

Full Length Research Paper

Parent attitudes and submissive behaviors in adolescents as social anxiety predictors

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The aim of this study was to present the power of high school students' parents' attitudes and submissive behaviors' in predicting social anxiety. The study group consisted of 298 students (159 female, 139 male) from two different high schools who were studying in the 2018-2019 academic year and voluntarily participated in the study. The study was carried out in accordance with the relational screening model. In this study, the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SASA) was used to determine the social anxiety levels of the participants, while the Parenting Attitude Scale (PAS) and the Submissive Behaviors Scale (SBS) was used for determining the parents' attitudes. Multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the power of secondary school students in predicting social anxiety levels. There was a medium level positive correlation found between high school students' total social anxiety scores and submissive behaviors.

Key words: Social anxiety predictors, parent attitudes, submissive behaviors, adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the period after childhood and before adulthood during which an individual undergoes growth and development. It is considered to begin at the age of 10.5-11 for girls and 12.5-13 for boys, and end between the ages of 16 and 18 in general (Parman, 2017). In this period, very rapid changes occur (WHO, 2016) and individuals in this period may need some social groups (Van Zalk et al., 2011). Adolescents attempt to cope with their emotions of inadequacy during this period, but they are susceptible to negative thoughts (Townsend, 2012), and these environments are avoided or endured with excessive anxiety (Kring et al., 2017). This period is seen as a point of conflict and sharing between adulthood and childhood (Parman, 2017). Anxiety is defined as an expectation of a possible future threat and an emotional

response to a distinguishable, real or felt immediate threat (APA, 2013). Adolescents may face the problem of social anxiety and this is a problem that can be encountered more frequently among themselves (Tassin et al., 2014). In addition, it is described by DSM-5 (APA, 2013) as a clear and constant feeling of fear of meeting new people and being observed by others. Adolescents form their beliefs about social life by watching the actions of their parents. If the parent suggests that social interaction will have a negative outcome, the adolescent may suffer from social anxiety (Bögels and Perotti, 2010). Authoritarian parenting, in particular, is connected with social anxiety (Rana et al., 2013).

For both individuals and their parents, the transition from childhood to adolescence involves an exciting and

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anxious change (Plotnik, 2009). It has been reported that the age at which social anxiety begins to occur is around 13-14 years old and that social anxiety disorder reaches its peak in mid-adolescence (Johnson et al., 2006). High levels of social anxiety affect the social relationships of individuals (Çankaya, 2007). Adolescents who experience social anxiety at a high-level refrain from communicating with their peers due to fear of rejection (Teachman and Allen, 2007) and are known as people who do not speak or operate in social environments and keep a low profile especially in relations with the opposite gender. There are studies showing that female adolescents have higher social anxiety levels than male adolescents (Jose et al., 2012). The fear and avoidance behaviors of adolescents with high social anxiety levels decrease their friendship quality and negatively affect their social interactions (Biggs et al., 2012; Blote et al., 2007). As a result of this apathy, the adolescent may exhibit violent behavior and chilly attitudes toward their parents, siblings and friends (Bee and Boyd, 2009).

Parenting is the process of encouraging and supporting a child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth from infancy to adulthood (Yousaf, 2015). Some studies have showed that there is a significant relationship between parental attitudes and adolescents' social anxiety levels (Chen, 1994; Flanagan et al., 2008). Adolescents who exhibit excessive authoritarian and protective attitudes have been found to have higher levels of social anxiety (Bögels et al., 2001; Hudson and Rapee, 2000; Sertelin-Mercan, 2007). The child's insecurity is exacerbated by the parent's strict and demanding attitude, which promotes lack of trust in social environments (Rana et al., 2013); while adolescents who perceive their parents as democratic have lower social anxiety (Hardin, 2002). Parents play an active role in adolescents' socialization (Flanagan et al., 2008) and development stages (Özyürek and Şahin, 2005). Parents' attitude is vital for adolescents to know themselves, form their personality, make choices and adapt to society (Herken and Özkan, 1998). Relationships with parents, the quality of the parents' attitude, and creating boundaries, respecting everyone's personal space, and treating opposites with a knowledge of how the individual interprets this all play a role in psychological development (Erdoğan, 2014; Jeammet and Mingasson, 2016).

