collect the data in the study, firstly, ethics committee approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Study Ethics Committee of X University on 19/02/2021 with the number 2021/109. On the first page of the online questionnaire, information was given about the purpose of the study, and the participants were informed that the study would be initiated only if they provided consent.

Results

The Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis, and Spearman Correlation Analysis results of the

scale scores of the findings of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic process are given below according to the variables of gender, perceived socio-economic level (the analysis results that did not show significant differences between the variables and the sub-dimensions of the adult psychological resilience scale are not included in the tables so that the tables do not tire the eyes and are more understandable in the presentation of the findings). Descriptive analyzes were made to find the socio-demographic characteristics of the university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this respect, 75.5% of the students were female, 29.8% were 21,

28.1% were 22 years old. The mean age of the sampling was found to be 21.48. A total of 37.5% of the students were third-year students; 84.8% perceived their socio-economic status as moderate.

According to Table 1, when the average of both scale scores was evaluated, it can be argued that both the relational interdependent self-construal and psychological resilience levels of the participants are relatively high.

According to Table 2, statistically significant differences were detected between the gender of the students and the self-perception sub-dimension scores. The adult psychological resilience scale self-perception sub-dimension scores of the male students were higher than those of the female students ($p:0.002$).

According to Table 3, significant differences were detected in terms of the perceived socio-economic level and adult psychological resilience scale total score ($p:0.004$), self-perception ($p:0.002$), future perception ($p:0.018$), structural style ($p:0.004$), and family adjustment (0.017) sub-dimension scores. Those who had a perception of upper socio-economic level had higher adult psychological resilience total score, self-perception, and sub-dimensions of family adjustment than those who had a perception of moderate and lower socioeconomic level. Also, the future perception and the structural style sub-dimension scores of the participants who had a perception of upper socio-economic level were higher than those who had a perception of lower socio-economic level.

According to Table 4, The Spearman Correlation Coefficient (0.361) was positive at a significance level of 0.01 between RISCS and

Table 1 Findings on the RISCS and APRS scores of the participants

	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	\bar{x}	SD
RISCS	16	74	55.55	8.66
APRS- total	55	165	125.29	18.09
APRS- self- -perception	6	30	23.00	3.60
APRS- future perception	4	20	14.94	3.08
APRS- structural style	7	20	15.11	2.77
APRS- social competence	6	30	22.46	3.96
APRS- family adjustment	6	30	22.19	5.04
APRS- social resources	8	35	27.57	4.69

Table 2 Mann-Whitney U results of RISCS and APRS scores according to the gender of the participants

Dependent variable	Gender	n	\bar{x}	SD	Median	Min-max	Q1-Q3	Z	p
RISCS	Female	274	55.80	7.78	57	16-74	52-61	-0.350	0.726
	Male	89	54.79	10.94	56	19-73	49.50-61.50		
APRS- total	Female	274	124.84	16.85	127	55-163	115.75-136	-1.596	0.111
	Male	89	126.67	21.50	131	60-165	120.50-139		
APRS- self- perception	Female	274	22.81	3.33	23	6-30	21-25	-3.046	0.002*
	Male	89	23.60	4.27	24	10-30	22.50-26		

Table 3 Kruskal Wallis results of the RISCs and APRS scores according to the perceptions of the participants regarding their Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Dependent variable	SES	n	\bar{x}	SD	Median	Min-Max	Q1-Q3	Chi-square	Difference	p
RISCs	a. Upper	15	56.20	8.33	61	44-66	46-63	.560	-	0.756
	b. Moderate	308	55.73	8.48	56	19-74	52-61			
	c. Lower	40	54	10.12	56	16-66	51.25-59			
APRS-total	a. Upper	15	138.40	14	143	112-163	131-147	10.817	a>ba>c	0.004*
	b. Moderate	308	125.32	17.32	128	60-165	116-136			
	c. Lower	40	120.12	22.59	127.5	55-157	107.2-132			
APRS-self-perception	a. Upper	15	25.80	2.59	27	21-29	24-27	12.811	a>ba>c	0.002*
	b. Moderate	308	23	3.54	23	6-30	21-25			
	c. Lower	40	21.97	3.85	23	11-29	20-25			
APRS-future perception	a. Upper	15	16.33	3.03	17	11-20	13-19	8.038	a>c	0.018*
	b. Moderate	308	15.04	2.97	15	4-20	13-17			
	c. Lower	40	13.65	3.61	14.5	4-19	11-16			
APRS-structural style	a. Upper	15	16.93	2.73	18	12-20	15-19	10.820	a>c	0.004*
	b. Moderate	308	15.18	2.64	15.5	7-20	14-17			
	c. Lower	40	13.85	3.28	15	7-19	11-16			
APRS-family adjustment	a. Upper	15	25.20	3.42	26	16-29	24-28	8.129	a>ba>c	0.017*
	b. Moderate	308	22.15	4.95	23	6-30	20-16			
	c. Lower	40	21.35	5.86	22	8-30	18-25			

APRS scores ($p:0.000$). It was determined that there is a positive and significant relation between relational interdependent self-construal scores and adult psychological resilience scores of university students who returned to their families because of COVID-19. In this context, as the relational interdependent self-construal levels of the students increase, their psychological resilience increases.

