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Perceived social support as predictors of adolescents' career exploration

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine whether adolescents' career exploration is predicted by perceived social support. Participants were 718 seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grade students. In this research, simultaneous regression analysis assessed the contributions of perceived social support to the adolescent's career exploration. Perceived family social support, perceived friends' social support, and perceived significant other social support correlated significantly with the career exploration. The simultaneous regression analysis showed that perceived family social support, perceived friends' social support, and perceived significant other social support were a significant predictor of career exploration.

Keywords

Career exploration, career development, perceived social support, adolescent, simultaneous regresyon analysis

The importance of an individual's work life cannot be underestimated. Philosophers, scholars, psychologists, and counselors have signified the importance of the individual's work and career. They verified that finding vocation is one of life's most challenging tasks (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). The career development process is an important study area for researchers (Levine & Sutherland, 2013). According to the National Career Development Association (2012), career development is a continuous life process through which individuals explore activities, make decisions, and assume a diversity of roles. Career development is the total integration of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total life span of any given individual (Connell, 2011). Career development that progresses during a person's life starts in early childhood (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). According to Super (1994) and Super et al. (1996), the early stage of an individual's life can be characterized by the growth (ages 4 to 13) and exploration (ages 14 to 24) stages of career development process (American School Counseling Association (ASCA), 2005; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Lapan, 2004; Schaefer, Rivera, & Ophals, 2010; Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2002; Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005).

Jepsen and Prediger (1981) stated that the four measures of career choice are: career exploration, career decisiveness, career planfulness, and involvement in career-planning activities (Cassie & Chen, 2012). Career exploration is the primary framework for career development (Esters, 2008; London & Stumpf, 1982) and is a complex process of self-exploration and external environment (Gamboa, Paixao, & Jesus, 2013; Jordaan, 1963; Patton & Porfeli, 2007; Porfeli & Lee, 2012; Taveira, 2001). Career exploration indicates all the activities for the aim of fostering and developing career development and career choice. The process of career exploration is interested in where an individual explores, how one

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explores, how much one explores, and directedness continuum (Esters, 2008). Career exploration is needed to help students effectively direct their efforts (Kosine & Lewis, 2008) and is a crucial phase in an individual's career development as it is associated with school-to-work transition (Savickas, 1997; Super, 1957; Zikic & Hall, 2009). As a result, research into career exploration is a very important subject area.

Social support is one of the most important factors in the process of career exploration. Social support is commonly defined by the characteristic of social environment, social networks, and the benefits that they provide (Cohen & Matthews, 1987). Researchers have described social support's beneficial effects (Abbey, Abramis, & Caplan, 1985; Caplan, 1979; Cobb, 1976; Lieberman, 1982; Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983; Williams, Ware, & Donald, 1981). Social support is the information that leads individuals to believe that they are cared for, esteemed, and loved (Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2004). It is a multidimensional concept. Social support constitutes the psychological and material resources provided by an individual's interpersonal relationships (Rodriguez & Cohen, 1998). When individuals perceive particular interaction with another one as beneficial, social support occurs (Vietze, 2011). Social support indicates a social network's structural characteristics and the perceived availability of resources (Choenarom, Williams, & Hagerty, 2005). So, social support is usually stated as perceived social support (Vietze, 2011). Social support is a particular social interaction that can be seen in different forms (Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2004). Throughout an individual's life span, social support is provided from family, peers, colleagues, and professions (Cobb, 1976). Social support can be psychological and/or material resources maintained from social network such as friends, family members, and colleagues (Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2004).

Social support begins in the uterus and is best recognized at breast feeding, communicated in different ways (Cobb, 1976). Understanding how much support individuals receive would require an assessment of social support's effect, affirmation, and aid level obtained from people whom they perceived as supportive (Abbey et al., 1985). Social support (e.g. family social support and friends social support) has been found to have a significant effect on academic achievement (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russel, 1994; Steinberg & Darling, 1994). Social support was also significantly and positively correlated with career development (Chen, Fu, Li, Lou, & Yu, 2012). People do not experience some problems in the same way, because there are a lot of social factors in one's life (Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2011). The term social support is used very commonly in social development and social interaction research, helping professional and educational research (Vietze, 2011).

Super (1994) stated that one of the most important tasks of adolescents is the exploration of identity and the development of a core sense of self in relation to work and making career choices (cited in Kerner, Fitzpatrick, Rozworska, & Hutman, 2012). A central element in most career choices is the career exploration process. Although some adolescents autonomously engage in this process, others may need support (Flum & Blustein, 2000).

