

Perceived Stress, Positive Psychological Capital, Locus of Control: An Application on Higher Education Students

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Abstract

Objective: In recent years, stress has become the source of psychological problems at a global level, and studies have focused on the detection and control of stress. In this study, the relationship between perceived stress levels and positive psychological capital and locus of control of higher education students in Turkey were discussed. **Methods:** The sample included 497 individuals who continue to higher education in Rize, Turkey. 18293 students who continue their higher education at various levels constitute the universe, and all students were provided with the opportunity to be represented in the sample using the random sampling method. Data were collected between March and June 2018. Sociodemographic Information Form, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Positive Psychological Capital Scale (PPS), Locus of Control Scale (SDS) were used to collect data. The research, which has a nature of practice, is a quantitative study using techniques related to the descriptive scanning model. The internal consistency coefficient of the Perceived Stress Scale was 0.672, the internal consistency coefficient for the Locus of Control Scale was 0.856, and the internal consistency coefficient for the Positive Psychological Capital Scale was 0.924. The relationship between the Perceived Stress Scale, Locus of Control Scale and Positive Psychological Capital Scale was examined with the Spearman test. The Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used to determine whether the Perceived Stress and Locus of Control scales predicted the Positive Psychological Capital Scale. **Results:** According to the results of the study, as the scores of the participants according to the perceived stress scale increase, scores of general locus of control and the scores obtained from the sub-dimensions, which are personal control, belief in chance and fatalism increases. It was found that a significant and negative correlation was observed with the positive psychological capital scale and its sub-dimensions, and self-efficacy, trust, extraversion, psychological resilience, and hope scores of sub-dimensions decreased ($p<0,05$, $p<0,01$). **Conclusion:** According to the study, it was found that perceived stress decreases the positive psychological capital of students, and locus of control does not have a direct effect on positive psychological capital but increases perceived stress.

Keywords: Perceived Stress, Locus of Control, Positive Psychological Capital, Higher Education Students

It is a part of the doctoral thesis prepared in the field of General Psychology at Near East University and IMBL University.

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Today, one of the most common psychological problems affecting individuals physically and spiritually at every stage of life is stress (Pereira-Morales, Adan, & Forero, 2019), (O'Connor, Thayer, & Vedhara, 2021). In today's world where there is rapid change, perceived stress at different

levels (Tutar, 2000) is sometimes evaluated in terms of the source of stress and sometimes in terms of the reaction of the person to the resource (Baltaş & Baltaş, 2002). Scientific studies show that stress has effects on people's mental health and behavior (Schneiderman, Ironson, & D. Siegel, 2004). Although it differs among individuals, it leaves more permanent marks in the developmental stages of the brain (Megan & Quevendo, 2007). It has even been found that there is a significant relationship between stress and cardiovascular disorders (Everson-Rose & Lewis, 2005).

Positive psychology is to make both individual and social life of a person livable by seeing the negativities in human life as a natural part of life and emphasizing their strengths (Cortes, 2010). Positive psychology is the science that studies what works, the natural structure of institutions or individuals that address the strengths of people (Hoy & Tarter, 2011). Positive psychology has a wide network that can be used in all areas of life such as therapies, education, business life and family (Kalem Ertal, 2017). Psychological capital refers to the positive psychological development of individuals (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Positive psychology and positive psychological capital has been leading subjects for a number of graduate thesis and graduate studies since the year 2011 in Turkey, which continues to increase with academic interest (Örücü, 2019).

Locus of control refers to people's natural capacities in life (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2004). If the individual thinks he is in control of the reinforcers, he has an internal locus of control; It is stated that he has an external locus of control if he attributes it to variables such as fate, luck, other people and the creator (Jain, 2011).

It has been observed that independent studies have been conducted on perceived stress level, positive psychological capital and locus of control, but there is no quantitative study discussing three concepts together. This study is the first in the literature in which three concepts are studied together. This study fills an important gap in the literature in terms of the determination of many direct and indirect connections between the perceived stress levels of students, positive psychological capital and locus of control. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between the perceived stress levels of higher education students, their positive psychological capital and locus of control.

