The Effect of Perceived Social Support on the Academic Achievement of Health College Students

Sağlık Yüksekokulu Öğrencilerinin Algıladıkları Sosyal Desteğin Akademik Başarılarına Etkisi

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SUMMARY

Objectives: This study aims to analyze the effect of perceived social support level on the academic achievement of health college students.

Methods: The research sample consisted of 411 students: 140 nursing students, 157 midwifery students and 114 emergency and disaster management students from a health college of a national university. A questionnaire prepared by the researchers and the Perceived Social Support Scale-R were used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions about the students' socio-demographic characteristics, weighted grade point averages, friendships, and school and family lives. The findings were analyzed using a statistical package program.

Results: The students' grade point average were found to be 2.68 (on a scale of 4.00), and their perceived social support point average was found to be 128.64 (on a scale of 150). A weak positive relation was found between the perceived social support levels and academic achievement. The social support levels of the females, the students without psychological problems, the students who are pleased with their place of residence and the students in good economic circumstances were higher. The weighted grade point averages of these groups were higher: nursing students, seniors, vocational health high school graduates, students who graduated from high school with excellent grades, students who perceive themselves as academically successful and students with regular study habits.

Conclusion: This study identified the individual, educational and familial factors that affect academic achievement and social support perception and uses them to make recommendations based on them.

Keywords: Academic achievement; health college; perceived social support.

ÖZET

Amaç: *Sağlık yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin sosyal destek ve akademik başarılarını etkileyen faktörleri belirlemek ve algılanan sosyal desteğin akademik başarıya etkisini incelemektir.*

Gereç ve Yöntem: *Araştırmanın örneklemi bir devlet üniversitesine bağlı sağlık yüksekokulunda öğrenim gören 140 hemşirelik, 157 ebelik ve 114 acil yardım afet yönetimi bölümü öğrencisi olmak üzere toplam 411 öğrenci oluşturdu. Veri toplama aracı olarak, araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan anket formu ve Yıldırım (2004) tarafından geliştirilen Algılanan Sosyal Destek Ölçeği-R kullanıldı. Anket formu; öğrencilerin sosyo-demografik özellikleri, Ağırlıklı Genel Not Ortalaması, arkadaş ilişkileri, okul ve aile yaşantılarına yönelik toplam 21 sorudan oluşmaktaydı. Bulgular, istatistik paket programında analiz edildi.*

Bulgular: *Öğrencilerin akademik başarı not ortalamasının 2.68 (4.00 puan üzerinden) olduğu; algılanan sosyal destek puan ortalamasının 128.64 (150 puan üzerinden) olduğu belirlendi. Algılanan sosyal destek düzeyi ve akademik başarı arasında pozitif yönde zayıf derecede ilişki bulundu. Kadınlar, psikolojik sorun yaşamayanlar, kaldığı yerden memnun olan ve ekonomik durumunun iyi düzeyde olduğunu ifade eden öğrencilerin sosyal destek düzeyi daha yüksekti. Hemşirelik öğrencileri, son sınıfta okuyanlar, sağlık meslek lisesinden mezun olanlar, liseden pekiyi dereceyle mezun olanlar, akademik olarak kendini başarılı algılayanlar ve düzenli ders çalışma alışkanlığı olan öğrencilerin ağırlıklı genel not ortalaması daha yüksekti.*

Sonuç: *Çalışmamızda akademik başarı ve sosyal destek algısını etkileyen bireysel, eğitsel ve ailesel faktörler belirlenmiş ve bunlara yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur.*

Anahtar sözcükler: *Akademik başarı; sağlık yüksekokulu; algılanan sosyal destek.*

Introduction

During their university education, young people socialize, try to become independent and adapt to a new environment.

