



## Coping Strategies as the Predictor of Irrational Beliefs among Adolescents

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships of coping strategies and irrational beliefs. To this end, 360 middle and high school students completed Kidcope (Spirito, Stark, & Williams, 1988) and The Irrational Beliefs Scale (Çivitci, 2006). For the statistical analyzes of the study, Pearson moments correlation coefficient and multiple regression analyses were used. The results indicated that there is a medium negative relation between active coping and demand for comfort, medium positive relation between negative coping and demand for comfort. There is a medium positive relation between avoidant coping and demand for success, low positive relation with demand for comfort. Results of multiple regression analyses indicated that within the demand of success; avoidant coping strategies was the only predictor. Another result indicated that within demand for comfort; negative, active and avoidant strategies were the significant predictors, respectively. In the light of these findings, suggestions for the future interventions to improve coping skills of the students via individual and group guidance activities were emphasized and ideas for future research are discussed.

### Keywords

Adolescent  
Coping strategies  
irrational beliefs

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### Introduction

Humans go through several developmental stages throughout life and these stages all exhibit a variety of features (Kulaksızoğlu, 2011). During the transition from childhood to adolescence certain changes are experienced in the domains of biological, cognitive, social and emotional development. Among the social & emotional changes adolescences experience, the most striking ones are pursuit for independence, desire to spend more time with peers and experiencing fewer problems with parents (Sanrock, 2012). Daniel Offer and his colleagues (1988) conducted a study among the U.S., Australia, Bangladesh, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Taiwan, Turkey and Germany. In this study minimum seventy three percent of the adolescents exhibited a healthy physical image. Regardless of the minor differences in between, a good body of interviewed adolescents stated that they were most of the times happy, contended with their lives, care about their school and work, think positively about their parents and can cope with stress (Sanrock, 2011). As regards problem solving skills, Yıldırım, Hacıhasanoğlu, Karakurt and Türkes (2011) conducted a study covering five- thousand high school

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students. In this research they have detected that students' problem solving skills were in optimum level. On the other hand as a result of the indefinite status and immature identity of the adolescents passing through a rapid developmental stage, there is a sharp increase witnessed in the relations with family, siblings, school, teachers and peers. These are collectively critical sources of stress for the adolescents (Spirito, Stark, Grace, & Stamoulis, 1991; Stark, Spirito, Williams, & Guevremont, 1989). These problems may also be assistant in positive development function and help the adolescence to become an autonomous individual not independent to his/her family (Kulaksızoğlu, 2011; Yörükoğlu, 1993). The success adolescents attain in problem-solving matters greatly in proving himself/herself within society and securing a social status. Problem solving skill posits one of the most determining roles in personal identification and coping with environment (Danışık, 2005).

As a natural characteristic of social life, problem coping skills and problem coping approaches vary among different persons (Öğülmüş, 2001). D'Zurilla, Nezu and Maydeu-Oliveras (2004) define interpersonal problem as the failure of individuals to solve a problem faced, and the failure to have an idea on how to solve; thus they underline the nonpresence of problem solving skills in a person's problem solving process. In order to solve interpersonal problems D'Zurilla and Goldfried (1971) have developed a social problem solving model in which problem solving approach maintains two dimensions as problem orientation and problem solving skill. Problem orientation involves the thoughts and feelings an individual experiences when faced with problems and the emotional and cognitive aspects (Arslan, Hamarta, Arslan, & Saygın, 2010; Arslan, 2005). Problem orientation is identified as positive and negative orientation. Positive problem orientation is defined as possessing positive approaches towards a problem. It has been observed that these people identify their problem as a natural component of life, believe in their ability to solve the problem, and the necessity to have more time and effort for a successful problem solving (D'Zurilla, Chang, & Sanna, 2003). This positive approach is equally reflected on problem coping behaviors. In contrast negative thought is defined as negative problem orientation which refers to a nonfunctional perspective towards experienced problems. People with negative approaches towards problems view problem as a threat, and strongly claim that problems cannot be solved and they cannot solve these problems in any way (D'Zurilla et al., 2004). As regards problem solving skill dimension, problem solving skills are classified under rational, impulsive-careless and avoidance styles. Rational – logical problem solving is labeled as constructive problem solving skill (Eskin, 2009). Impulsive - careless and avoidance problem solving style is a non-constructive approach. These approaches involve avoiding thoughtless, careless acts and instead of coping with problem, involving nonfunctional problem solving ways such as avoiding the problem (D'Zurilla et al., 2004). Once people view the problems they face as uncontrollable situations, as a coping strategy they mostly tend to avoid the problem (Perade, Forns, Kirchner, & Munoz, 2009). In social problem solving model the objective is to gain people a positive look towards problems and a functional coping skill. Researchers suggest that people with negative thoughts towards problems and nonfunctional coping styles are more inclined towards stress (Basut, 2006), depression (Eskin, 2009), anxiety (Karataş, 2011) suicidal orientation (Fidan, Ceyhun, & Kirpınar, 2009; Holen, Lervag, Waaktaar, & Ystgaard, 2012; Spirito, Francis, Overholser, & Frank, 1996) and a wide range of other psychological problems.

