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A CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH ON COPING, SELF-COMPASSION AND WELL-BEING: JAPANESE AND TURKISH SAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study is to examine the cultural effects on coping, self-compassion and well-being in Japanese and Turkish samples. **Method:** The study has 2 different groups of participants from Japan and Turkey. Japanese study group contains 55 females and 27 males emerging adults while Turkish study group contains 61 females and 41 males emerging adults. The method of the study is general scanning model. Data was provided via English and Turkish versions of Brief Cope Inventory, Self-Compassion Scale and WHO Well-being Scale (WHO-5) afterwards it was analyzed by independent t test and regression. **Results:** Based on the results obtained from independent t test; Japanese emerging adults have higher self-compassion and well-being than Turkish emerging adults. And they also significantly cope with stress actively, frame the events positively in their minds and seek for emotional support from others more than Turkish emerging adults in stressful situations while; Turkish emerging adults seek for instrumental support from others, vent their emotions, plan and turn to God more than Japanese emerging adults. And self-compassion is a significant predictor of well-being in both groups. **Conclusion:** 1) As two collective societies, there are significant cultural differences on coping ways between Turkish and Japanese emerging adults. 2) Turkish people use more venting and self blame, which are negative coping methods, than Japanese people. 3) Self-compassion can be used for increasing well-being in both countries. These subjects require more cross-cultural studies to understand the effects of culture on them.

***Key Words**: Self-compassion, well-being, coping, cultural differences.*

STRESLE BAŞ ETME, ÖZ-ANLAYIŞ VE İYİLİK HALİ ÜZERİNE KÜLTÜRLERARASI BİR ARAŞTIRMA: TÜRK VE JAPON ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZET

Amaç: *Bu çalışmanın amacı stresle baş etme tarzları, öz-anlayış ve iyilik hali üzerindeki kültürel etkileri Türk ve Japon örneklerinde incelemektir.* ***Yöntem:*** *Bu çalışmanın Türk ve Japon olmak üzere iki adet çalışma grubu vardır. Japon çalışma grubu 55 kadın ve 27 erkek ile toplamda 82 olmak üzere, 18-29 yaş arası beliren yetişkinlerden oluşmaktadır. Türk çalışma grubu 61 kadın ve 41 erkek ile toplamda 102 olmak üzere, 18-29 yaş arası beliren yetişkinlerden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma yöntemi genel tarama yöntemidir. Veriler Brief Cope Envanteri, Öz-Anlayış Ölçeği ve WHO5 İyilik Hali İndeksi ölçeklerinin Türkçe ve İngilizce versiyonları ile internet üzerinden anket sistemi ile toplanmıştır ve daha sonrasında t testi ve regresyon analizine tabi tutulmuştur.* ***Bulgular:*** *T testi sonuçlarına göre Japon çalışma grubu Türk çalışma grubundan daha yüksek seviyede öz-anlayış ve iyilik hali değerlerine sahip olmuşlardır. Aynı zamanda stresli olaylar karşısında Türk çalışma grubuna göre daha çok aktif baş etme, pozitif yeniden çerçeveleme ve duygusal destek arama yöntemlerini kullanmaktadırlar. Türk çalışma grubu ise bir araç yoluyla destek arama, plan yapma, dine yönelme, duygusal patlama yaşama ve kendini suçlama yöntemlerini Japon çalışma grubundan daha çok kullanmaktadırlar. Ayrıca öz-anlayış her iki toplumda da iyilik halinin anlamlı bir yordayıcısıdır.* ***Sonuç:*** *1) Her ikisi de kolektif toplum olan Türk ve Japon toplumlarının stresle baş etme yöntemleri, öz-anlayış ve iyilik halleri üzerinde kültürel etkiler vardır. 2) Türkler olumsuz olan duygusal patlama yaşama ve kendini suçlama yöntemlerini Japonlara kıyasla daha fazla kullanmaktadırlar. 3) Her iki toplumda da öz-anlayış iyilik halini artırmak için kullanılabilir, fakat Türk toplumunda daha önemli olabilir. Bu olgular üzerindeki kültürel etkileri algılayabilmek için daha fazla çalışmalar yapılabilir.*

Keywords: *öz-anlayış, iyilik hali, stresle baş etme, kültürel farklılıklar.*

Introduction

Dictionary of Cambridge defines culture as a way of living, general customs and beliefs of particular people in a particular place. Valsiner elaborate on culture in his book “Culture in minds and societies” that culture is a product of human mind and their societies but it also becomes a substance of again human mind and their societies (Valsiner, 2007). There is an unbreakable chain between humans and culture.

