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Ayrahat Hudaynazarova 
Necmettin Erbakan University, Türkiye

Selahattin Avşaroğlu 
Necmettin Erbakan University, Türkiye

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Investigation of Ostracism (Social Exclusion) and Forgiveness Levels of Adolescents with Positive and Negative Life Experiences

Ayrahat Hudaýnazarova, Selahattin Avşarođlu

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between positive and negative childhood experiences, forgiveness and social exclusion experiences of individuals in adolescence. The research was carried out using the relational survey technique, one of the quantitative research methods. The participants of the study consisted of middle school and high school students (n=669), 354 girls and 315 boys, aged between 11 and 17, in the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. The data collection tools employed within the study are: Personal Information Form, Adolescent Ostracism (Social exclusion) Scale to measure the social exclusion levels of the participants, Childhood Happiness/Peace Memories Scale to measure their positive experience levels, Childhood Experiences Scale to measure their negative experience levels, and Forgiveness Scale for Adolescents to measure their tendency to forgive. For the analysis of the data, SPSS 26.00 package program was utilized and descriptive analysis, correlation, and multiple regression analysis were conducted. As a result of the data analysis, it was observed that exclusion dimension within the social exclusion scale has a higher mean score than the disregarding dimension, exclusion dimension features higher significance, the social exclusion experiences of the adolescents differ significantly in favor of the female adolescents in the neglected dimension.

Introduction

Traumatic experiences early in life, which are critical for the development of healthy personality and psychopathology, are important life events with short and long-term effects. Although traumatic experiences affect all age groups, especially children and adolescents, people with disabilities and the elderly are seen as more risky groups in the face of traumatic stress. Neglect and abuse are among childhood traumatic experiences (Gülođlu, Kararımk, & Emir, 2016). Childhood trauma is defined as physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect and other forms of abuse that negatively affect the physical health, safety of life, physical development, mental health and development of children between the ages of 0-18 and affect trust and bonding in interpersonal relationships (World Health Organization, 2016). All of these traumatic experiences are defined as adverse childhood experiences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998). It has been observed that adolescents having had negative experiences in childhood, having been exposed to negative experiences such as social exclusion and rejection, and as a result,

experiencing negative emotions such as anger and anxiety and coping with these emotions are associated with forgiveness (Garthe & Guz, 2019; Kandemiri, 2019). Forgiveness appears to regulate the relationship between social exclusion and trait anger (Li, Zhang, Zhao, & Yu, 2020).

The transition from adolescence to early adulthood is a challenging time for many young people. Although avoiding problematic behaviors remains important during this period, recent studies have emphasized the importance of positive development and positive social outcomes (Kosterman, Mason, Haggerty, Hawkins, Spoth, & Redmond, 2011, p.180). The enduring role of childhood life experiences on lifelong development has been proven by research, both in terms of the negative effects of early adversity on long-term maladjustment and the positive effects of positive early experiences on well-being in adulthood (Narayan, Rivera, Bernstein, Harris, & Lieberman, 2018). Various studies have proven that negative experiences in childhood lead to a number of physiological and psychological health problems in young adulthood and later in life (Felitti et al., 1998). Numerous studies have shown that positive and negative childhood experiences have a significant impact on factors such as whether a person experiences many mental and psychiatric problems, even physical illnesses, or maintains lifelong well-being (Oh, Jerman, Marques, Koita, Ipsen, Purewal, & Bucci, 2018; Gündüz, Yaşar, Gündoğmuş, Savran, & Konuk, 2018; Rokita, Dauvermann, & Donohoe, 2018; Miller, Cheung, Novilla, & Crandall, 2020; Daines, Hansen, Novilla, & Crandall, 2021; Lopez, Ruiz, Rovnaghi, Tam, Hiscox, Gotlib, . . . and Anand, 2021;).