In the related literature, it can be seen that no study has investigated the relationships between perceived social support and career exploration. Thus, the aim of the present study is to examine the relationships between perceived social support and career exploration. In this study, career exploration has been considered as an outcome and perceived social support as predictor variables. Based on the studies of social support (Choenarom et al., 2005; Cutrona et al., 1994; Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2004; Steinberg & Darling, 1994; Vietze, 2011) and career exploration (Connell, 2011; Esters, 2008; Gamboa et al., 2013; Kosine & Lewis, 2008; Levine & Sutherland, 2013; Porfeli & Lee, 2012; Super et al., 1996; Taveira, 2001) with psychological constructs, we hypothesized that perceived social support would be associated positively with career exploration. Additionally, parental support for career, work experience, and career decision self-efficacy are influenced by career identity evaluation (Stringer & Kerpelman, 2010). The role of social support has been facilitating the transition from school to work life (Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). The present study is aimed to examine whether adolescents' career exploration is predicted by perceived social support. This perspective suggests that career exploration is influenced by some factors, such as perceived social support from parents, perceived social support from friends, and perceived social support from significant others.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from students in four different schools, two middle schools and two high schools, in İstanbul, Turkey. Participants were selected at random, and consisted of 718 seventh (160 students), eighth (212), ninth (174), and tenth (172) grade students. The participants completed questionnaires in class which were administered by researchers. The questionnaires took approximately 8–15 min to complete and were returned on the same day. Of approximately 1000 surveys that we distributed, a total of 718 were returned. This total consisted of 363 boys and 355 girls. All the participants participated in the study voluntarily. The data collection and its analysis were done anonymously. Ages of individuals participating in the study ranged from 13 to 17 years.

Procedure

Students participated in research voluntarily; completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were executed in administration. Prior to administration of the scales, all participants were told the purposes of the study. In this research, Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized to determine the relationship between variables. Simultaneous regression analyses assessed the contributions of the perceived social support to adolescents' career exploration.

Instruments

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The scale, developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988), is a 12-item self-report measure of adolescents' career exploration. The scale was adapted by Eker, Arkar, and Yaldız (2001). Items are rated from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). The scores can range from 12 (low level of perceived social support) to 84 (high level of perceived social support). The scale includes three factors representing the perceived social support: "family," "friends," and "significant other." The scores of the perceived family support, the perceived friends' support and the perceived significant other support can range from 4 (low level of perceived social support) to 28 (high level of perceived social support). Examples of items include: "My family really tries to help me."; "My friends really try to help me." Scale scores are the sum of items. There is no reverse item. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the MSPSS was 0.81. Component analysis identified three factors (family, friend, significant other) that, together, accounted for 83.9% of the variance (Dahlem, Zimet, & Walker, 1991). The adaptation of the scale was used in the present study.

Career Exploration Scale

The scale, developed by Yuen, Gysbers, Chan, Lau, and Shea (2010), is a subtest of Career and Talent Development Self-efficacy Scale and is a six-item self-report measure of career exploration. Items are rated from 1 (extremely lacking in confidence) to 6 (extremely confident). The scores can range from 6 (low level of the career exploration) to 36 (high level of the career exploration). The scale scores are the sum of items. There is no reverse item. In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was 0.82.

Results

Descriptive data and intercorrelations

We conducted independent sample *t*-tests to test for gender differences for the mean levels of the variables in the present study. Results revealed that there were significant gender differences on career exploration, perceived family social support and perceived friends' social support variables (Table 1). Table 2 shows the

Table 1. Means and standard deviations (gender differences).

	Full sample		Men		Women	
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Career exploration***	31.21	3.57	30.40	3.76	32.03	3.16
Perceived family social support***	21.65	5.68	22.27	5.31	23.81	4.99
Perceived significant other social support	16.66	7.96	16.94	7.18	16.36	8.68
Perceived friends' social support***	23.03	5.21	20.35	5.94	22.98	5.08

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$; indicates significant gender differences.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (grade level).

