

Investigation of the Relationships between Optimism, Perceived Social Support, and Hope

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Introduction

Positive psychology is a field of psychology that is effective in many areas, such as making sense of life, increasing the effectiveness of one's personal life, and providing individual happiness (Avcı, 2009). Positive psychology is related to subjective experiences like well-being, satisfaction, gratification, hope, optimism, happiness, and flow (Lazarus, 2003). Flow theory states that an individual's happiness depends not on the events experienced but on how the individual interprets the events. Having an optimistic point of view toward life is one of the most important factors that will ensure the useful evaluation of one's circumstances (Csikszentmihalyi, 2017). Positive psychology aims to increase a person's awareness of positive emotions. The purpose of this awareness is to ensure that the individual is minimally affected by negativities, problems, and stressful situations (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

In positive psychology, which focuses on positive experiences and individual characteristics and facilitates their development, optimism is an important concept (Salsman et al., 2005; Duckworth et al., 2005). According to learned optimism theory, which expresses the concept of optimism as a form of attribution learned later, close relationships, business life, and a free time-based lifestyle comprise a happy life. Researchers have argued that discovering and strengthening individuals' abilities and competencies that need improvement is an important way to increase happiness (Seligman et al., 2006). It is possible for people to increase their positive feelings about the past, such as gratitude; positive feelings about the future, such as optimism and hope, and positive feelings toward the present moment, such as enjoying a situation (Seligman et al., 2004).

Optimism acts as a medium between environmental events and the individual's assessment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Although genetic factors also affect optimism, an individual can learn to make optimistic attributions with the influence of their social environment (Seligman et al., 2006). Scholars have stated that an individual's style of attribution and level of optimism are related (Taylor et al., 2015). Optimism is the belief that one will encounter positive results (Wrosh & Scheier, 2003). The concept of optimism, which is also defined as the expectation of positive results (Scheier & Carver, 1985), seems to be related to both physical and mental health (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Researchers have found that individuals with high optimism have low levels of cognitive distortion (Türküm, 2001) and anxiety (Catov et al., 2010) and have high levels of self-esteem (Bastianello et al., 2014) and psychological resilience (Ergün-Başak & Can, 2018). Optimistic individuals approach their lives positively (Wrosh & Scheier, 2003), have the skills to cope with stress (Avcı, 2009), think and hope that they will face good situations in the future (Carver & Scheier, 2002), and make positive internal attributions to positive events they experienced (Peterson, 1991). Research has shown that individual development is important for optimistic individuals (Seligman et al., 2006). Others have stated that individuals whose optimistic orientation is dominant have higher subjective well-being than those who are pessimistic in the face of stressful and negative situations (Scheier & Carver, 1993).

The current literature addresses the concept of optimism with variables such as happiness (Demir & Murat, 2017), subjective well-being (Eryılmaz & Atak, 2011), pessimism (Seligman, 2000), and hope (Kelberer et al., 2018; Alarcon et al., 2013). Other variables include personality (Asan, 2019), communication skills (Doğan, 2019), life satisfaction (Sapmaz & Doğan, 2012), values (Büyükadıgüzel & Traş, 2017), and social support (Ekas et al., 2010). Empirical findings suggest that getting more support from one's social network supports optimism (Vollmann et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2017).

Perceived social support expresses an individual's belief that they can get help or empathy when necessary. Another aspect of perceived social support is the extent to which a person is satisfied with the type or amount of support available (Sarason & Sarason, 1985). Scholars have argued that social support is perceived for the first time in an individual's life in their interaction with their parents, and a sense of acceptance is formed according to the nature of this interaction. The individual's need for acceptance and approval is shaped by their communication with others and expectations from them (Sarason et al., 1991). In addition, when individuals receive social support, their loyalty to groups improves (Traş & Güngör, 2011). Since social relationships can provide one with regular, positive, and calm experiences, some have argued that they directly affect a person's mood (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Perceived social support makes one feel valued and loved and that one is good at dealing with important people in one's life (Oktan, 2005).