Parents' unloving approach causes negative situations such as oppressive attitudes, the presence of threats, and the expectation of the child's obedience (Gilbert, 2000; Gilbert et al., 2002). In such families, the parents believe that obeying them is necessary, even if it is unjust, and this submissive conduct begins in the family as a result of the family environment (Yavuzer, 2016). People who are submissive live by the regulations and rules established by others (Adler, 2016). Individuals who engage in submissive behavior are unable to freely express their differing viewpoints, have difficulty saying "no," believe themselves to be worthless and insignificant

(Allan and Gilbert, 2002), and are unable to defend themselves against external criticism (Catarino et al., 2014). This form of action is said to be motivated by a sense of family loyalty (Gilbert et al., 2003). Subservient behavior is mostly caused by an individual's excessive effort to adapt to the social environment (Brabender and Fallon, 2009).

Submissive individuals are very timid people who refrain from upsetting others for fear or sensitivity (Gilbert et al., 2003). Individuals who demonstrate submissive behaviors tend to see themselves as worthless and insignificant (Çelik and Odacı, 2011) and avoid change and taking responsibility (Allan and Gilbert, 2002). In a study conducted by Lopresto and Deluty (2001), a relationship was determined between submissive behaviors and gender. It was reported that females exhibited more submissive behaviors compared to males. When the relationship between parental attitudes and submissive behaviors was examined, it was determined that adolescents exposed to authoritarian and controlling attitudes tended to demonstrate submissive behaviors (Gander and Gardiner, 1998). Submissive behaviors negatively affect the personal development of adolescents (Yıldırım and Ergene, 2003). Studies have indicated that adolescents who grow up among the eastern culture experience more submissive behavior, social anxiety, and depressive symptoms compared to individuals who grow up among the western culture (Hoffmann et al., 2004).

In this study, the effects of parents' attitudes, submissive behaviors and social anxiety levels on adolescents' life periods were examined. Accordingly, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the attitude of high school students' parents, submissive behavior and social anxiety levels?
2. Do the parental attitude and submissive behaviors of high school students' parents predict social anxiety at a significant level?

METHOD

Study group

This study was carried out in accordance with the relational screening model. The study group consisted of 298 students (N = 159 female, N = 139 male) studying in the 9th, 10th, 11th or 12th grades in two different high schools in the center of Uşak in the 2018-2019 academic year. All students accepted to participate in the study voluntarily.

Data collecting tools

Social anxiety scale for adolescents (SASA)

This scale was originally developed by La Greca and Lopez (1998) and adapted into Turkish by Aydın and Tekinsav Sütçü (2007). It is

Table 1. Correlation values that show the relationships between the variables (n=298).

Variable	Accepting interest	Control inspection	Psychological autonomy	Submissive behaviors	Social anxiety
Accepting-interest	1	0.035	0.251**	-0.129*	-0.032
Control-inspection		1	-0.182**	0.047	0.105*
Psychological autonomy			1	-0.195**	-0.202**
Submissive behaviors				1	0.443**
Social anxiety					1

applied to determine the social anxiety levels of students. The scale consists of 22 articles in total and is a 5-point Likert type scale. It includes three sub-dimensions, namely "fear of negative evaluation", "social avoidance and uneasiness in general situations" and "social avoidance and uneasiness in new situations". The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the original scale was found to be .88 for the whole scale. The applicability of the scale to the secondary education sample was examined by Göktürk (2011) and the reliability coefficient of the entire scale was calculated as .91. In addition, it was determined that the scale also worked in the high school sample. In the present study, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was determined as 0.82.

Parent Attitude Scale (PAS)

This scale was developed by Lamborn et al. (1991) to determine the parents' attitudes as a data collection tool and adapted into Turkish by Yılmaz (2000). It consists of 26 items, the first 18 of which are of a 4-point Likert type scale. Moreover, articles 19 and 20 contain 6 sub-articles consisting of 'Yes' and 'No' answers, while articles 21 and 26 consist of a 3-point Likert type scale. The scale includes three sub-dimensions, namely "acceptance-interest", "psychological autonomy" and "control-supervision". The internal consistency coefficients of the sub-dimensions of the original scale ranged between 0.72 and 0.82 (Lamborn et al., 1991). The internal consistency coefficients of the scale adapted for primary school, high school and university students varied between 0.60 and 0.75 (Yılmaz, 2000). In the present study, the internal consistency coefficients for the sub-dimensions ranged between 0.66 and 0.68.

Submissive behaviors

This scale, which was prepared to determine the social submissive behavior levels of individuals, was developed by Gilbert and Allan (1994) and adapted into Turkish by Şahin and Şahin (1992). It consists of 16 items and is a 5-point Likert type scale. The scale was determined as one factor. As a result of the reliability analysis of the scale, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found as 0.89. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale adapted for high school students was determined as 0.74. In the present study, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.85.

Analysis of the data

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the variables in the study. In addition, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the power of the independent variables, namely acceptance-interest, psychological

autonomy, control-supervision and submissive behaviors, to predict the level of social anxiety of the high school students.