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Their most important sources of social support are parents and friends. Determining their social support levels, informing them about new sources of support and identifying how they rely on support for problem solving are important.[1–3]

Social support refers to mutual interaction among people. It is a dynamic event affected by the characteristics of individuals, the nature of their relationships, and social and cultural situations.[4] Social support means having people to consult when needed, receiving moral and material aid and being satisfied with one's relationships.[3,5–7] People with strong social support adapt to stress and cope with psychological problems more easily.[8] Perceived social support is the cognitive perception of reliable relationships with others and their support. In the broadest sense, it is satisfaction with re-

lationships. Provided social support, on the other hand, is the amount of social support obtained from others.[9,10]

Parents, siblings, spouses, lovers, friends, teachers, relatives, neighbors, and experts are important sources of social support in the individual's life. The important sources of social support for students are listed as family, friends and teachers. Relationships are stated between social support and academic achievement, and coping skills and social skills in previous studies.[4,10,11]

Health college students encounter many stressful situations in hospitals that constitute a part of their education in addition to the problems they have in university. They are also sources of social support for patients and patients' relatives while communicating them. Psychological and physical health of the students in these colleges is especially important in this respect. The students also should be supported by guidance/counseling units when they have problems.[12] Studies showed that the students receiving the required support from their families and friends would cope with the problems that threaten their psychology such as depression, anxiety, stress etc. and would be more successful in their professions,[2,6] and that the students receiving support from their families, friends and teachers solve their problems allowing it to grow and are more successful in their lessons.[8] Nurses should be preferred to work in guidance unit and be community mental health nurses or specially educated in this field. Nurses have plenty of responsibilities in terms of counseling and education or providing social support. This study aims to analyze the effect of perceived social support level on academic achievements of health college students. The results of this study are considered to be an important data source for the guidance-counseling, which is an important role of especially psychiatric nurses.

The questions of this study are:

a) Does the perceived social support level of students affect academic achievement?

b) What are the socio-demographic characteristics that affect the academic achievement and social support levels of students?

Material and Method

This is a descriptive and cross-sectional field study. The universe of the research consisted of 504 students: 185 nursing students, 185 midwifery students and 134 emergency and disaster management students studying at the health college of a public university in the 2010–2011 academic year. The entire universe was accepted as research sample in the study. Although the entire sample was reached, 93 students either did not want to participate in the study or did not answer all the questions on the questionnaire. They were not included

in the study. The research sample consisted of 411 students (85% of the universe): 140 nursing students, 157 midwifery students and 114 emergency and disaster management (EDM) students.

Data Collection Tools

A questionnaire based on the researchers' experience and the relevant literature[2,4,6,13] and the Perceived Social Support Scale-R[7] were used for data collection.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire includes 21 questions on the students' socio-demographic characteristics (gender, family type, place of residence, satisfaction with place of residence, economic status, age, health status), educational life (department, year, high school, high school grades, regular study habits, study methods, perception of academic success in), friendships, and school and family lives.

Perceived Social Support Scale-R (PSSS-R): This scale, which was revised by Yıldırım (2004),[7] consists of 50 statements. It indicates individuals' perceived levels of social support from their families, friends and teachers. The three sub-scales of PSSS-R are: FAS=Family Support, FRS=Friend Support, and TES=Teacher Support. Yıldırım (2004) found Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of .93 for the entire scale (PSSS), .94 for the FAS sub-scale, .91 for the FRS sub-scale and .93 for the TES sub-scale in this study. The reliability coefficients were .78 for scale, .75 for the FAS sub-scale, .79 for the FRS sub-scale and .69 for the TES sub-scale.

PSSS Scoring: There are 20 questions in the family support sub-scale, 13 questions in the friend support sub-scale and 17 questions in the teacher support sub-scale. Each sub-scale has a reversed question. Each expression in the scale are ranked as "Suits me=3," "Partially suits me=2," and "Does not suit me=1." The regular questions are scored as they are, but reversed questions are scored reversely. The score ranges of the sub-scales are: 20 to 60 for family support, 13 to 39 for friend support and 17 to 51 for teacher support. For the entire scale, the range is 50 to 150 points. A high score from the scale indicates a high perception of social support, and a low score shows low perception of social support.