Social support is effective in confronting and coping with negative experiences that one may encounter. Perceived social support protects a person against the negative effects of life (Mahon et al., 1998). Social support is also thought to affect individuals' problem-solving skills (Traş, 2013). Individuals who are deprived of social support or perceive their social support as low are more affected by a person who causes stress than by events that affect them negatively (Cohen, 2004). Hence, researchers have argued that social support affects social competence (Traş & Arslan, 2013). Types of social support may vary depending on the situation and the needs of the

recipient. In the literature, the effect of social support has been proven in different situations. Social support is emotionally based in connection with cognition (Lam, 2019). While the concept of perceived social support has been associated with positive variables such as physical and psychological well-being (Sumi, 1997), self-efficacy (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2016), and social competence (Zorlu-Yam & Tüzel-İşeri, 2019), it is also associated with negative variables such as stress (Çetinkaya & Korkmaz, 2019), anxiety, and depression (Applebaum et al., 2014). In addition, social support has been found to be an effective factor in improving quality of life (Applebaum et al., 2014) and compliance (Shelby et al., 2008). Individuals who have a high level of perceived social support and a low level of loneliness have high hopes (Edwards, 2009). Like social support, hope has been found to affect an individual's stress (Horton & Wallander, 2001).

Hope is a type of thinking that depends on individuals' capacity to think of different mental pathways toward the goals they want to achieve, to go to one of these pathways, and to motivate themselves to continue (Snyder, 2002). The concept of hope, which has positive psychological effects, has been found to support positive emotions and enjoyment from life (Şahin et al., 2012). Hopeful individuals believe that they can achieve their goals (Çetrez-İşcan & Malkoç, 2017), their life satisfaction is high (Ayan, 2017; Aydın, 2016), their optimism is high (Kardaş et al., 2019; Youssef & Luthans, 2007), and their attention to emotional information is higher than hopeless individuals (Kelberer et al., 2018).

The concept of hope denotes people's mental belief in their potential regarding the ways necessary to achieve their goals (Snyder, 2002). Researchers have found that individuals with high hope levels have high psychological well-being (Kocaman, 2019) and self-efficacy (Erdoğan, 2013), and their anxiety (Gonzales et al., 2016) and depression levels (Du et al., 2015) were found to be low. Based on the above literature, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between optimism and perceived social support and hope in teacher candidates.

Method

Research Model

In this study, the correlational research model was used. Correlational research provides important clues to identify causal relationships between variables and provides the basis for determining the predictor of the variable(s) (Shaughnessy et al., 2012). Optimism is the dependent variable in this study, and social support and hope are the independent variables.

Study Group

The study group consisted of teacher candidates studying at various universities in a city in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey. A total of 435 people, including 331 females (76.1%) and 104 males (23.9%), constituted the study group. The age range of the study group was between 18 and 30, while the average age was 21.

Data Collection Tools

This study used the Life Orientation Test to measure optimism, the Perceived Social Support Scale to measure perceived social support, and the Adult Trait Hope Scale to measure hope levels. In addition, the researchers prepared a Personal Information Form to obtain information about the participants' gender, age, perceived income level, and perceived parental attitude.

The Life Orientation Test

The Life Orientation Test was developed by Scheier and Carver (1987) to measure individuals' optimism and was translated into Turkish by Aydın and Tezer (1991). The test has 12 items and uses a 5-point Likert scale. The test-retest reliability coefficient was found to be .77. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .72 (Aydın & Tezer, 1991). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be .76.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

This scale, developed by Zimet et al. (1988) and translated into Turkish by Eker et al. (2001), consists of 12 items that use a 7-point Likert scale. Correlations of the total score of the scale with other scales vary between .45 and .73. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .89 (Eker et al., 2001). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .91$.