Method

Universe and sample

This research is a quantitative study conducted with descriptive scanning model using relational techniques. Research has been conducted with students of Recep Tayyip Erdogan University in Rize, Turkey. 18293 people constitute research universe, who were the students enrolled at the university during the 2018-2019 academic year.

The sampling method was used due to the difficulty of reaching the entire universe. It was also aimed that the sample had the characteristics of the target group, representing all of the active students of institute, faculty, college and vocational school (Ural & Kılıç, 2013). With a 5% error rate and 95% confidence rate for a total of 18293 students enrolled, 376 people were considered sufficient representing the sample. Simple random method was used to determine the sample (Yamane, 2001).

Collection of Data

18293 students attending the state university in Rize province were asked to fill out questionnaires on a voluntary basis and their informed consent was obtained. The socio-demographic form created by the researcher, the Perceived Stress Scale, the Positive Psychological Capital Scale, the Locus of Control Scale were used to collect the data, and the necessary permissions were obtained for the use of the scales. The data were collected by the researcher through an electronic questionnaire between March-June 2018.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), which aims to measure how stressful an individual is perceiving certain situations in his life, consists of 14 items. The items of the scale have a 5-point Likert type scoring between "Never (0)" and "Very often (4)". 7 of the items with positive expressions were scored in reverse. Turkish PSS – 14 internal consistency coefficient, 0.84; test-retest reliability coefficient 0.87, it has been calculated. Stress scores obtained from PSS were found to have a positive relationship with life events and depression, and a negative relationship with life satisfaction, self-esteem and perceived social support scores.

The scale was adapted to Turkish by Eskin, Harlak, Demirkiran, & Dereboy (2013). The scores of the PSS-14 range from 0 to 56, while a high score indicates a person's perception of stress.

Positive Psychological Capital Scale

It was developed by the Positive Psychological Capital Scale (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007). The alpha value for the reliability of the PPS scale was 89%, and the highest alpha values of the self-efficacy, hope, flexibility and optimism scales, which are the sub-scales of PPS, were found at 85%, 80%, 72% and 79%, respectively (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007).

The scale consists of 24 questions, and in order for the four components of positive psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism and flexibility) to have equal weight, six questions that are thought to best represent these components were asked.

Alpha internal consistency coefficients calculated for the scores obtained from the six-dimensional scale were 0.79 for the first dimension, 0.80 for the second dimension, 0.82 for the third dimension, 0.79 for the fourth dimension, 0.75 for the fifth dimension and for the sixth dimension. It is 0.72. The alpha coefficient of consistency of the six-dimensional scale is 0.92. Its Turkish validity and reliability in 2014 were made by (Tösten & Özgan, 2014).

Locus of Control (SDS)

The locus of control of the students in the study was conducted with the Locus of Control Scale developed by (Dağ, 2002). The scale is a Likert type scale consisting of 47 questions. The validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted on 111 students, and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient. It was found to be 92. A high score on the scale indicates the presence of an external locus of control, and a low score indicates the presence of an internal locus of control. The internal consistency coefficient of the 47-item SDL was found to be Crobach's alpha = 0.92 (Dağ, 2002).

Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed by SPSS 24.0 for Windows and AMOS 24.0 programs of IBM. The internal consistency coefficient of the Perceived Stress Scale was 0.672, the internal consistency

coefficient of the Locus of Control Scale was 0.856, and the internal consistency coefficient for the Positive Psychological Capital Scale was 0.924. The scores obtained from the Perceived Stress Scale, Locus of Control Scale and Positive Psychological Capital Scale were shown, and nonparametric hypothesis tests were applied to compare these scores with socio-demographic characteristics.