Social exclusion, another variable used in the study, can be categorized as a negative experience that can have devastating effects in childhood and adolescence. Conflicts and feelings of hurt are inevitable parts of human interpersonal relationships. When people are offended, their first reaction is often to retaliate and take revenge. However, giving in to these impulses can have negative consequences for individuals as well as relationships (Van Der Wal, Karremans, & Cillessen, 2017). In such situations, the individual sometimes holds others responsible, and sometimes looks for the fault in himself/herself and holds himself/herself responsible for what caused the outcome. Both positive development and negative experiences are natural in an individual's relationships (Kaya, 2019). Therefore, since positive and negative childhood experiences affect the individual's lifelong health and well-being, the importance of early intervention emerges. For this reason, it is envisaged that it is important to carry out preventive and protective interventions in order for individuals to cope with the effects of adverse childhood experiences in a functional way and to protect their health.

With the development of positive psychology, it is seen that factors that protect the health of individuals come to the forefront. One of the popular concepts of positive psychology is forgiveness. There are various studies supporting forgiveness as a protective factor (Lawler-Row & Piferi, 2006; Çardak, 2012; Van Der Wal et al., 2017; Asıcı, 2019, Karataş & Kıvanç, 2021). Forgiveness can be expressed as a skill that individuals can use to maintain their psychological resilience in situations such as being offended or hurting the other person. When the studies conducted in Turkey are examined, it is seen that there is a limited number of studies despite the increasing interest in the concept of forgiveness in recent years. As mentioned, many studies have shown that childhood psychological traumas, which are accepted as negative life events at an early age, continue throughout life and have very destructive consequences, are associated with the variable of forgiveness, which is thought to have a

restorative and healing effect (Korkmaz, 2019). With the results to be obtained from this study, it is aimed to make sense of the effects of positive and negative childhood experiences and to contribute to a healthy transformation by utilizing the positive effects of forgiveness in coping with the consequences of negative experiences until adulthood. In the light of the information described above, it was aimed to examine the relationship between positive and negative childhood experiences of adolescents and their experiences of forgiveness and social exclusion. In this aim, answers to the following sub-problems were sought:

- Is there a relationship between adolescents' experiences of social exclusion, tendency to forgive, negative childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences?
- Do positive and negative childhood experiences of adolescents predict their forgiveness levels?

Method

In this part of the study, the study design, population and sample, data collection tools, data collection and data analysis are given.

Research Model

This research was conducted using the relational survey technique, one of the quantitative research methods. Survey models are research approaches that aim to describe a past or present situation as it exists. The event, individual or object that is the subject of the research is tried to be defined within its own conditions and as it is. The relational survey model is a research model that aims to determine the presence and/or degree of co-variance between two or more variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Karasar, 2005; Akman & Alagöz, 2019). Since the purpose of using the relational survey technique in this study is to determine the levels of relationship between social exclusion, positive and negative experiences experienced in childhood and forgiveness for adolescents, this model was preferred.

Participants of the Research

The sample consisted of 354 female and 315 male (n= 669) middle and high school students, aged between 11 and 17 years, who continued their education in the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year in Çumra district of Konya province. Convenient sampling method was used to select the individuals to participate in the study group.

Data Collection Tools

In the study, "Personal Information Form" prepared by the researcher as a data collection tool, "Ostracism (Social Exclusion) Scale for Adolescents" developed by Gilman, Carter-Sowell, DeWall, Adams, and Carboni (2013) and adapted into Turkish by Akin, Uysal, and Akin (2016), "Forgiveness Scale for Adolescents" developed by Asıcı and Karaca (2018) to measure adolescents' tendency to forgive, Gilbert, Cheung, The "Childhood Experiences Scale" developed by Grandfield, Campey, and Irons (2003) and adapted into Turkish by Akin, Uysal, and Çitemel

(2013), and the "Childhood Happiness/Happiness Memories Scale" developed by Richter, Gilbert, and McEwan (2009) and adapted into Turkish by Akın, Uysal, and Çitemel (2013) were used to measure the positive childhood experiences of adolescents.