The Adult Trait Hope Scale

Snyder et al. (1991) developed this scale, and Tarhan and Bacanlı (2015) translated it into Turkish. It consists of 12 items using an 8-point Likert scale. The scale has a two-factor structure divided into pathways thinking and agency thinking. In addition, the scale can be evaluated using the total score. According to DFA results, the fit index values of the scale were GFI = .96, AGFI = .92, RMR = .08, NNFI = .94, RFI = .90, CFI = .96, and RMSEA = .077. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .83$ (Tarhan & Bacanlı, 2015). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .82$.

Personal Information Form

This form was prepared by the researchers to determine the gender, age, perceived income level, and perceived parental attitude of the participants.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process was carried out in university classrooms in the fall semester of the 2020–2021 academic year. The researchers carried out the application of the research, explaining the aim of it to the participants, introducing the relevant scales, and stating that participation was voluntary and that participants could stop completing the scale form at any time. The application took approximately 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

SPSS 21.0 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Pearson's correlation coefficient, and multiple linear regression analysis were performed. Before proceeding to the analyses, the researchers extracted missing and outlier

data. Thirty-nine scales that were incomplete and had outliers were removed from the dataset. Outliers were extracted by looking at the Mahalanobis distance, Cook’s distance, and leverage values (Kannan & Manoj, 2015). The researchers determined the skewness and kurtosis coefficients to examine the normal distribution property of the scores obtained after the data were sorted out. Table 1 shows the skewness and kurtosis values of the data.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Optimism	435	18.05	5.76	-.348	-.005
Perceived Social Support	435	65.95	15.01	-.901	.363
Hope	435	48.37	7.90	-.524	.121

As Table 1 shows, the skewness and kurtosis coefficient of the optimism (Life Orientation Test), perceived social support, and hope scales were between -1 and +1. If the skewness and kurtosis coefficients are in the range of -1 to +1, one can assume a normal distribution feature (Hair et al., 2006). Therefore, in this case, the data was normally distributed. Table 1 shows that the optimism mean score was $\bar{X} = 18.05$, the perceived social support mean score was $\bar{X} = 65.95$, and the hope mean score was $\bar{X} = 48.37$.

Results

Table 2
T-test results teacher candidates’ optimism scores according to gender

Variables	Gender	N	\bar{X}	SD	t	P
Optimism	Female	331	18.11	5.67	.385	.701
	Male	104	17.86	5.38		

As Table 2 shows, teacher candidates’ optimism average scores did not differ significantly according to gender ($p > .05$). According to the findings, the average optimism score for female teacher candidates was $\bar{X} = 18.11$, and for male teacher candidates, it was ($\bar{X} = 17.86$).

Table 3
N, \bar{X} , SD values of teacher candidates’ optimism scores according to perceived income level variable

Variable	Perceived Income Level	N	\bar{X}	SD
Optimism	(1) Low	34	15.47	5.47
	(2) Medium	379	18.15	5.65
	(3) High	22	20.40	6.21
	Total	435	18.05	5.76

Table 3 shows that teacher candidates with the highest perceived income average had the highest optimism mean score ($\bar{X} = 20.40$), followed by candidates whose perceived income level was ($\bar{X} = 18.15$) and low ($\bar{X} = 15.47$).

Table 4

One-way ANOVA results regarding the differentiation of teacher candidates' optimism according to perceived income level

Variable		Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Squares	F	P	η^2	difference
Optimism	Between groups	352.460	2	176.230	5.419	.005*	.02	2,3>1
	Within groups	14048.216	432	332.519				
	Total	14400.676	434					

* $p < .01$, 1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high

Table 4 indicates that participants' optimism differed significantly according to perceived income level ($p < .01$). According to the Scheffe test to find the difference between the groups, the optimism scores of participants whose perceived income level was medium or high were significantly higher than those whose perceived income level was low.