The preference of nonparametric hypothesis tests for comparisons is that the normality assumption tested by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was not met. Thus, if two variables are compared, Mann-Whitney U test was used, and if three or more variables were compared, Kruskal-Wallis H test was used. The relation between the Perceived Stress Scale, Locus of Control Scale and Positive Psychological Capital Scale was examined by Spearman test.

Results

Scores Received from Scales

When looking at the scores obtained from the scales according to the research, the perceived stress scale scores in the scale taken $\bar{x}=32,24 \pm 5,84$, insufficient self-efficacy perception scores $\bar{x}=15,29 \pm 3,36$ and stress/annoyance perception scores $\bar{x}=16,95 \pm 3,68$. Students personal control scores $\bar{x}=58,37 \pm 9,93$, belief in chance scores $\bar{x}=10,79 \pm 2,41$, unfair world belief scores $\bar{x}=11,84 \pm 3,66$ and locus of control scale scores $\bar{x}=134,81 \pm 18,03$. Positive psychological capital scale scores of the students $\bar{x}=53,67 \pm 15,50$, participating in the study the size of extroversion is $\bar{x}=11,25 \pm 4,09$. Optimism dimension $\bar{x}=8,20 \pm 3,06$, trust dimension $\bar{x}=11,01 \pm 4,41$, psychological resilience $\bar{x}=7,49 \pm 2,77$, hope dimension $\bar{x}=10,32 \pm 3,86$ and it was found to be $\bar{x}=5,39 \pm 2,32$.

Table 1. Students' Perceived Stress Scale, Locus of Control Scale and Positive Psychological Capital Scale

	n	s	Min	Max
Insufficient perception of self-efficacy	497	15,29	3.36	0
Stress / Discomfort perception	497	16.95	3.68	0
Perceived Stress Scale	497	32,24	5.84	0
Personal control	497	58.37	9,93	18
Don't believe in luck	497	29.11	4.77	11th
The pointlessness of trying	497	24.71	6.30	10
Fatalism	497	10.79	2.41	3
Unfair world belief	497	11.84	3.66	5
Locus of Control Scale	497	134,81	18,03	47
Self-sufficiency	497	8,20	3.06	4
Optimism	497	11,01	4.41	5
Confidence	497	7,49	2.77	4
Extroversion	497	11.25	4,09	5
Psychological resilience	497	10.32	3.86	5
Hope	497	5.39	2.32	3
Positive Psychological Capital Scale	497	53.67	15.50	130

Correlation Results of the Scales

According to the correlation results done with the Spearman test, as the overall perceived stress scale scores of the participants increase, the general locus of control scale which show positive and significant correlations between each other, and scores of sub-dimensions such as personal control, belief in luck and fatalism also increase. Positive psychological capital scale, which has negative and significant correlations between them, and self-efficacy, trust, extraversion, psychological resilience and hope sub-dimensions scores decrease. There is a significant and positive relationship between the insufficient self-efficacy perception scores of the participants' perceived stress scale sub-dimension, and the overall stress / discomfort perception scores of the perceived stress scale.

The locus of control is positive between overall scale and personal control, fatalism scores. Negative correlation was found between the scores of meaninglessness of trying. There are negative and significant correlations between the positive psychological capital scale in general and all its sub-dimensions except hope. As the insufficient self-efficacy scores of the participants increase, the perceived stress scale and stress /

discomfort perception scores increase. There is a positive and strong relationship between the

scores of the participants in the personal control sub-dimension and their scores on belief in chance, fatalism and locus of control in general.

There are negative and strong correlations between self-efficacy, optimism, trust, resilience, hope and positive psychological capital scale overall scores. As the personal control scores of the students increase, the scores of believing in luck, fatalism and locus of control also increase.

In addition, as the scores of the participants in the belief in chance sub-dimension increase, the meaninglessness of striving, fatalism, unfair world belief and locus of control, which has strong and positive correlations between them, also increase.