Collection of Data

After determining the data collection tools to be used in the study, the necessary permissions were obtained from the researchers who developed or adapted the measurement tools via e-mail. Necessary ethical permissions were obtained from Necmettin Erbakan University Institute of Educational Sciences, Necmettin Erbakan University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research Ethics Committee and Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education of the Ministry of National Education. After obtaining the necessary permissions, the study was conducted between 20.09.2021-30.11.2021 with secondary and high school students living in Çumra district of Konya province and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Before the application, the participants were informed about the purpose and importance of the research and were asked to answer the scales sincerely. The scales were administered to the participants face-to-face by the researcher. The administration of the scales varied between approximately 15-20 minutes. 21 of the 690 replicated application forms could not be processed due to incomplete completion. At the end of the data collection process, a total of 669 data ready for analysis were obtained.

Data Analysis

Correlation and multiple linear regression analysis were performed using SPSS 26.00 package program. Before the analysis, it was checked whether the data were normally distributed, and it was understood that the data showed normal distribution according to the kurtosis-skewness value (George & Mallery, 2003). It was determined that the necessary assumptions (homogeneity, linearity, multicollinearity problem) were met in multiple regression analysis. The "r" values indicating the level of relationship were interpreted as low if less than 0.29, medium if between 0.30-0.69, and high if between 0.70-1.00.

Results

In this section, the findings obtained within the framework of the problem and sub-problems of the study are presented.

Findings on the Relationship between Adolescents' Experiences of Social Exclusion, Tendency to Forgive, Positive and Negative Childhood Experiences

The findings on the relationship between adolescents' experiences of social exclusion, tendency to forgive, negative childhood experiences and positive experiences are given in Table 1. As seen in Table 1, there is a positive and medium level significant relationship between the scale of negative childhood experiences and memories of worthlessness ($r=.55, p<.01$), and a positive and high-level significant relationship between the sub-

dimensions of subjugating memories ($r=.88, p<.01$) and threatening memories ($r=.89, p<.01$). There is a positive and low-level significant relationship between the social exclusion scale and the sub-dimension of being ignored ($r=.25, p<.01$), and a positive and high-level significant relationship between the sub-dimension of exclusion ($r=.74, p<.01$). There is a positive and highly significant relationship between the forgiveness scale for adolescents and the components of forgiveness ($r=.84, p<.01$), revenge taking ($r=.71, p<.01$) and anger maintenance ($r=.75, p<.01$) sub-dimensions, and a positive and moderately significant relationship between the empathizing sub dimension ($r=.51, p<.01$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients of Dimensions/Subdimensions

Dimension/ Subdimension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1												
2	.551**	1											
3	.880**	.256**	1										
4	.887**	.295**	.691**	1									
5	-.599**	-.468**	-.479**	-.498**	1								
6	-.013	-.126**	.022	.027	.203**	1							
7	.525**	.295**	.482**	.442**	-.518**	.250**	1						
8	-.377**	-.320**	-.315**	-.282**	.546**	.740**	-.467**	1					
9	-.099*	-.100**	-.035	-.113**	.160**	.007	-.020	.020	1				
10	.070	-.060	.127**	.056	.062	.102**	.125**	.007	.804**	1			
11	-.211**	-.078*	-.165**	-.232**	.173**	-.101**	-.120**	-.009	.712**	.259**	1		
12	-.191**	-.023	-.176**	-.212**	.139**	-.122**	-.147**	-.009	.757**	.340**	.692**	1	
13	-.027	-.186**	.050	.007	.142**	.133**	.015	.112**	.584**	.509**	.202**	.178**	1

