

Full Length Research Paper

The relationship of resilience with attitude toward grief in university students

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The purpose of this study is to reveal whether university students' level of resilience differ by gender and attitude toward grief, and to identify to what extent resilience predicts attitude toward grief. 259 students studying at Ondokuz Mayıs University participated in the study. The average age of the participants was 20.27 ± 1.19 . Two scales were used for data collection. 'The Attitude to Grief Scale' was used to determine attitudes towards grief, and 'The Resilience Scale' was used to identify resilience. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, linear regression analysis, and t-test were used in data analysis. The findings suggest that resilience is related to grief ($-0.58, p < 0.001$). Whether resilience was a predictor of attitude toward grief was tested through regression analysis. Resilience was found to be a significant predictor of attitude toward grief ($R^2 = 0.346$). The results of this study indicated that resilience scores of the students did not significantly differ by gender.

Key words: Resilience, grief, university students, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are a socio-cultural creatures, therefore, they need to adapt to the environment they live in. In an effort to adapt to the environment, they may, however, encounter some problems such as losing a loved one or job, catching a disease with no cure, and divorcing. If an individual does not have adequate equipment to protect themselves against such problems, they will feel helpless, weak and exhausted, and will experience psychological and physical disorders. Nevertheless, there are such individuals who can survive even major disasters. The only thing that distinguishes these individuals is psychological endurance (Masten, 2001; Karaimak, 2006; Terzi, 2008a). In psychiatry, psychology and education, ideas about the fact that individuals can recover from negative events and will grow stronger as they overcome these difficulties are explained by the concept of resilience, and psychological endurance and social support are regarded as the most important predictor of resilience (Terzi, 2008a). The concepts 'indomitableness', 'psychological endurance' and 'the ability to recover' are

used as Turkish equivalent to resilience (Öğülmüş, 2001; Gizir, 2007; Terzi, 2008b).

When examining the related literature, several definitions for resilience were found. Resilience is described as the capacity to withstand difficulties by Turner (2001), a process of adaptation by Hunter (2001), a personality trait which operates as a source of resistance in the face of stressful life events by Terzi (2008a), the capability to recover from difficult life events by Garmezy (1991), and an ability to preserve identity (Bonanno et al., 2002). Some authors refer to resilience as an inheritance (Block and Block, 1980), a characteristic that can be learned (Beardslee and Podorefsky, 1998; Jacelon, 1997), a trait learned in the developmental process (Masten et al., 1990), and the ability of adults under normal conditions (Bonanno, 2004). Definitions of psychological endurance are based on three points as: a) exposure to significant threat or negativity condition, b) a successful adaptation process despite possible negative impacts on the stages of development, and c) protective

factors (Luthar et al., 2000; Bonanno et al., 2002; Bonanno, 2005). Resilience is “inferred on the basis of significant interactions between risk and protective factors to the extent that protective factors are associated with healthy adaptation” (Windle, 1999; Trans.Gizir and Aydın, 2006). As also inferred from this explanation, resilience is not a personality trait, but a protective factor that leads an individual to success in challenging events and reduces the effects of threatening conditions. The related literature groups risk factors under three headings as person-related risk factors (such as a lack of self-confidence), family-related risk factors (poverty, divorce, etc.), and social risk factors (terrorism, natural disasters, etc.) (Karairmak, 2006; Terzi, 2006).