Similar to problem solving skills, Rational Emotional Behavior Therapy also claims that underlying factor in psychological problems is irrational belief a person holds. It has also been asserted that the way people interpret the events and experiences determines the formation of psychological problems they face (Hackney & Cormier, 2008; Altıntaş & Gültekin, 2005). The main assumption of Rational Emotional Behavior Therapy is that sensation is basically a natural result of our beliefs, evaluations, comments and reactions to lifestyles. Ellis (2007) reports that we all have inner dialogues and through a continuous self- evaluation, we attribute a value to ourselves and influence ourselves in return. The consultation practice is defined as a training period in which a counselee relearn how to use in problem solving and emotional change the rational thoughts, experimental exercises and behavioral tasks (Corey, 2005). Such acquired information enable people to gain a positive approach towards themselves and the future (Güloğlu & Aydın, 2007). Irrational beliefs

constitute a major place within negative approach which has a crucial effect in coping skills of people. Irrational beliefs evolve around three *musts* defined as: I must do the best and I must be accepted, Everyone must treat me kindly and friendly, The world must give me all I want immediately, easily and completely. Exhibiting a more rational approach will help to cope with problems in a more effective way (Köroğlu, 2012). Creating an alternative thinking style in lieu of negative thoughts occupying problem solving model and empowering this style shall enable to create positive changes in people. Establishing alternative thoughts and options by employing different techniques on the experienced situation shall enable people to gain a different approach towards problems thus evaluate the problem in a realistic way (Akkoyunlu & Türkçapar, 2013). Compared to irrational beliefs and thoughts, rational beliefs and thoughts serve much more effectively to people to live happily, harmoniously, joyfully and productively. Rational thoughts and beliefs empower a person's ability to evaluate reality and adjust to reality (Karahan & Sardoğan, 2012). Positive thought, the way to explain experienced events, assists greatly in coping with problems (Seligman, 2007). Quick solutions lacking adequate self- mediation fail to rise as rational solutions. The attempt to approach the problem unbiased and neutrally, the conviction that any problem can be solved successfully shall provide necessary motivation to solve the problem (Ellis & Harper, 2009; Ellis, 2007). Acting, most of the times, involves contemplating in length and breadth (Ellis, 2008).

As the studies dealing with coping skills and irrational beliefs are examined, it surfaces that adolescents believing that their lives must be problem-free and comfortable in all stages of life reflect this irrational belief as bearing less responsibility in peer relations, avoiding social relations etc. (Çivitci, 2007). A positive correlation has been detected between irrational thoughts and physical aggressiveness & high anger level (Yavuzer & Karataş, 2012) and bullying (Şahin & Sarı, 2010). It has thus been concluded that as irrational thinking levels of people plummet, they exhibit a tendency to evaluate problem solving skills more positively (Bilge & Arslan, 2000). Yıkılmaz and Hamamcı's (2011) study demonstrates that rational emotional training applied to high school students proved to be effective in mitigating students' irrational beliefs and developing perceived problem-solving skills. Once individuals possess cognitive flexibility which occupies a major place in people's social problem skills, they tend to possess fewer numbers of irrational beliefs (Gündüz, 2013). In a different saying, possessing fewer irrational beliefs facilitates cognitive flexibility. Addington and Addington (1999) study manifested that people with poor cognitive flexibility have lower scores in interpersonal problem solving. Having social cognitive flexibility may be effective in elevating social problem solving skill (Stevens, 2009). An experimental research conducted by Steinhardt and Dolbier (2008) revealed that individuals employing high problem solving skills use more effective coping mechanisms and possess positive thoughts. Conducted experimental studies also manifested that psycho-education programs create effect in lowering the irrational belief levels of individuals (Çivitci, 2005; Yılmaz & Duy, 2013; Ulusoy & Duy, 2013).