1- Negative childhood experiences scale (General); 2- Memories of worthlessness;3-Subjugating memories; 4- Threatening memories; 5- Positive childhood experiences scale (General); 6- Social exclusion scale (General); 7- Ignoring; 8- Ostracization; 9- Forgiveness scale for adolescents (General); 10- Components of forgiveness; 11- Don't take revenge; 12- Sustaining anger; 13- Empathize

While there was a negative and moderately significant relationship between adolescents' negative childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences ($r=-.59, p<.01$), there was a negative and low-level significant relationship between their tendency to forgive ($r=-.09, p<.05$). However, there is no statistically significant relationship between negative childhood experiences and social exclusion experiences ($r=-.01, p>.05$). On the other hand, there is a positive and low-level significant relationship between adolescents' positive childhood experiences and social exclusion experiences ($r=.20, p<.01$) and forgiveness tendencies ($r=.16, p<.01$).

Findings on the Power of Negative Experiences in Adolescence to Predict Individuals' Forgiveness Levels

When Table 2 is analyzed, it is seen that threatening memories and positive childhood experiences It was found to have a low and significant relationship with the tendency to forgive ($R=.210, R^2=.044, p<.05$). Accordingly, threatening memories and positive childhood experiences explain 2% of the total variance in adolescents' tendency to forgive. When the standardized (β) coefficient and t values are examined, it can be said that positive childhood

experiences and threatening memories are significant predictors of adolescents' tendency to forgive, respectively. On the other hand, memories of worthlessness ($t=-.866$, $p>.05$), subjugating memories ($t=1.787$, $p>.05$), being ignored ($t=1.415$, $p>.05$) and ostracization ($t=-1.603$, $p>.05$) were not significant predictors of adolescents' forgiveness tendencies.

Table 2. Regression Results Regarding the Prediction Levels of Variables on Adolescents' Tendency to Forgive

Variable	B	e	β	t	p
Stable	47.573	5.822		8.172	.000
Memories of worthlessness	-.206	.238	-.038	-.866	.387
Subjugating memories	.325	.182	.098	1.787	.074
Threatening memories	-.400	.187	-.118	-2.145	.032*
Ignoring	.250	.177	.069	1.415	.158
Ostracization	-.191	.119	-.076	-1.603	.109
Positive childhood experiences	.194	.051	.208	3.831	.000*

* $p<.05$

Discussion and Conclusion

There is a significant relationship between adolescents' experiences of social exclusion, tendency to forgive, negative and positive childhood experiences in the negative childhood experiences scale and memories of worthlessness positively and at a moderate level, subjugating memories, and threatening memories sub-dimensions positively and at a high level. There is a positive and low-level significant relationship between the social exclusion scale and the sub-dimension of disregard, and a positive and high-level significant relationship between the sub-dimension of exclusion. There is a positive and highly significant relationship between the forgiveness scale for adolescents and the components of forgiveness, revenge taking and anger maintenance sub-dimensions, and a positive and moderately significant relationship between the empathizing sub-dimension.

When the related literature was examined, no study was found that investigated the variables of positive childhood experiences, negative childhood experiences, social exclusion and forgiveness together. However, there are some studies examining the relationship between forgiveness and social exclusion, positive and negative experiences. Zhang, Li, Shao, Hales, Williams, and Teng (2019) stated in their study that the individual exposed to exclusion produces anger. They also stated that when individuals are excluded from society, those with high forgiveness experience lower levels of anger, while those with low forgiveness experience high levels of anger. According to Worthington's forgiveness model (Worthington & Wade, 1999), forgiveness can facilitate the reduction or replacement of momentary angry emotions with positive emotions (McCullough et al., 2003; Berry et al., 2005) and is expressed as the ability to cope with emotion-focused situations. Li, Zhang, Zhao, and Yu (2020) stated that there is a high relationship between anger, aggression and social exclusion. Similar results have been observed in many studies (Shorey et al., 2011; Wilkowski and Robinson 2010; Zhao et al., 2015). However, there are results that there is no relationship between social exclusion and aggression (Baumeister et al., 2002; Buckley et al., 2004; Twenge et al., 2001; Akman, Karaaslan & Bayram, 2022). Wang, Tu, Hu, Luo, and Zhao (2021) concluded