Since culture effects humans in a way; psychology investigates influences of culture on human behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Is it a detail or an effective variance? A fair amount of cross-cultural research had been done and reported in psychological literature. A cross-cultural perspective in a research hypothesize that the difference between variances of two or more groups is a result of cultural differences of those populations. And a general way of doing it is a comparative research (Brislin, 1976).

Coping with stress, well being and culture are related to each other and the relationship of the three can be seen directly in the definition of stress which is the warning feeling arises when individuals think they can not cope with the demands of his/her environment in a healthy way or with threats to his/her well being (Lazarus, 1966). Therefore cross-cultural studies on these topics were made by researchers around the globe.

A study found that East Asian participants in the group, including Japanese, use more of the internal coping control systems than European ones while European participants use more of the self-enhancing interpretive control systems (Tweed, White & Lehman, 2004). And in the very same year another study on coping strategies in Japanese and American women found that American women use more coping strategies and they are more effective than Japanese women (Taylor et al,. 2004). Tuna’s doctoral dissertation (2003) on coping strategies in U.S and Turkish students found significant cultural effects on coping.

There are a lot of studies on well being with different variances and self-compassion is one of them (Neff, 2008). Even though mindfulness and self-compassion became more popular

on psychological perspectives in recent years (Bishop et al., 2004), it is still an ongoing topic. Self compassion is questioned to be used more often in Asian cultures but a study between the United States, Taiwan and Thailand's population found that greater self compassion levels of the three were in order of Thailand, United States and Taiwan. And all three populations significantly found that self-compassion predicts well-being (Neff et al., 2008). While there are studies on self-compassion, well-being and coping (Neetly et al., 2009; Allen, Goldwasser & Leary, 2012; Hall et al., 2013) the authors remarks that the number of cross-cultural studies on self-compassion are strictly limited and they recommend other researchers to study more on the topic.

Based on the information given above, the aim of this research is to compare self-compassion, well-being and coping strategies in Turkish and Japanese samples. Sub problems of the study are:

1. To investigate and compare the levels of self-compassion in Japanese and Turkish sample.
2. To investigate and compare the levels of well-being in Japanese and Turkish sample.
3. To investigate and compare the diversity in usage of coping strategies in Japanese and Turkish sample.
4. To investigate if self-compassion can predict well-being in Japanese sample.
5. To investigate if self-compassion can predict well-being in Turkish sample.

Cross-cultural studies on self-compassion are extremely limited and there is no study with a Turkish sample comparison. Even though there are studies on self-compassion, coping and well-being and previous studies found that self-compassion predicts well-being both in Japanese and Turkish samples; cross-cultural studies on the topic are also limited and devoid of Turkish sample. This study is aiming to fulfill these empty spots on global psychology literature.

Method

The research model for this study is the general scanning model. The instruments were typed in online forms and send to participants via internet. Participants were informed about the topic, instruments the research and their additional questions were answered. Participants data whom had problems with understanding English versions of the instruments were outcasted from the rest of the data to maintain the validity of the research.

Study group

Because this is a cross-cultural research, there are two different study groups: Turkish and Japanese. Turkish study group contains 102 emerging adults, 41 of them are males and 61 of them are females who are between the ages of 18 to 29. The average age of Turkish study group is 23.4. Japanese study group contains 82 emerging adults, 27 of them are males and 55 of them are females who are between the ages of 18 to 29. The average age of Japanese study group is 21.8.

Instruments

For the Turkish sample, Turkish versions of Brief Cope Instrument, Self-compassion Instrument and WHO5 Wellbeing Scale were used. And for the Japanese sample, English versions of Brief Cope Instrument, Self-compassion Instrument and WHO5 Wellbeing Scale were used.