Adolescence comprises of both secondary and high school grades. The coping strategies and irrational beliefs of these students are in focus of psychological counselors within these schools. Thus, the findings of the current study are considered to have contribution for the preventive guidance and counseling programs prepared by school counselors. With this respect, the purpose of current study is to determine the relations between coping skills and irrational beliefs and whether coping skills predict irrational beliefs in a significant level. It is envisaged that results of current study shall contribute significantly to a limited number of studies in relevant literature focusing on coping strategies and rational beliefs of adolescents during development stages and preventive & developmental guidance studies emphasizing the benefits of positive thinking among adolescents.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants are composed of middle and high school students within central Konya. Research sampling is comprised of two middle and two high school students selected via random clustering sampling method. There are total 360 students: 93 seventh graders, 94 eighth graders, 92 ninth graders and 81 tenth graders. One hundred and seventy four students are girls and 183 are boys. Three students did not reveal their gender. Age interval of students varies between 12-19 and mean age is 14.60 ( $S_s = 1.31$ ).

### *Data Collection Tool*

*Kidcope* (Spirito et al., 1988). *Kidcope* used in the study was developed by Spirito et al., (1988) and adapted into Turkish by Bedel, Işık, and Hamarta (2014) to measure the level of coping strategies of students in adolescent. *Kidcope* consist of 11 items and three subscales, including the active coping subscale, the avoidant coping subscales and negative coping subscale. Ratings are made on a four-point scale from Not at all (0) to Almost all the time (3). Sample items include "Thought about or did something else; tried to forget it" and "Tried to see good side of things; focused on good outcomes." The range of possible score varies from a minimum score of 0 to a maximum score of 12 for Active and Avoidant Coping and 0 to 9 for Negative Coping, higher scores reflecting the greater use of this coping behavior. The convergent validity of the *Kidcope* was supported by a moderate correlation between the subscales and trait anxiety. The internal consistency score of the *Kidcope* subscales were  $\alpha = .72$  for Active Coping,  $\alpha = .70$  for Avoidant Coping, and  $\alpha = .65$  for Negative Coping. Test-retest reliability in an interval of three weeks were  $r = .66$  for Active Coping,  $r = .61$  for Avoidant Coping, and  $r = .76$  for Negative Coping. These results revealed that this scale is a valid and reliable instrument to use with Turkish 6-11 grade students as a measure of coping approaches students.

*The Irrational Beliefs Scale (IBS-A; Çivitçi, 2006)*: The IBS-A used in the study was developed by Çivitçi (2006) to measure the level of irrational beliefs of Turkish students in early adolescence. The IBS-A consists of a total of 21 positive items and 3 subscales, including the demand for success subscale, the demand for comfort subscale, and the demand for respect subscale. The IBS-A consists of response options rated on 5-point Likert-type scale as follows: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat agree, (3) neutral/no opinion, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The total score on the scale could range from 21 to 105. In the analysis for internal consistency of the IBS-A, were also good enough; .62, .61, .57 and .71 respectively. Test-retest reliability coefficients were all satisfying;  $r = .84$  for demand for success,  $r = .75$  for demand for comfort and  $r = .67$  for respect and  $r = .82$  for the total of it.