These risk factors also involve loss. Each individual must have experienced or will experience a loss. Knowing this fact or even preparing yourself for this does not change grief reaction. Grief is a normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. Grief first connotes the loss of a love one, but it is also experienced after many different losses or loss threats such as divorce, organ loss, job loss, and impairment of health (Çevik 2000, Bonanno, 2004, 2005). Grieving is a psychological response to the death of a loved one or the termination of a significant relationship, and compromises between inner world and reality made to be attuned to (Volkan and Zintl, 1999). According to Jakoby (2012), explores a sociological perspective on, grief as a social emotion. Grief process begins with the experience of a loss (Mestçioğlu and Sargin, 2003) and ends with the termination of a relations, the break-up or death (Toth et al., 2000). Thus, each individual naturally face grief. Responses given by persons who face grief display interpersonal differences. These differences are resulted from the factors on the grief process. For these reasons, grief is categorized as normal, traumatic and complex. *Normal grief* response is described as acute or incomplete grief and as physical, emotional, behavioral and cognitive reactions that naturally emerge after loss (Worden, 2001). *Traumatic grief* refers to the reactions showed after sudden and unexpected losses (Parkes, 2001). Traumatic grief may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. *Complex grief* refers to dysfunctionality in individuals who experience a loss (that is in their social, personal and professional lives) although a specific period (at least 6 months) passes after the experience of loss (Zhang et al., 2006). Complex grief process may be observed as chronic grief, delayed grief, exaggerated grief, masked grief or pathological grief. In this process, grief reactions of individuals continue for a long time and the intensity of emotion after loss gradually increases (Bonanno and Kaltman, 2001; Bonanno et al., 2002). The related literature indicated that the bereaved individuals stayed stable and their grief reactions were short-term. It is stated that very rare or short-term grief reaction was common while delayed grief reaction was rarely observed (Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno, 2012).

In the related literature, studies on the relationship between grief and depression was found (Bonanno et al., 2002). In a study on married adults, levels of grief and depression before and after (6, 8, and 48 months later) the death of the partner were measured. The study revealed that:

- a. *In the group in which general grief reaction and improvement was observed*, the level of pre-loss depression was low, but the level of depression increased within the 18-month period after the death;
- b. *In the group in which resilience was high and level of sadness was low*, low level of pre-loss and post-loss depression (46%) was observed;
- c. *In the group in which post-loss depression was observed*, the level of pre-loss depression was high while the level of post-loss depression decreased (10%),
- d. *In the group which showed chronic grief reaction*, the level of pre-loss depression was low while the level of post-loss depression was high and lasting (16%)
- e. *In the group with chronic depression*, the level of post-loss depression was high, and there existed continuous depression in pre-loss period (8%).

As seen in the present study, in individuals with high level of resilience, grieving process is shorter besides low-grade depression (Nader and Salloum, 2011).

The sudden remembrance of the deceased immediately after the loss, period of intense mourning in first months, anguish caused by intense pain were less observed in resilient individuals. Unlike individuals with chronic depression, chronic grievers reported that they had neither ambivalence towards the deceased before death nor conflictual marriages. The commitment prior to the loss was regard as an significant predictor of grief reaction in both groups (Bonanno et al., 2002). In their study on the phenomenon of resilience in adults diagnosed with any risk, Carbonell et al. (1998) discovered that resilience was associated with social support and family ties.

Grief reactions influence individuals throughout their developmental process. The effects of grief reactions on young people is a special subject for assessment. It is stated that loss and bereavement have important effects on university students (18 to 23 years of age), and students in this age group suffer serious problems after losses (Toth et al., 2000). These problems are feelings of being physically and psychologically unwell and so on. Under such situations, young people use one or some of the coping strategies, but the strategies they use are not identical (Bonanno, 2004). There is a direct relationship between grief and resilience, and individuals who has experienced a loss have more resilience than thought (Bonanno et al., 2002; Bonanno, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to reveal whether university students' level of resilience differ by gender and attitude toward grief, and to identify to what extent

Table 1. Demographic data of the university students.

Variable	n	%
Grade level		
Grade 2	166	64.1
Grade 4	93	35.9
The degree of the relationship		
Loss of a first degree relative	45	17.4
Loss of a second degree relative	98	37.8
Break-ups	116	44.8
The duration of the loss		
Six months	61	23.6
Six-twelve months	114	44.0
Twelve months and over	84	32.4

resilience predicts attitude toward grief.

METHODOLOGY

Study group

The research was conducted on 259 students who study in several departments of Ondokuz Mayıs University Faculty of Education in the education and training year 2012 to 2013, and have experienced the loss of a loved one or broken up with their boyfriend/girlfriend. 156 (60.23%) of the students were female while 103 (39.77%) were male. The average age was 20.27 ± 1.19 .

Data-collection tools

Two scales developed in line with the literature were utilized in order to collect data. The attitudes of university students toward grief were identified by 'the Attitude to Grief Scale', and 'the Resilience Scale' was used to define their psychological resilience.