that perceived ostracism and self-evaluation in adolescents mediate the link between psychological maltreatment in childhood and depression in parallel. In Bağır's (2020) study, a moderate relationship was found between the general score of social exclusion and its sub-dimensions, the dimension of being ignored, while a very high-level relationship was found with the dimension of exclusion. Çapan and Arıcıoğlu (2014) found that there is a significant positive relationship between social exclusion, being ignored and the experience of exclusion. As a result, it can be said that the research in the literature supports the results obtained in this study.

While there was a negative and moderately significant relationship between adolescents' negative childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences, there was a negative and low-level significant relationship between their tendency to forgive. However, there is no significant relationship between negative childhood experiences and social exclusion experiences. On the other hand, there is a positive and low-level significant relationship between adolescents' positive childhood experiences, social exclusion experiences and forgiveness tendencies. When the studies conducted were examined, Telef (2021) reported a significant positive relationship between positive childhood experiences and school satisfaction.

Threatening memories and positive childhood experiences were found to have a low and significant relationship with adolescents' tendency to forgive. Accordingly, threatening memories and positive childhood experiences explain 2% of the total variance in adolescents' tendency to forgive. It can be said that positive childhood experiences and threatening memories are significant predictors of adolescents' tendency to forgive. On the other hand, memories of worthlessness, subjugating memories, being ignored and ostracization were not found to be significant predictors of adolescents' forgiveness tendencies.

When the related literature is examined; Arslan (2017) obtained results consistent with the findings obtained in their study. They stated that there was a high level of negative relationship between the schemas developed as a result of the happy and peaceful memories gained during childhood and forgiveness. In the study conducted by Lawler-Row and Piferi (2006), it is seen that there is a significant relationship between the forgiveness levels of individuals who had negative experiences during adolescence.

In their study, Güloğlu, Kararımak, and Emirali (2016) revealed that individuals who were exposed to trauma in childhood had difficulty in forgiving themselves, others and the situation, and also had lower levels of spirituality. There are many studies supporting the research findings (Snyder & Heinze, 2005; Kandasamy, Chaturvedi, & Desai, 2011; Çabuk, 2015; Deniz, 2006). It can be said that individuals who have experienced enough positive childhood experiences have developed the ability to tolerate negative experiences.

Recommendations

In this study, it was concluded that adolescents' experiences of exclusion were at a higher level compared to their experiences of being ignored. It is recommended that school counselors identify the factors affecting adolescents' experiences of exclusion and implement a psychoeducation program to improve problem solving and communication skills. As a result of this research, it is seen that female adolescents experience more neglect than

male adolescents. There may be cliques among individuals during adolescence. In this process, it is recommended to implement group guidance activities related to exclusion. In the light of the results obtained in this study, it was concluded that the lower the level of mother's education, the higher the level of revenge taking of adolescents. In some cases, revenge may be a behavior that justice-seeking individuals may choose. However, it is important to recognize forgiveness as a positive coping skill in the face of the event/situation and to be empathetic towards the other party. In this case, it is important for individuals to recognize forgiveness of self, others and the situation. It is recommended that school counselors implement a group guidance or psychoeducation program on forgiveness for students.

Notes

This study is derived from Ayarahat Hudaynazarova's master's thesis.

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Author Information

Ayrahat Hudaynazarova

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8391-4286>


Necmettin Erbakan University

Ahmet Kelesoglu Faculty of Education

Türkiye

Contact e-mail: ayrahat.hudaynazarova@gmail.com

Selahattin Avcıaroğlu

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0953-2922>

Necmettin Erbakan University

Ahmet Kelesoglu Faculty of Education

Türkiye