FINDINGS

A correlation analysis was carried out in order to observe the relationships between the secondary school students' social anxiety total scores and predictive variables, namely acceptance-interest, psychological autonomy, control-supervision, and submissive behaviors, and the results are presented in Table 1. As can be seen from the results in Table 1, a weak and positive significant relationship was determined between the social anxiety total scores and the parental attitude sub-dimensions of control-supervision [$r = 0.105$, $p < 0.05$] psychological autonomy [$r = -0.202$] there was a significant relationship between the accepting-interest sub-dimension [$p < 0.01$]. However, no significant relationship was found between the acceptance-interest sub-dimension [$r = -0.032$, $p > 0.05$]. According to these findings, it can be said that as the level of students' democratic perception increased their level of social anxiety decreased, and the more they perceived their parents as controlling the more their social anxiety increased. However, a moderately positive correlation was determined between the social anxiety total scores and submissive behaviors [$r = 0.443$, $p < 0.01$]. This finding indicates that the students' submissive behavior levels and social anxiety are in a positive relationship. Accordingly, it can be said that as the submissive behaviors of secondary school students increase, their social anxiety levels also increase.

Prior to the analysis conducted to determine the predictive roles of high school students' social anxiety levels, submissive behaviors and parental attitudes, descriptive statistics regarding the variables were examined. Considering the kurtosis and skewness coefficients of the variables, it can be stated that the assumption of normality was provided. The results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to determine the power of the independent variables, namely acceptance-interest, psychological autonomy, control-supervision and submissive behaviors, in predicting the social anxiety levels of high school students are presented in Table 2. Dependent variable is social anxiety, while independent variables are: parent attitudes (accepting-interest,

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis results

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	p	Tol.	VIF	R	R ²
Accepting-Interest	-0.122	0.177	-0.040	-0.687	0.493	0.907	1.102		
Control-Inception	0.191	0.293	0.037	0.650	0.516	0.954	1.048	0.234	0.055
Psychological Autonomy	-0.622	0.173	-0.211	-3.599	0.000***	0.887	1.128		
Submissive Behaviors	0.741	0.071	0.507	10.376	0.000***	1.000	1.000	0.507	0.257

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

psychological autonomy, control-inspection), submissive behaviors. In the present study, when it was examined whether the assumptions regarding the regression analysis were met, the tolerance values for the variables were found to be between .88 and 1.00. However, the variance increases factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.00 to 1.12. Considering that the tolerance values were greater than .20 and the VIF values were less than 10, it can be said that the conditions were met (Büyüköztürk, 2009; Field, 2009). As can be seen in Table 2, when the multiple regression analysis regarding parental attitude and submissive behaviors predicting social anxiety was considered, it was observed that the sub-dimensions of acceptance-interest, control-supervision and psychological autonomy that constitute parental attitude predicted social anxiety in a statistically significant manner ($F = 5,960$, $R = 0.234$, $R^2 = 0.055$, $p < 0.01$). It was observed that all dimensions of parents' attitudes explained approximately 6% of the total variance related to social anxiety. Accordingly, it was seen that it contributed positively to psychological autonomy.

In addition, the submissive behavior total scores were found to statistically predict social anxiety ($F = 107.669$, $R = 0.507$, $R^2 = 0.257$, $p < 0.001$). Submissive behaviors were found to explain approximately 26% of the total variance related to social anxiety. This finding shows that as the submissive behaviors of high school students increased, their social anxiety levels increased and that submissive behaviors in adolescents are an important predictor of social anxiety.

DISCUSSION

As a result of the research, it was seen that there is a negative and significant relationship between the levels of democratic perception of their parents and social anxiety in secondary school students, and a positive relationship with the levels of supervisory perception. Furthermore, the findings of the study demonstrated that the sub-dimensions of acceptance-interest, control-supervision, and psychological autonomy, which make up parental attitude, are in a predictive position in the level of social anxiety. According to Bynion et al. (2017), social anxiety is the most common anxiety disorder among adolescents, and it has a significant relationship with some parenting

behaviors. In today's societies, anxiety is regarded as a manageable emotion, and it is viewed as a significant impediment to human enjoyment that must be overcome as quickly as feasible (Salecl, 2018). Adolescents go through a troubled process that is anxious, seeking, self-discovery and trying to gain an identity during adolescence. They may have conflicts with their families and social groups as they struggle to adjust to the changes in their bodies (Eni, 2017). It is also claimed that people who suffer from social anxiety had a lower quality of life (Sung et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Stein et al. (2017), social anxiety disorder has also been linked to specific socio-demographic characteristics (younger age, female gender, single marital status, low education, and low income). Bruce et al. (2012) emphasize that childhood traumatic events are an effective predictor of social anxiety disorders.