COPE: The Brief COPE is a brief form of an inventory (COPE) originally developed by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) to assess the different ways in which people respond to stress. The original COPE consists of 15 subscales but the final form of the Brief Cope has 14; Accepting, Active Coping, Planning, Seeking Instrumental Social Support, Seeking Emotional Social Support, Positive Reinterpretation, Denial, Venting, Turning to religion, Venting of Emotions, Alcohol and Drug Use, Humor, Behavioral disengagement and Self-Distraction. the internal consistency Coefficients of the subscales exceeded the value of .50. Averaged Cronbach alpha coefficients across three administrations of each of the subscales of the Brief COPE were .68 for active coping, .73 for planning, .64 for positive reframing, .57 for acceptance, .73 for humor, .82 for religion, .71 for using emotional support, .64 for using instrumental support, .71 for self-distraction, .54 for denial, .50 for venting, .90 for substance use, .65 for behavioral disengagement, and .69 for self-blame. And the Averaged Cronbach alpha coefficients across three administrations of each of the subscales of the Turkish version Brief COPE were 45 for active coping, .51 for planning, .73 for positive reframing, .55 for acceptance, .73 for humor, .82 for religion, .72 for using emotional support, .64 for using instrumental support, .45 for self-distraction, .59 for denial, .26 for venting, .91 for substance use, .64 for behavioral disengagement, and .33 for self-blame.

Self-Compassion Scale: The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the Self-compassion scale was made by Deniz, Kesici and Sümer (2008). Item-total correlations were calculated to assess how the scale items differentiated the students with regard to their self-compassion. Two items (1, 22) below .30 were eliminated from the scale. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .89 and test-retest reliability was .83. With a suggested cut-off for reliable measurement instruments of .70. Because the Turkish version has 24 questions while English version of Self-compassion scale has 26, questions numbered 1 and 22 were not included in both versions of the scales.

WHO5 Scale: 5 itemed scale was made for testing the index of individuals well-being. It takes values from 0 (never) to 5 (always) and the interpretations are made over a total score of 25 meaning the highest level of individual's well-being. For scores under 13 it is advised to perform (ICD 10) the Major Depression Scale. The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the scale is made by Eser (1998).

Results

In this study, collected data from the study groups were run in SPSS Statistics Program. Firstly the means, standard deviations, f values and t values were calculated separately in T test for both of the study groups. Later on, separate regression analysis were made on both study groups. The results are shown below.

Table.1 Descriptive Statistics And Independent T Test Results

	Japanese Sample		Turkish Sample			
	Mean (n = 82)	**SD**	**Mean (n = 102)**	**SD**	**df**	**tp**
Coping With Stress						
Active Coping	**6.46**	**1.49**	6.04	1.16	182	2.09*
Emotional Support	**5.98**	**1.51**	5.33	1.68	182	2.70**
Instrumental Support	5.67	1.35	**6.13**	**1.12**	182	2.50*
Venting	4.65	1.49	**5.69**	**1.57**	182	4.95***
Positive Reframing	**6.50**	**1.23**	5.96	1.44	182	2.69**
Planning	6.18	1.34	**6.78**	**1.22**	182	3.18**
Religion	3.83	1.40	**5.55**	**2.08**	181.66	6.08***
Self Blame	5.16	1.69	**5.55**	**2.09**	182	3.83***
Wellbeing	**16.29**	**4.14**	13	5.05	182	4.76***
Self-Compassion	**78.77**	**9.11**	73.24	15.89	165.86	2.96**

***p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001**

102 Turkish (N= 102) and 82 (N= 82) Japanese participants data were calculated in T test. First of all, in sub-dimensions of COPE scale there were significant differences between the Turkish and the Japanese study group. The Japanese study group had significant higher scores in active coping $t(182) = 6.46$, $p<0.05$; seeking emotional support $t(182) = 5.98$, $p<0.0$; and positive reframing $t(182) = 2.69$, $p<0.01$ sub-dimensions than the Turkish study group. Opposite to that, Turkish study group had significant higher scores in seeking instrumental support $t(182) = 6.13$, $p<0.05$; venting $t(182) = 5.69$, $p<0.001$; planning $t(182) = 6.78$, $p<0.01$; religion $t(181.7) = 5.55$, $p<0.001$ and self blame $t(182) = 5.55$, $p<0.001$ than the Japanese study group. For the remaining two scores of well-being and self-compassion, the Japanese study

group had significant higher scores on both scales (well-being: t(182) = 16.29, p<0.001; self-compassion: t(165.9) = 78.77, p<0.01 than the Turkish study group.