Table 5

N, \bar{X} , SD values regarding the optimism scores of teacher candidates according to perceived parental attitude

Variable	Parental Attitude	N	\bar{X}	SD
Optimism	(1) Nonpermissive	42	17.50	4.89
	(2) Repressive	21	13.80	6.74
	(3) Democratic	155	19.00	5.49
	(4) Protector	217	17.89	5.82
	Total	435	18.05	5.76

As Table 5 shows, participants who perceived their parents' attitude as democratic ($\bar{X} = 19.00$) had the highest mean scores in optimism. Then, teacher candidates who perceived their parents' attitude as protective ($\bar{X} = 17.89$), nonpermissive ($\bar{X} = 17.50$), and repressive ($\bar{X} = 13.80$) followed.

Table 6

One-way ANOVA results regarding the differentiation of teacher candidates' optimism according to perceived parental attitude

Variables		Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Squares	F	P	η^2	difference
Optimism	Between groups	537.382	3	179.127	5.569	.001**	.03	3,4>2
	Within groups	13863.294	431	32.165				
	Total	14400.676	434					

** $p < .01$

1 = nonpermissive, 2 = repressive, 3 = democratic, 4 = protective

Table 6 reveals that optimism scores differed significantly according to perceived parental attitude ($p < .01$). According to the Scheffe test to find the difference between the groups, participants who had democratic or protective parents were significantly more optimistic than ones who had repressive parents.

Table 7

Correlations between variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Optimism	-		
2. Perceived Social Support	.31**	-	
3. Hope	.48**	.34**	-

**p<.01

As Table 7 indicates, the researchers found a positive correlation between participants’ optimism and perceived social support ($r = .31, p < .01$). Similarly, we found a positive significant relationship between optimism and hope levels ($r = .48, p < .01$).

Table 8

Multiple regression analysis results regarding the prediction of optimism

Variable	B	SHB	β	T	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-1.156	1.592		-.727		
Perceived Social Support	.062	.017	.163	3.687**	.882	1.134
Hope	.312	.032	.428	9.693**	.882	1.134

$R = .51, R^2 = .26, \Delta R^2 = .25, F(2-432) = 74.923, p < .001$ Durbin-Watson = 2.038 **p < .001

Before performing regression analysis, the researchers examined postulates required for analysis. One of the postulates was that there was no auto-correlation between error terms. For this purpose, we calculated the Durbin-Watson coefficient. A coefficient between 1 and 3 indicates that there is no auto-correlation (Field, 2018). In this study, the Durbin-Watson coefficient was 2.038. Another postulate was that there was no multicollinearity problem between the variables. For this, the tolerance value should be greater than .10, and the VIF value should be less than 5 (Daoud, 2017). As Table 8 shows, there was no multicollinearity problem between independent variables (perceived social support and hope). The relevant values show that the research data aligns with the postulates of multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 8 displays the regression analysis results for predicting optimism according to the perceived social support and hope variables in the teacher candidates. The variables of hope and perceived social support predicted teacher candidates’ optimism significantly ($R^2 = .26, F(2-432) = 74.923, p < .001$). According to the standardized regression coefficient (β), the strongest predictor variable was hope ($p < .001, \beta = .42$). In addition, the perceived level of social support predicted optimism ($p < .001, \beta = .16$). Hope and perceived social support variables together explained 26% of the total variance related to optimism.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that optimism did not differ significantly according to gender. Johnson (2018) also found that optimism did not differ significantly by gender. Other studies have found the same result (Soylu, 2019; Doğan, 2019; Demir & Murat, 2017; Hırlak et al., 2017; Şahin, 2015; Türküm, 2001). However, some studies have found that optimism differs by gender in favor of males (Cabras & Mondo, 2018; Sivri, 2019; Ayan, 2017; Puskar et al., 2010), while others have found that females were more optimistic than men (Hinz et al., 2017). Gender stereotypes are based not on the individual’s characteristics or abilities, but on the over-generalized perceptions of one gender or another (Wienclaw, 2011). The reason for not finding a

common result in the literature may be due to the different gender stereotypes of the research groups.