The attitude to grief scale

The Grief Scale developed by Balcı-Çelik (2006) is a 5-point Likert scale with 35 items. The Cronbach's Alpha calculated to determine internal consistency of the scale is .96. The reliability coefficient determined by the test-retest method is calculated as .84. The validity of similar scales developed with Beck Hopelessness Scale is calculated as $r = .80$ for total score. Four factors were obtained as the result of factor analysis conducted for the structural validity. These are physical, cognitive, behavioral and emotional reactions to grief. The lowest score to be obtained from the scale in total is 35 while the highest score is 175. High scores indicate high level of grief.

The resilience scale

The resilience scale (RS) was developed by Wagnild and Young (1993), and adapted to Turkish by Terzi (2006). It is a 7-point Likert scale with 24 items. The Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient and the test-retest reliability for the scale was computed as .82, and .84, respectively. The item-total correlation was seen to vary

between .03 and .69. The structural validity of the scale was determined using factor analysis. In the validity study for similar scales, a significant relationship was found between the resilience scale and the general self-efficacy scale ($r = .83$). The lowest score to be obtained from the scale is 24 while the highest score is 168. High scores indicate high level of resilience.

Procedure

The researcher personally applied the measuring instruments used for data collection to the students. Students' willingness was taken into consideration, unwilling students were not forced to participate in the study, and no personal identity information was asked. The students were also notified that the results to be derived would only be used for scientific study.

Data analysis

SPSS 17.0 was used to analyze data. Percentages and frequencies were utilized to find demographic characteristics of the students. T-test was used to discover whether the scores obtained from the Resilience Scale differ by gender. The correlation between the scores obtained from the grief scale and the resilience scale was calculated using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. Simple linear regression analysis was used to determine to what extent attitude toward grief predicted resilience.

FINDINGS

Demographic data on the university students

Table 1 shows the demographics of the students, grade level, loss of a first degree relative (such as mother, father, and sibling), loss of a second degree relative (such as uncle, and aunt), students who broke up with their boyfriend/girlfriend, and the duration of the loss.

166 (64.1%) of 256 university students who participated in the study are second graders while 93 (35.9%) are fourth graders. There are 45 students (17.4%) who have experience a loss of first degree relative, 98 students (37.8%) who have experienced a loss of second degree relative, and 116 students (44.8%) who have broken up with their partner. As seen from Table 1, the largest percentage is constituted by the individuals who have experienced a break-up. When examining the data on the duration of the loss or the break-up, it is seen that there are 61 students (23.6%) with six months' duration, 114 students (44.0%) with six-twelve months' duration, and 84 students (32.4%) with twelve months' duration and over.

Relationship between resilience and attitude toward grief

The correlation between the scores obtained from the grief scale and the resilience scale was calculated using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. It was discovered that there was a significant negative

Table 2. Resilience predicting attitude toward grief.

Variable	β	t	p	R	R ²
Grief	-0.581	11.636	0.001	0.558	0.346

Table 3. T-test results of the resilience scale in terms of gender.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
RS	Female	156	100.92	17.82	.70	.944
	Male	103	101.09	20.48		

p> .05

relationship between the resilience scores and the attitude toward grief scores ($r = -0.58$, $p < 0.001$). It was determined that the attitudes of university students toward grief developed negatively as their resilience scores increased.

Resilience's being a predictor of attitude toward grief

Whether resilience is a predictor of attitude toward grief was tested using simple linear regression analysis technique. Table 2 involves the related findings.

When examining Table 2, it is found out that resilience ($R = 0.588$, $R^2 = 0.346$, $F = 135.402$, $p < .001$) is a significant predictor of attitude toward grief. It is safe to say that 35 % of the total variance concerning resilience is explained by the students' attitudes to grief.

Resilience in terms of gender

T-test was used to determine whether there was a difference between the mean resilience scores of female and male students. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3 indicates that the mean resilience scores of students do not significantly differ by gender according to the results of the independent samples t-test.

DISCUSSION

This study discusses adult resilience and attitude toward grief. First, it was examined whether there was a relationship between adult resilience and attitude toward grief, and then a significant negative relationship between resilience and attitude toward grief was discovered (-0.58 , $p < 0.001$). Resilience as a predictor of attitude toward grief was tested through regression analysis. Resilience was found to be a significant predictor of attitude toward grief ($R^2 = 0.346$). The study lastly searched for whether there was a significant difference between adult resilience in terms of gender, and no significant difference was found

($t = .70$, $p > 0.05$).