Academic Achievement: Academic achievement is measured by the students' weighted grade point averages (WG-PAs). Their WGPAs were obtained from the student affairs department of the health college with institutional permission. Their success is monitored using their grades, term grade point averages (TGPAs) and grade point averages (GPAs). TGPA is obtained by dividing the sum of products of the credits of each course taken in one semester and the grades for these courses into the sum of the credits of these courses. WGPA is obtained by dividing the sum of products of the credits of each course taken in all semesters and the grades of these courses into the sum of the credits of all courses. The

students with a GPA of at least 2.00 at the end of current semester are considered successful, and students with a GPA less than 2.00 at the end of the fourth semester are considered unsuccessful, except for preparatory course grades.[14]

Data Collection and Analysis

Permission to use the Perceived Social Support Scale and the approval of the health college administration were obtained before starting the research. The students were informed and their oral consent were obtained before administering the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. The data were collected by a researcher in classes.

The research data were uploaded and analyzed by a statistics expert using SPSS 17.0 and a 95% confidence interval. Frequencies, averages, chi-square, one-way anova, post hoc test (Tukey-HSD and Kruskall-Wallis) were used to analyze the socio-demographic and descriptive data, and Pearson's correlation was used to analyze grade point averages and social support scores.[15–17]

Findings

Socio-Demographic Findings

Of the participants, 28.7% were in the first year, 28.2% were in their second year, 24.6% were in their third year, and 18.5% were in their fourth year. The average age of the students was 21±1.78 (minimum 17, maximum 32). Of the students, 71.8% were females, almost all (98.3%) were single, and 83.5% had nuclear families. Of the students, 37.5% were the oldest sibling, 61.8% were pleased with their place of residence, and 42% had an intermediate economic status.

Academic Achievement and Perceived Social Support Level Findings

The WGPAs of the students and the perceived social support (PSS) and sub-scale scores are shown in Table 1. Their WGPAs were 2.68±0.51, and their PSS score averages were 128.64±13.08.

A weak, but significantly positive relation was found between the WGPA and PSS and sub-scale scores when this relationship was analyzed (Table 2).

The Socio-Demographic Characteristics that Affect Academic Achievement and Social Support Level

The socio-demographic characteristics that affect the WGPAs and PSS scores of the students were examined (Table 3).

A significant difference was found between gender, WGPAs and PSS scores. The WGPA, PSS, FAS and FRS scores of females were higher than those of males (p<0.05). The TES score showed no significant difference by gender. The PSS, FAS, FRS and WGPA scores of the students with psychological problems were lower than those of the others

Table 1. The Academic Achievement and Perceived Social Support Scores of the Students (n=411)

	Average	SD	Min. - Max.
Weighted Grade Point Average	2.68	0.51	1.10−3.90
Perceived Social Support	128.64	13.08	84−150
Family Support	55.09	5.34	35−60
Friend Support	35.58	4.06	19−39
Teacher Support	37.91	8.20	17−51

SD: Standard deviation; Min.: Minimum; Max.: Maximum.

Table 2. The Relationship between the WGPAs, Perceived Social Support and the Sub-Scale Scores of the Students (n=411)

		PSS	FRS	FAS	TES
Weighted Grade Point Average	r	.259**	.168**	.204**	.198**
	p	.000	.001	.000	.000
Perceived Social Support	r		.617**	.726**	.816**
	p		.000	.000	.000
Friend Support	r			.417**	.216**
	p			.000	.000
Family Support	r				.300**
	p				.000

WGPA: Weighted Grade Point Average; PSS: Perceived Social Support; FRS: Friend Support; FAS: Family Support; TES: Teacher Support. r: Pearson Correlation. **Significance at the level of 0.01.