### *Analysis of Data*

The scales employed in present research have been distributed by counselor teachers during class hours. Prior to the application students have been briefed about research objective and volunteering students have been selected only. In order to examine potential relations among research variables which are interpersonal problem solving, positive-negative affect and anxiety scores, Pearson Moments Multiplication Correlation coefficients have been calculated. To the end of determining explanatory ratio of interpersonal problem solving on positive-negative affect and anxiety level Multiple Regression Analysis has been employed. Their relative explanatory levels have been compared via standardized Beta ( $\beta$ ) values.

## Results

Correlations regarding coping skills and irrational beliefs employed in present research are as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Intercorrelations among Coping Skills and Irrational Beliefs

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Active coping	-					
2. Negative coping	-.164**	-				
3. Avoidant coping	.161**	.160**	-			
4. Demand for success	.027	.068	.208**	-		
5. Demand for comfort	-.216**	.263**	.164**	.286**	-	
6. Demand for respect	.019	-.018	.092	.143**	.072	-

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 1 displays that there is a medium negative relation between active coping and demand for comfort ( $r = -.216$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), medium positive relation between negative coping and demand for comfort ( $r = .263$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There is a medium positive relation between avoidant coping and demand for success ( $r = .208$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); a low positive relation with demand for comfort ( $r = .164$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

To the end of determining predictive level of coping skills variables on demand for success, multilinear regression analysis has been performed and obtained results are as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Multiple Regression Analyses for the Prediction of Demand for Success

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Active coping	.001	.125	.000	.009	.993
Negative coping	.124	.186	.036	.670	.504
Avoidant coping	.711	.188	.203	3.788	.000

$R = .211$   $R^2 = .045$

$F_{(3, 359)} = 5.545$   $p = .001$

Table 2 puts forth that all variables detected as predictive variable collectively predict demand for success on significant level ( $p < .001$ ) and explain about 5 % of the variance in demand for success. As relevant Beta values are examined, it surfaces that the unique significant predictor of demand for success is avoidant coping ( $\beta = .203$ ).

To the end of determining predictive level of coping skills variables on demand for comfort, multilinear regression analysis has been performed and obtained results are as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression Analyses for the Prediction of Demand for Comfort

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Active coping	-.487	.119	-.209	-4.089	.000
Negative coping	.697	.177	.202	3.947	.000
Avoidant coping	.576	.179	.165	3.227	.001

$R = .354$   $R^2 = .125$

$F_{(3, 359)} = 17.008$   $p = .001$

Table 3 puts forth that all variables detected as predictive variable collectively demand for comfort on significant level ( $p < .001$ ) and explain about 13% of the variance in demand for comfort. As relevant Beta values are examined it surfaces that the strongest predictor of demand for comfort is active coping ( $\beta = -.209$ ) ensued by negative coping ( $\beta = .202$ ) and avoidant coping ( $\beta = .165$ ) variables.

To the end of determining predictive level of coping skills variables on demand for respect, multilinear regression analysis has been performed and obtained results are as seen in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Multiple Regression Analyses for the Prediction of Demand of Respect

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Active coping	-.004	.078	-.003	-.047	.963
Negative coping	-.071	.115	-.034	-.617	.538
Avoidant coping	.208	.116	.097	1.788	.075

$R = .097$   $R^2 = .009$

$F_{(3, 359)} = 1.333$   $p = .336$

Table 4 puts forth that none of the independent variables predicted the demand for respect significantly ( $p > .05$ ) and all coping strategies collectively explain only about %1 of the variance in demand for respect.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