	Full sample		Seventh grade		Eighth grade		Ninth grade		10th grade	
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Career exploration	31.21	3.57	31.30	3.48	31.89	3.59	31.11	3.43	30.37	3.62
Perceived family social support	23.03	5.21	23.47	4.99	23.99	4.68	23.36	4.57	20.86	6.00
Perceived significant others social support	16.66	7.96	16.13	8.23	17.33	7.88	17.55	7.74	15.42	7.86
Perceived friends' social support	21.65	5.68	21.63	5.85	22.47	5.54	21.32	5.86	20.99	5.44

means, standard deviations (SDs), for the variables (grade level). The perceived family social support, the perceived friends' social support, and the perceived significant other social support correlated significantly with the career exploration. The career exploration correlated positively $r = .66$ ($p < .01$) with the perceived family social support, $r = .68$ ($p < .01$) with the perceived friends' social support, and $r = .28$ ($p < .01$) with the perceived significant other social support. The highest correlations were between the career exploration and the perceived friends' social support. Table 3 shows the means, SDs, and Pearson correlation coefficients for the variables.

Simultaneous regression analysis

Before applying regression, assumptions of the simultaneous regression were checked. The data were investigated for normality by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test showed normality of distributions of test scores in the present study. Outliers are cases that have data values that are very different from the data values for the majority of cases in the data set. Outliers were investigated using Mahalanobis distance. A case is outlier if the probability associated with its D^2 is .001 or less (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Based on this criterion, 72 data were labeled as outliers and they were deleted.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and Pearson intercorrelations of the variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4
Career exploration	1			
Perceived family social support	.66*	1		
Perceived friends' social support	.68*	.36*	1	
Perceived significant other social support	.28*	.15*	.26*	1
Mean	31.21	21.65	16.66	31.21
SD	5.21	5.68	7.96	3.57

*$p < 0.01$.

Multi-collinearity was checked by the variance inflation factors (VIF). All the VIF values were less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), which indicated that there was no multi-collinearity. The simultaneous regression analyses assessed the contributions of the perceived family social support, the perceived friends' social support, and the perceived significant other social support to adolescents the career exploration (see Table 4).

The regression model predicting the career exploration was significant. The career exploration was predicted by the perceived family social support ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$), the perceived friends' social support ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$), and the perceived significant other social support ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$). The variables accounted for 66.7% of the variance in the career exploration. The regression model predicting the career exploration was significant ($R^2 = .66$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationships between career exploration and social support. It was hypothesized that social support can be correlated positively with career exploration. The results of correlation and regression analyses confirm the hypothesis and the importance of social support for better understanding of career exploration. The perceived family social support, the perceived friends' social support, and the perceived significant other social support correlated significantly with the career exploration. Furthermore, the career exploration correlated positively with the perceived family social support, with the perceived friends' social support, and with the perceived significant other social support. The highest correlations were between the career exploration and the perceived friends' social support.

As a result of multiple regression analysis, the linear combinations' values of the perceived family social support, the perceived friends' social support, and the perceived significant other social support predicted significantly ($R^2 = .66$, $p < .001$) career exploration. This result showed that the more perceived family social support, the perceived friends' social support, and the perceived significant other social support level increased, the more career

Table 4. Simultaneous regression analyses for the perceived social support (family, friend, and significant other) predicting the career exploration.

Dependent	Predictor	*b*	Standard error of *b*	β	*t*	*p*
Career exploration	Perceived family social support	.32	.02	.47	20.37	<.001
	Perceived friends' social support	.30	.01	.49	20.44	<.001
	Perceived significant other social support	.04	.01	.08	3.78	<.001

$R^2 = .66$, *$p < 0.01$.

exploration increased. These results are consistent with earlier studies that reported the link between social support (e.g. family social suport and friends social support) and academic achievement (Cutrona et al., 1994; Steinberg & Darling, 1994). Social support term is used very commonly in social development and social interaction research, helping professions and educational research (Vietze, 2011). Social support is a very important factor for adolescents who are in the career-choice period. In this context, peer, teacher, and family social support can influence career exploration.

Although this study has several limitations, it offers a greater understanding of the support mechanisms that are likely to contribute to the career exploration of adolescents. Through the lens of our theoretical framework, our findings also help to elaborate on the connection between social support, career exploration, and career development. In particular, our results suggest that the social support sources contribute to engagement in career exploration process. Further research is also recommended to examine different samples in Turkey (e.g. university students), as the current sample groups are only of Turkish adolescents in school. This study is limited by our focus on only adolescents and while we believe that respondents' subjective experiences are important to understand, this focus also has limitations, in that objective measures/observations (e.g. of career exploration and social support dynamics) might reveal a different pattern of results.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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