Table 3. Comparison of the WGPAs and PSS Scores and Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Students (n=411)

	WGPA		PSS		FAS		FRS		TES	
	n	Avg.±SD	n	Avg.±SD	n	Avg.±SD	n	Avg.±SD	n	Avg.±SD
Gender										
Female	295	2.72±0.4	295	129.78±12.1	295	55.78±4.7	295	36.03±3.8	295	37.97±8.1
Male	116	2.56±0.5	116	125.51±14.8	116	53.32±6.2	116	34.43±4.4	116	37.76±8.0
	t=-2.92 p=0.004		t=-2.75 p=0.006		t=-3.81 p=0.000		t=-3.42 p=0.001		t=-0.23 p=0.818	
Psychological problems										
Yes	132	2.58±0.5	132	125.33±14.2	132	53.39±6.3	132	34.81±4.6	132	37.14±8.1
No	279	2.72±0.5	279	130.11±12.2	279	55.89±4.5	279	35.95±3.7	279	38.27±8.2
	t=-2.70 p=0.007		t=-3.31 p=0.001		t=-4.04 p=0.000		t=-2.46 p=0.015		t=-1.31 p=0.190	
Satisfaction with place of residence										
Yes	254	2.73±0.5	254	130.23±12.7	254	55.91±4.7	254	55.91±4.7	254	38.31±8.3
No	42	2.51±0.5	42	124.21±13.6	42	53.21±6.9	42	53.21±6.9	42	35.83±8.1
Partially	115	2.62±0.4	115	126.52±13.1	115	53.96±5.5	115	53.96±5.5	115	37.77±7.7
	F=4.76 p=0.009		F=5.91 p=0.003		F=8.44 p=0.000		F=3.76 p=0.024		F=1.67 p=0.188	
Economic status										
Good	125	2.71±0.5	125	129.91±12.6	125	56.51±4.1	125	36.04±3.9	125	37.36±8.9
Intermediate	173	2.70±0.5	173	129.82±12.4	173	55.50±4.8	173	35.80±3.5	173	38.51±7.9
Poor	113	2.61±0.4	113	125.20±13.9	113	52.88±6.4	113	34.74±4.7	113	37.58±7.6
	F=1.44 p=0.237		F=5.28 p=0.005		F=15.67 p=0.000		F=3.48 p=0.032		F=0.83 p=0.433	

WGPA: Weighted Grade Point Average; PSS: Perceived Social Support; FRS: Friend Support; FAS: Family Support; TES: Teacher Support; avg.: Average; SD: Standard deviation. t: t-test; F: One-way Anova.

(p<0.05). No significant difference was found between TES and psychological problems (p>0.05). The PSS, FAS, FRS and WGPA scores of the students who were pleased with their place of residence were higher (p<0.05). No significant difference was found between TES and satisfaction with the place of residence (p>0.05). The PSS, FAS, and FRS scores of the students with good economic status were higher than the others (p<0.05). No significant difference was found between TES, WGPA and economic status (p>0.05).

Discussion

The students' academic achievement and social support score averages were analyzed (Table 1). Their WGPA of the students was 2.68±0.51 on a scale of 4.00, an intermediate level. In a study by Uzman (2001)[18] conducted with university students, the students' GPA was found to be 2.25 on a scale of 4.00. This finding is similar to this study's. The students' PSS score average was 128.64±13.08. Their FAS score average was 55.09±5.34, their FRS score average was 35.58±4.06, and their TES score average was 37.91±8.20. The highest score on the scale is 150, hence the participants' perceived social support is at a good level. The social support levels of the students perceived from their families, friends and teachers are also high. The scores of high school students in a study using the same scale[19] were similar to this study's.