There was a negative correlation between the psychological autonomy sub-dimension and social anxiety. Lieb et al. (2000) reported that overprotective and rejecting parenting is significantly associated with social anxiety. Studies have shown that adolescents with positive parental support have lower social anxiety levels (Hardin, 2002), increased socialization characteristics (Bögels et al., 2001), and their personality development is positively affected (Erdoğan, 2014; Yavuzer, 2003). Xu et al. (2012) found that social anxiety is more prevalent in women than in males throughout their lives. Another study found that the mother's anxious upbringing style and psychological control increased the adolescent's anxiety, whereas the father's anxious upbringing style had no effect (Bynion et al., 2017). It is revealed that parenting behaviors are positively related to child anxiety (Brown and Whiteside, 2008). University students' social anxiety is linked to their parents' lack of emotional warmth and overprotectiveness (Spokas and Heimberg, 2009). The findings of this study are supported by the literature in light of the given facts.

It has been shown that there is a positive relationship between the submissive behavior levels of secondary school students and social anxiety. Furthermore, as a result of the research, it was seen that submissive behavior total scores significantly predicted the level of social anxiety. Their autonomy decreases and their need for approval increases, they become dependent on the environment and have difficulty expressing their feelings

and thoughts (Gilbert and Allan, 1994) and it has been determined that they act shy and accepting (Gilbert et al., 2003). According to Allan and Gilbert (2002), submissive behaviors are mostly related with depression symptoms and mental problems, and these behaviors prevent the individual's assertiveness. On the other hand, McCreary and Rhodes (2001) concluded that males exhibit more dominant behaviors than females, while females display more passive behaviors. It has been determined that girls are more submissive because they are passive. The findings are consistent with the information gathered throughout the literature review.

This study has shown that parents' attitudes are important predictors of submissive behaviors. It has been reported that parental attitudes have an important effect on the development of children and adolescents (Sezer, 2010). Parents who respect the autonomy of adolescents, display consistent behavior and communicate well (Cheung et al., 2004; Gilbert et al., 2003; Troop et al., 2003; Gilbert and Allan, 1994; Yavuzer, 2016) lead to the adolescents demonstrating less of submissive behaviors. Adolescents, on the other hand, may have needs such as adhering to a social group and maintaining their social position, and in order to achieve these goals, they may exhibit submissive behaviors as well as negative behaviors such as approving and accepting everything (Hofmann et al., 2004). Perren and Alsaker (2006) found that students involved in victim incidents were more subservient, lacked leadership abilities, were more introverted, lonely, less socialized, and often lacked a playmate.

Another variable that is an important predictor of adolescent's social anxiety is submissive behavior. Submissive behaviors are the denial of individual desires, lack of assertiveness, and following a strategy of perceiving lesser social position and functions to placate others to prevent threats from others (Catarino et al. 2014). Adolescents exhibiting submissive behaviors were found to have high social anxiety. Some studies have associated social anxiety with submissive behavior (Hudson and Rapee, 2000), and determined that adolescents growing up according to eastern culture show more social anxiety and submissive behaviors (Gilbert et al., 1995). Moreover, it has been stated that social anxiety and submissive behaviors are directly related to family attitude (Gander and Gardiner, 1998; Cüceloğlu, 2006). Individuals' fears of not receiving approval and the need to please others, as well as feelings and behaviors such as inferiority, being unsuccessful as an individual, being seen as incomplete, and losing their dignity, are explained by Gilbert et al. (2002), who link inadequacy thoughts to submissiveness. Another study discovered that women exhibit more submissive behaviors than men (Lopresto and Deluty, 2001). As a result, it was discovered that as anxiety levels rise, so do submissive behaviors (O'Connor et al., 2002).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result, it is seen that as the submissive behaviors of secondary school students increase, their social anxiety levels increase and submissive behaviors in adolescents are an important predictor of social anxiety. Social anxiety levels of secondary school students increase as their submissive behaviors increase. The current study has some limitations. First of all, it was attempted to reveal the predictive power of secondary school students' parental attitudes and submissive behaviors on social anxiety. The study's data is limited to people who attended secondary school and volunteered to participate in the study. The study's limitations are critical in evaluating and generalizing the findings. As a result, qualitative investigations can be used to study the role of parental attitudes and submissive behaviors on the level of social anxiety in future studies. When the developmental characteristics of adolescents are evaluated, it is believed that concepts such as social media, loneliness and perfectionism may be related to social anxiety. Furthermore, examining the relationships between variables with different study groups is important for the generalizability of the results.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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