When reviewing the related literature, some support the finding of the present study, while some do not. Terzi (2008a) discovered that the difference between university students' levels of resilience by gender was not significant; the resilience scores in the total group and separately in girls and boys had a significant positive relationship with the scores of optimism, self-efficacy and problem-solving, and coping strategy; and also the variables of coping strategy based on optimism, self-efficacy and problem-solving were significant predictors of resilience in the total group and separately in girls and boys. Kumpfer (1999) suggested that gender was associated with psychological endurance, and that in children under risk, girls had high level of psychological endurance than boys. In their study on the examination of psychological endurance in terms of self-concept and gender, Önder and Gülay (2008) indicated that gender and self-concept had an impact on psychological endurance. In the study on the primary school teachers' level of psychological endurance, Sezgin (2012) revealed that there was no difference by gender.

Resilience was discovered to be a significant predictor of attitude toward grief. In the related literature, the study on the resilience level of individuals who experienced any traumatic event, Bonanno (2005) suggested that the duration of resilience changed according to the size of the traumatic event. In the study on the resilience and healthy grief response of an adult who lost their father during childhood, Hurd (2004) suggested that the resilience of the individual who had family support and a high level of self-acceptance was aided by the awareness of the capacity, healthy grieving, and the form of the relationship with the mother.

Eppler (2008) researched the resilience in children aged between 9 to 12 after the loss of a parent. In the said research, the children who lost a parent were asked to write or narrate a story about their loss. Their stories were observed to involve dominant grief. However, they depicted themselves as happy, nice, helpful, normal, and having fun. They also stated that they had support from family, school and some peers. The study of Eppler

suggested that school counselors had great duties to help children recover after a loss. Bonanno et al. (2002) emphasized five basic issues in the data collected at different times from 250 individuals who lost their partner (after 6-18 months). These are general grief reaction, chronic grief reaction, chronic depression, increase in the grief, and resilience (psychological endurance). General grief reaction was rarely observed than others in those individuals while resilience (psychological endurance) was quite often. The said study indicated that chronic grief reaction was experienced quite often, and that resilience was associated with the acceptance of death before loss, and death belief. Bonanno, Papa and O'Neill (2002) suggested that individuals who experienced a loss had more resilience than thought, and that bereaved individuals did not need professional help to deal with their loss. Bonanno (2005) stated that the resilience of adults who were exposed to trauma until recently was also observed either pathologically or unusually (albeit occasionally) in healthy individuals, and that this situation was thought-provoking.

In the literature, it was emphasized that there was a significant relationship between psychological endurance and perceived social support in a study conducted on 140 students, by Terzi (2008b), and that resilience was associated with spirituality in a study on adults (Raftopoulos and Bates, 2011). In the study conducted on 20 African-American girls (aged between 16 to 19) who lost their friends due to homicide, Johnson (2010) discovered that metaphysical and motivational meaning constructions improved their resilience. Preston et al. (2012) explore the role emotional resilience of foster carers plays in promoting placement stability. Emotional resilience was defined by three first higher-order latent constructs, *managing emotions*, *personal attributes* and *personality traits*.

The findings derived from the present study is important to understand university students' resilience and attitude toward grief. Considering this, the following suggestions are made:

Each individual experiences one or more losses within a period of their lives. When it is considered that dating relationships are intense especially during university years, even breaking up with boyfriend/girlfriend leads to serious psychological problems. However, individuals with high level of resilience (psychological endurance) experience such problems less. Therefore, it is suggested that individuals who have experienced a loss should be identified and provided with psychological help. To do this, psychological counseling units of universities should be contacted. Trainings in loss-coping skills may be organized in order to help individuals who have experienced a loss to cope with it.

Resilience is presented as a source of resistance against stressful life events. Thus, individuals who encounter stressful events may be taught to deal with these. It is

likely to contribute to preventive mental health in this way. This study revealed that the difference between resilience and gender was not significant. It may be suggested to examine the effect of gender on resilience in different populations.

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