A weak, positive relation (p<0.001) was found between the students' WGPAs and their PSS, FRS, FAS and TES scores (Table 2). This shows that academic achievement rises slightly as social support increases. The support the students receive from their families, friends and teachers affects their academic achievement even slightly. Students seek moral and material support from their social environment during their educational life. The findings of this study are supported by studies of social support that have found higher academic achievement for students who receive social support from their families, teachers and friends.[3,10,11,20–27] Laibach (2006)[13] stated that no significant relationship exists between the academic achievement of nursing students and social support and that support from close friends is important, but not sufficient. Uzman (2001)[18] indicated no significant relationship between the social support perceived from families and friends and academic achievement. The findings of these two studies differ from this study's.

Analyzing the socio-demographic characteristics that affect the WGPA and PSS scores of the students (Table 3), the academic achievement of female students was found to be higher than male students (p<0.05). This suggests that female students attach importance to school achievement. Statistics show that the success rates of females are also higher than males on the university entrance exam.[28] This means that female students are also successful at university education. The findings of the relevant studies[5,12,27,29–31] support this finding.

Social support helps students to solve problems in difficult times. The fact that the social support perception scores of the female students were higher than the male students' (p<0.05) suggests that females share their problems with their families and friends and receive more help than males. Studies have indicated that female students perceive more support from families[4,9,32–35] and friends[4,9,27,36–38] than males.

Çeçen (2008),[38] on the other hand, found that perceived social support does not differ by gender. This study found that teacher support score does not differ significantly by gender (p>0.05). However, Gökler's (2007)[36] and Kızıldağ's (2009)[5] studies found that perceived social support from teachers was higher for females.

This study found that the PSS, FAS, FRS scores and WGPAs of students with psychological problems were lower than those of others (p<0.05) in this study. It is inevitable that students with psychological problems need support from their families, friends and teachers since they cannot use coping strategies effectively. Students cannot cope with their problems when they do not receive sufficient support, and this can affect their academic achievement. No significant difference was found between the TES and having psychological problems (p>0.05). This finding was interpreted to mean that the teacher-student relationships were negatively affected by problems such as high numbers of students, heavy workloads and the fact that instructors are assigned to different programs in the same school.

The WGPAs and the PSS, FAS, and FRS scores of the students who were pleased with their place of residence were higher (p<0.05). No significant difference was found between TES and satisfaction with place of residence (p>0.05). It is natural that the peace and happiness of the students who are pleased with their place of residence in terms of social relationships or study conditions positively affects their academic achievement. Şeker et al. (2004)[29] found that being pleased with the place of residence positively affects academic success, and that students who are pleased with the place they reside graduate with higher averages than others.

The FAS and FRS scores of the students with good economic status were higher than the others' (p<0.05). Good economic status may make students perceive more social support since it increases their opportunities to spend time with friends and participate in various activities. Students' financial support from their families may affect their perception of social support from their families. Previous studies[4,6,8,37–39] support these findings. No relationship was found between income levels and social support levels in a study by Yılmaz et al. (2008)[37] on university students.

Conclusion

The students' grade point average was found to be 2.68 on a scale of 4, and their perceived social support score average was found to be 128.64 on a scale of 150. A weak, positive relation was found between perceived social support and academic achievement. The social support perceptions of females, students without psychological problems, students who are pleased with their place of residence and students in good economic circumstances were higher. The weighted

grade point averages of these groups were higher: nursing students, seniors, vocational health high school graduates, students who graduated from high school with excellent grades, students who perceive themselves as academically successful and students with regular study habits.

Based on these results, we suggest:

- To develop programs in order to improve the students' academic achievements address the causes of academic failure,
- To plan social activities in order to improve students' relationships with each other and instructors as of their first year of study,
- To strengthen their sources of social support,
- To cooperate with families when necessary,
- To provide support for students' physical and psychological problems by improving the counseling system,
- To establish psychological counseling and guidance centers and employ nurses in these units.

The findings of our study are limited since they represent the students of one health college. Nevertheless, we hope that this study will be useful for further studies on this subject.

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