Table.2 Regression Analysis for Well-being in Turkish Group

	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	-.062				
Self-compassion	.178	.026	.561	6.785	.000***

***p<0.01 **(r = .561, r^2 =.315, p<.001)**

A regression analysis was made to investigate if self-compassion can predict well-being of individuals in Turkish study group. The results shows that self-compassion (β= .561, p <.001)significantly predicts well-being in this study group (r = .561, r^2 =.315, F = 46.032, p<.001). Self-compassion can predict 32% of well-being in Turkish sample.

Table.3 Regression Analysis for Well-Being in Japanese Group

	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	4.864				
Self-compassion	.145	.048	.319	3.011	.003**

p<0.01 **(r = .319, r2 =.102, p<.01)

A regression analysis was made to investigate if self-compassion can predict well-being of individuals in Japanese study group. The results shows that self-compassion (β= .319, p <.01)significantly predicts well-being in this study group (r = .319, r^2 =.102, F = 9.068, p<.01). Self-compassion can predict 10% of well-being in Japanese sample.

Discussion

This study was made for the purpose of investigating the cultural effect on coping methods, level of self-compassion and well being in two different societies, Turkey and Japan. The results shows that there are significant differences between Turkey and Japan on their levels of self-compassion, well-being and their common used methods for coping with stressful events. While Japan had higher levels of self-compassion and well-being considering against Turkey; both societies followed separate ways on 8 methods of coping by one of them using one method more than other.

Firstly as it was spoke about above; literature shows differences on coping methods between European/American individualist societies and Asian, such as Japanese, collectivist

societies (Tweed, White & Lehman, 2004; Taylor et al,. 2004). And also differences on coping methods between Turkish and American societies (Tuna, 2003). Although in her study, Goregenli (1997) reports that Turkey does not have a tendency towards individualism or collectivism; many recent studies regards Turkey as a collectivist country (Aycan et al,. 2000; Wasti, 2000; Sigal et al., 2005).

With that being said, one might have thought that as two collectivist societies, Japan and Turkey wouldn't have many differences between their methods of coping with stressful events; but as this study's results show that in fact they are different on 8 coping methods. There are some studies on coping strategies between Asian collectivist societies but they are focused on more specific kind of stressful events such as immigration and people with schizophrenia (Yeh and Inose, 2002; Hanzawa et. al., 2010). On the other hand, this study focuses on all kinds of stressful events and states cultural differences between two collectivist countries. Another aspect of culture, religion is recognized as a possible reason of cultural differences and it is often pointed out in cross-cultural studies.

An importing aspect of the results is that Turkish people use both two negative coping methods, venting and self blame, more than Japanese people. These two sub-dimensions were found related to increased anxiety and depression symptoms (Peterson, Schwartz and Seligman, 1981; Rothrock, Nan and Lutgendorf, 2003; Kitano et al., 2015). Self-compassion is also found related to depression symptoms and anxiety; furthermore it has been used as a control and benefit mechanism (Shapira and Mongrain, 2010; Van Dam et al., 2011; Krieger et al., 2013; Terry, Leary and Mehta, 2013).

Yamaguchi et al. (2014) in Japan and Ozyesil and Akbag in Turkey (2013) investigated the effect of self-compassion on depression symptoms, found it protective and treating. This study found self-compassion as a significant predictor of well-being in both societies. Although self-compassion found as an effective predictor in both societies, depending on the regression analysis results this study suggests that it is a more important subject in Turkish society.

Finally, Buddhist and Taoist Asian societies are expected to have higher levels of self-compassion. This theory was tested by Neff et al. (2008) but in their results United States had higher levels of self-compassion than Taiwan. This study supports the common hypothesis and reports higher level of self-compassion in Japanese people than Turkish.

In conclusion, this study found cultural differences on coping, self-compassion and well-being in two collective societies; Turkish and Japanese. Self-compassion is a valid predictor in both countries and can be used in upcoming research for treating depression and anxiety. The study was limited because of the usage of English instruments in Japanese sample. We suggest new studies to use Japanese instruments and greater samples and different combination of societies along with the recent samples.

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