As the meaninglessness of effort scores increase, the scores of fatalism, unfair world belief and locus of control, which are positively correlated, increase. At the same time, their scores on the positive psychological capital scale and all its sub-dimensions are also increasing. There is a positive and significant difference between the scores of the students from the fatalism sub-dimension and the overall locus of control;

Negative and significant correlations were found between trust and resilience sub-dimensions. According to this, As the fatalism scores of the students increase, the locus of control scores increase; confidence and resilience scores decrease.

A strong positive relationship was found between the scores of the students who participated in the study from the unfair world belief sub-dimension and the scores of the locus of control scale in general.

Likewise, there are strong and positive correlations between self-efficacy, trust, extraversion, psychological resilience, hope and positive psychological capital scale scores. As the unfair world belief scores of the participants increase, the locus of control, self-efficacy, confidence, extraversion, psychological resilience, hope, and positive psychological capital scale scores also increase.

Self-efficacy subscale scores of the participants and positive psychological capital scale overall and optimism, Positive and strong correlations were found between the scores of trust, extraversion, resilience and hope sub-dimensions.

Considering the scores obtained from the optimism sub-dimension, positive and strong correlations were observed between the positive psychological capital scale overall and the scores of trust, extraversion, psychological resilience and hope sub-dimensions of the participants. It was determined that as the optimism scores increased, the positive psychological capital scale and confidence, extroversion, psychological resilience and hope scores also increased.

It is shown in Table 2 that as the scores of the trust sub-dimension of the students increased, the positive psychological capital scale and extraversion, psychological resilience and hope scores also increased. There were positive and strong correlations between psychological resilience and hope sub-dimensions scores.

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Table 2. Spearman test results of the correlations between students' perceived stress, locus of control, and positive psychological capital scale scores

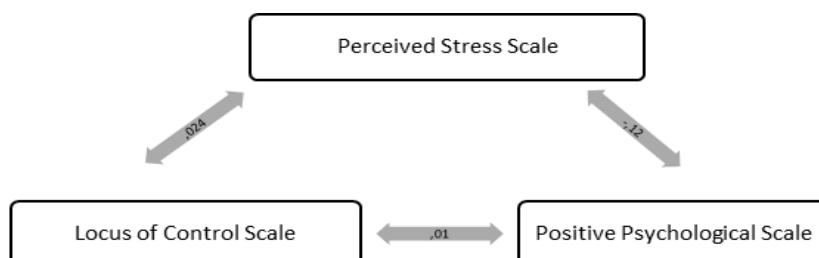
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Insufficient self-efficacy perception	0,23 0,00	0,72 0,00	0,15 0,00	0,03 0,32	- 0,01	0,13 0,00	- 0,35	0,07 0,02	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,05	- 0,00
2. perception of Stress / Discomfort	1 .0,00	0,81 0,01	0,08 0,00	0,13 0,01	0,08 0,01	0,18 0,70	0,01 0,00	0,14 0,33	0,03 0,00	0,13 0,16	- 0,08	- 0,05	- 0,05	- 0,32	0,00 0,86
3. Perceived Stress Scale	. 1	0,15 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,00 0,94	0,20 0,00	- 0,75	0,14 0,00	- 0,00	0,01 0,70	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,04	0,00 0,00
4. Personal control	. 1	0,25 0,00	- 0,73	0,24 0,00	0,72 0,00	0,64 0,00	- 0,00	0,00 0,00							
5. Don't believe in luck	. 1	0,53 0,00	0,13 0,00	0,40 0,00	0,70 0,00	0,04 0,17	0,03 0,40	0,03 0,27	0,03 0,44	0,02 0,23	0,04 0,31	0,04 0,14	0,03 0,17	0,03 0,17	0,05 0,14
6. Meaninglessness of effort	. 1	0,22 0,00	0,56 0,00	0,63 0,00	0,16 0,00	0,10 0,00	0,15 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,12 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,12 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,17 0,00
7. Fatalism	. 1	0,06 0,07	0,40 0,00	- 0,00	- 0,13	- 0,45	- 0,01	- 0,93	- 0,01	- 0,01	- 0,07	- 0,12	- 0,07	- 0,07	- 0,12
8. Unfair world belief	. 1	0,51 0,00	0,14 0,00	0,05 0,16	0,14 0,00	0,09 0,00	0,10 0,01	0,09 0,01	0,10 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,11 0,00	0,14 0,00
9. Locus of Control Scale	. 1	-. 0,72	-. 0,87	-. 0,61	-. 0,95	-. 0,25	-. 0,69	-. 0,78	-. 0,25						
10. Self-sufficiency	. 1	-. 0,50	-. 0,43	-. 0,50	-. 0,55	-. 0,32	-. 0,73	-. 0,32							
11. Optimism	. 1	-. 0,45	-. 0,43	-. 0,44	-. 0,22	-. 0,72									
12. Trust	. 1	-. 0,53	-. 0,58	-. 0,32	-. 0,71	-. 0,00									
13. Extroversion	. 1	-. 0,68	-. 0,30	-. 0,80	-. 0,00										
14. Psychological resilience	. 1	-. 0,45	-. 0,84	-. 0,00											
15. Hope	. 1	-. 0,50	-. 0,00												
16. Positive Psychological Capital Scale	. 1	-. 0,00													