Research findings underline that there is meaningful relation between active and negative coping dimension of coping inventory and demand for comfort and also there is significant relation between avoidant coping dimension and demand for success and comfort. However, these associations are low or moderate. One possible explanation may be that there would be other factors rather than coping strategies which explain irrational beliefs for this sample such as anxiety (Çivitci, 2005), self-esteem (Şahan-Yılmaz & Duy, 2013), and perfectionism (Camadan, Kahveci & Yavaş, 2013). On the other hand, the sample within this study included only participants without any pathological diagnosis. Coping strategies are closely related to various pathologies (e.g., depression, suicide attempt, personality disorders) (Eskin, 2009) and with this purpose coping strategies would be strongly associated within the samples which have pathological diagnosis. Additionally, as the analysis results explaining the types of variables effective on demand for success are explored it has been detected that avoidant approach alone is a major predictor. Within coping strategy there are constructive, negative and avoidant coping strategies. Frequent demand from avoidant approach to solve problems is considered as nonfunctional coping mechanism (Eskin, 2009). Instead of facing their problems these people prefer to avoid troublesome situations. Individuals with high level of irrational belief in demand for success cultivate beliefs such as "I must always be an able, skillful and successful person and I must gain the approval of significant people in my life by drawing their attention but if I cannot manage that, that means I am a useless, worthless person (Ellis, 2008). Hence people might select to avoid facing situations which might pose a threat on their way to succeed. Otherwise the failure to succeed in experienced problems might lead them to feel incompetent and worthless. Thus these people may be inclined to select easy tasks and situations they might be successful all the time. Echoing our research findings, Camadan, Kahveci and Yavaş (2013) study has proved that the rise in negative perfectionism level renders positive effect in the development of negative thoughts.

In a different finding it has been demonstrated that the strongest predictors of demand for comfort are sequenced as active, negative and avoidant coping styles. There is a negative relation between demand for comfort which is an irrational belief and frequent use of active approach as a coping mechanism against problems. Active coping approach is defined as constructive and functional coping mechanism. It has been reported that these individuals view the problems they face as means for self-development, that they have full faith in their problem solving skills and that they believe it takes time and effort for successful problem solving (D'Zurilla, Chang, & Sanna, 2003). People who seek demand for comfort -which is an irrational belief- decidedly demand order, comfort and advantage in all their situations. They want that these demands are met with no effort in the fastest way possible. If these demands are unfulfilled they might experience intense negative feelings (Koroğlu, 2012). People advocating active coping style accept that problems are just natural ingredients of life, and it takes time and effort to solve these problems. They are aware of the fact not

everything has to be the way they want. In order to cope with the problem, they apply to constructive coping methods such as problem solving, seeking social support, mental remodeling etc. (Spirito, Francis, Overholser, & Frank, 1996). This finding is consistent with social problem solving model in which it is expected that once people possess constructive and active coping skills, people entertain a positive approach to problems and avoid negative approaches and thoughts (D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971). Adapting a positive way of thinking facilitates problem solving process whilst possessing negative thinking challenges problem solving process (Öğülmüş, 2001). The remaining predictors of demand for comfort are negative approach and avoidant approach. When active coping, which is a constructive functional approach, is dominant then demand for comfort diminishes. On the other hand when negative and avoidant approaches are dominant, demand for comfort rises and these results are consistent findings within social problem model. While people's problem coping skills (Bilge and Arslan), cognitive flexibility (Gündüz, 2013) and consciousness levels (Akın, 2012) rise, their irrational beliefs fall. As their negative perfectionism enhances (Dilmaç, Aydoğan, Koruklu, & Deniz, 2009) and their loneliness level increases (Kılınç & Selim, 2005) their irrational beliefs also rise. In another finding it has been manifested that demand for success is not significantly predicted in any one of the approaches such as active, negative and avoidant coping approaches. Individuals with high demand for success strongly believe that all people should treat them in a kind, sincere and respectful manner. Hence they label the ones who treat them otherwise as wicked and worthless people (Ellis, 2007, 2008). Demand for success and comfort is closely intertwined with experienced problems but since there are some other factors influencing demand for respect there could not have been a significant relation in between.

An overall view of research findings points out that there is significant relation between coping strategies of adolescents and demand for success and comfort which are amongst the irrational thoughts. This conclusion proves that in decreasing the level of irrational thinking in adolescents, it matters vitally to gain coping mechanisms against problems. It can thus reasonably be suggested that in preventive counseling and psychological guidance services provided in schools particularly, it would be beneficial to conduct activities and events assisting the adolescents in gaining coping approaches and emphasizing the benefits of positive thinking. It is considered that present study shall render major contributions to literature on social problem solving and coping literature. In order to generalize the findings this research should be revisited among adolescent groups exhibiting different features. It is also feasible to conduct a research on the effect of this coping mechanism over different structures of thoughts and emotions.

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