We found that optimism differed significantly according to participants' perceived income level. Those who perceived their income level as medium or high were more optimistic than those who perceived it as low. Scholars have argued that there may be a reciprocal and cyclical relationship between optimism and income level (Carver et al., 2010). In a study by Heinonen et al. (2006), individuals with lower income levels in childhood and adulthood had lower levels of optimism than ones who had middle and high income levels. Similar to this finding, individuals with low family income were found to have high pessimism (Ayan, 2017). However, researchers have also found that optimism does not differ according to income (Soylu, 2019; Hırlak et al., 2015).

Our participants' optimism varied significantly according to their perceived parental attitudes. Those who perceived their parental attitude as democratic or protective had higher optimism scores than those who thought that they had nonpermissive parental attitudes. Other scholars (Demir & Murat, 2017) have also found that optimism differs according to perceived parental attitude; the optimism of those who perceive a democratic family attitude seems to be higher than those who perceive a nonpermissive family attitude. Another study found a negative relationship between optimism and nonpermissive rearing, and a positive relationship was found between optimism and democratic rearing attitude (Khan & Naeem, 2012). The relationship of parenting styles with optimism is supported by strong evidence, suggesting that family relationships play an important role in optimism development (Zanon et al., 2014).

In this study, there was a significant positive relationship between optimism and perceived social support. In addition, perceived social support was a significant predictor of optimism. In another study, there was also a significant positive relationship between social support and optimism (Applebaum et al., 2014). Similar studies coincide with the findings of this study (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2016; Applebaum et al., 2014; Dawson & Pooley, 2013; Vacek et al., 2010; Ren, et al., 2016, Ekas et al., 2010; Shelby et al., 2008; Ferreira & Sherman, 2007; Ah et al., 2007; Sumi, 1997). In some studies, no significant relationship was found between optimism and social support perception (Mosher et al., 2006). Scholars have argued that individuals with optimism assess behaviors and persons positively compared with pessimists and that social interaction partners generally respond more positively to optimists than to pessimists (Vollmann et al., 2007). In this context, it can be said that the related literature supports this research.

The current results showed a significant relationship between optimism and hope levels. Hope is also a meaningful predictor of optimism. In a study conducted by Bryant and Cvenegros (2004), a significant positive relationship was found between hope and optimism. The result of this research is parallel with similar studies (Kardaş et al., 2019; Kelberer et al., 2018; Strauss et al., 2015; Buyukgoze-Kavas, 2014; Dursun, 2012; Wright et al., 2011; Youssef & Luthans, 2007; Carjaval et al., 1998). Others have found a significant positive relationship between the optimism and hope levels of adolescents (Çalışkan & Uzunkol, 2018; Vacek et al., 2010). In addition, one study found a significant negative relationship between optimism and hopelessness (Applebaum et al., 2014). Others have shown that optimism is significantly related to hope (Eichner et al., 2014).

Research Limitations

The study group of this research consisted of teacher candidates between the ages of 18 and 30 who were continuing their education in a city in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey. Individuals' optimism levels have been shown to vary according to age and culture (Bennett, 2011; Palgi et al., 2011; You et al., 2009; Ji et al., 2004). In this respect, it can be thought that the study group of the research constitutes a limitation.

Recommendations

In this study, the researchers tried to measure optimism, perceived social support, and hope with the scales used. Future research could use qualitative methods to obtain detailed information about the relationships between optimism, perceived social support, and hope.

The working group of this research was limited to teacher candidates. Subsequent research can be done on different age groups, such as advanced adulthood.

In this study, a significant relationship was found between participants' optimism and their perception of social support. Social support can be considered a mechanism that mediates the relationship between optimism and health (Vollmann et al., 2007). To improve the optimism of teacher candidates, individual and group counseling services can be provided in university psychological counseling centers to increase social support.

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