*p<0,05, **p<0,01

After the correlation analysis, the Structural Equation Model was used to examine the effect of locus of control and perceived stress on positive psychological capital. According to the model, it was determined that the scores of the students from the Locus of Control Scale did not significantly predict the scores they got from the Positive Psychological Capital Scale ($= 0.01$; $p > 0.05$). It was determined that the scores of the

students from the Perceived Stress Scale significantly and negatively predicted the scores they got from the Positive Psychological Capital Scale ($= -0.12$; $p < 0.05$). In addition, it was determined that the Locus of Control Scale scores of the students participating in the study positively predicted the Perceived Stress Scale scores ($= 0.24$; $p < 0.05$), (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Path analysis results regarding the effect of the Control Focus Scale and Perceived Stress Scale scores on the Positive Psychological Capital Scale



Discussion

In this study, it was found that students with high perceived stress have low positive psychological capital and internal locus of control, while those with high positive psychological capital and high internal locus of control have low perceived stress. In the literature, it has been found that positive psychological capital and employee performance have a strong relationship (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011). A study conducted in 2016 showed that the self-sufficiency, one of the sub-dimensions of positive psychological capital had significant impact on the job performance (Korkmazer, Ekingen & Stars, 2016). In a study conducted on 480 graduate students, it was stated that it both affected the entrepreneurial intention and created a positive effect (Karabulut, 2016). A study on the anger control relationship between stress sources and symptoms supported this finding (Aytaç, 2011).

In our study, it was found that those who have an internal locus of control have low stress. In 2019, a study conducted with 178 accountants in Turkey showed that participants with external locus of control have high work stress and less job satisfaction (Thompson & Sea, 2019). Similar

results were obtained in a study conducted on 246 healthcare workers in 2011 (Akbulut, Işık, & Uğurluoğlu, 2011). In a study, it was found that workaholism and internal locus of control have significant effect on perceived stress (Akdağ, 2010). The existence of a significant relationship between addiction (Tan, 2020; Erol, 2019), which is an important factor affecting human life, and locus of control (Kaya & President, 2020) is similar to the results of our study.

In conclusion, according to this study, it is seen that perceived stress in higher education students decreases their positive psychological capital, and locus of control does not have a direct effect on positive psychological capital but increases perceived stress. With various training programs, stress can be maintained in controllable ranges, locus of control can be developed, and positive psychological capital can be increased in various ways. It is thought that this study, which discusses three different variables together, will guide researchers in the future in terms of identifying the needs and expectations of students in the last stage of their education life and revealing their risk potential.

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