Discussion

In this study, the relational interdependent self-construal and psychological resilience levels

of university students and the relation between these two concepts were investigated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the light of the findings, when the mean scores of the students in both scales are considered, it can be argued that the relational interdependent self-construal and psychological resilience levels of the participants are relatively high.

According to the results of this study, no statistically significant differences were detected between the relational interdependent self-construal and adult psychological resilience scale scores in terms of gender of the participants. Statistically

Table 4 The Spearman Correlation Analysis results of the RISCs and APRS scores of the participants

		RISCs	APRS						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
RISCs	1.Total	1							
APRS	2. Self-perception	.196**	1						
	3. Future perception	.168**	.696**	1					
	4. Structural style	.296**	.597**	.602**	1				
	5. Social competence	.220**	.484**	.437**	.420**	1			
	6. Family adjustment	.309**	.422**	.407**	.451**	.427**	1		
	7. Social resources	.396**	.491**	.381**	.466**	.515**	.716**	1	
	8. Total	.361**	.746**	.704**	.296**	.700**	.797**	.800**	1

significant differences were detected between the genders of the students and their self-perception sub-dimension scores. The adult psychological resilience scale self-perception sub-dimension scores of the male students were higher than those of the female students. The fact that self-perception, which refers to the characteristics such as self-confidence and having a positive perspective, was higher in males, can be interpreted as self-confidence in males being an important factor in the context of psychological resilience.

In the literature, there are different results in terms of the gender variable. Studies that were conducted with university students reported that there were no significant differences between self-construal and psychological well-being levels according to gender (Ak, 2019; Kuyumcu, 2012; Çuhadaroglu & Akfırat, 2017; Duman et al. 2020). On the other hand, in the study that was conducted by Tonbul (2020) in which the post-coronavirus psychological resilience of individuals aged 20-60 was investigated, it was concluded that the psychological resilience of women was found to be higher than that of men. Cross & Madson (1997) reported that women tended to define themselves in relational terms more than men based on independent and relationally dependent self-construal.

According to the results of this study, those who had a perception of upper socio-economic level had higher adult psychological resilience total score and self-perception, and sub-dimensions of family cohesion than those who had

a medium and lower perception. Also, the future perception and the structural style sub-dimension scores of the participants who had a perception of upper socio-economic level were higher than those with a perception of lower socio-economic level. The high scores of the participants who had the perception of upper socio-economic level in the total and some sub-dimensions of the adult psychological resilience scale may be because the economic power of the individual increases the alternatives in life, giving the chance to choose in every sense, and reduces anxiety about the future. Also, access to online platforms in the distance education process is directly related to the socio-economic levels of families (Özer & Suna, 2020). This result also shows the positive contribution of not experiencing socio-economic problems, in other words, not being in economic distress, on the psychological health.

As a result of this study, it was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between the relational interdependent self-construal scores of university students and adult psychological resilience scores in the COVID-19 pandemic process. In this respect, as the relational interdependent self-construal levels of the students increase, their psychological resilience also increases. It was also argued that family processes, shared family beliefs, and close relations play central roles in psychological resilience in the context of COVID-19 (Prime et al. 2020). In the study, the positive relation between relational interdependent self-construal and psychological resilience showed that the sense of

support and security brought by relationality can contribute to the psychological resilience of the individual when the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected human relations. Because the concept of psychological resilience is also considered as “the ability of an individual to use family and social and external support systems in the process of coping better with stressful situations” (Hurmeydan, 2019).

Conclusion

As mentioned above, there are many studies conducted on the effects of COVID-19 on the psychological health of individuals. In this study, it was found that relational interdependent self-construal may contribute positively to psychological resilience which is a dimension of psychological health during the pandemic process. In another study conducted with 1,004 US adults by Killgore et al. (2020), it was argued that psychological resilience is related to modifiable factors in this challenging period. These factors are listed as follows. At least 10 minutes of exercise per day, perceived family support; perceived friend support; less insomnia; perceived care and support from a close and significant other; and prayers. Study results showed that those who scored higher on a combination of these factors tended to have greater psychological resilience during the quarantine period. In other words, those who participated in these vital activities and nurtured their relations may be more resistant to the negative impacts of COVID-19 on psychological health.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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