

Analysis of the Peer Mediation Process' Effect on Interpersonal Problems of University Students

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this research is to analyze the effect of the peer mediation process on interpersonal problems of university students. In order to examine this constructive solution, 32 third-year university students took a 12-session mediation training program. Afterwards, the trained peer mediators gave mediation support to university students' interpersonal problems that they experience in the school, dorm, and home environments. During the study, 27 mediators mediated 40 interpersonal problems. Thirty-eight interpersonal problems (95%) resulted in agreement, and agreement contents are constructive and functional at the rate of 96.6 percent. When the obtained results were evaluated, it was seen that the peer mediation process was an effective method for solving the interpersonal problems of university students in a desired, constructive and functional way.

INTRODUCTION

There are differences among the problems that individuals face in different grades. The main reason for these differences is the difference of the development periods. The literature shows that university students who are in the age range of late adolescence and young adulthood frequently have emotional, social, academic and economic problems (Erkan et al. 2012). Among these social and emotional problems, relationship problems are most prominent (Kaygusuz 2002). University students state that within relationships with friends, they experience problems adapting to their friends' attitudes and behaviors towards incidents (Erdogan et al. 2005). It is a natural part of life that university students with different cultures, ideas, beliefs, morals, and life-styles experience interpersonal problems. In the primary, secondary, and high school stages, students often consult with the administrators and teachers about problems experienced within the school environment. But it is well known that university students, who are transitioning to adulthood, mostly get help from their families and friends (Topkaya and Meydan 2013).

Interpersonal problems and disagreements that university students are having in schools or their life spaces are not good or bad, constructive or destructive, positive or negative, right or wrong, but neutral. Problem-solving approaches and skills are effective in the evaluation of interpersonal problems. While people with the tradition of resolving the problems and the disagreements by constructive problem-solving techniques comprehend them as more positive and productive, people with destructive problem-solving techniques comprehend them as more negative and problematic (Turnuklu 2007). In every group, there are individual differences in problem-solving skills and attitudes towards the problems they face in their living spaces. When encountering problems in their living spaces, some people exhibit a "rough" attitude, some people exhibit a "gentle" attitude, and some exhibit a "principled" attitude. For the people exhibiting a principled attitude the important thing is to find a fair solution that each side would be satisfied with (Ogulmus 2001). Individuals who demonstrate high levels of anti-social behavior experience higher levels of physically aggressive strategies compared to the non-antisocial group (Zafirakis 2015). The purpose of the social problem-solving training programs is to provide individuals with a positive approach and constructive problem-solving skills informed by a principled attitude towards problems. These gained social skills will assist people in staying away from non-functional and passive approach-

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es to their problems (Piskin et al. 2011). One of the goals of the student-oriented training programs is to provide the problem-solving and mediation skills.

The mediation process, a peaceful approach that ensures that both sides win in the experienced problems, was defined by Johnson and Johnson (1995) as a structured process in which an unbiased third party, known as the mediator, assists two or more people to negotiate their conflicts. Mediation is an interaction process that ensures that the individuals' demands and needs are met in a way that works for both sides. The purpose of mediation training, which is an alternative solution for the problems experienced, is to teach alternative problem-solving methods to individuals (Johnson and Johnson 1996). The practitioners are expected to apply program techniques to increase their social, emotional competence in situations such as the following: solving interpersonal problems, conflict resolution, and peer mediation, focusing on risk groups such as school-based prevention studies within the scope of preventive counseling and psychological consultation services (Korkut 2003). These applications are expected to decrease the risk of aggression following intense anger caused by the lack of interpersonal problem-solving skills. The purpose is to create a peaceful educational environment in schools through peer mediation training. Accordingly, not only the students but also all other personnel should be included in the training activities (Nation 2003). Interpersonal problems experienced in schools may also manifest as discipline problems for the teachers and school administrators. Since the students can manage their own problems constructively with the problem-solving skills that are gained in schools, teachers and administrators can spend less time solving the students' problems. Administrators and teachers can allocate their remaining energies left on the other educational pursuits (Lane and McWhirter 1992; Johnson et al. 1995). In schools it is important to intervene in problems in a timely fashion. Not taking required measures can cause a violation of trust in schools, which may lead to that institution becoming an untrustworthy environment for students, administrators, and families. Therefore, it may be observed that undesirable acts of violence occur. While social problems need to be addressed individually, a school behavior management policy needs to be in place in every

educational institution. The important thing is to build a secure school environment. The social skills that students will acquire through problem-solving and peer-mediation training will decrease the rate of interpersonal problems experienced in school environments on the one hand, and on the other, it will enable the parties to develop the skills to manage these problems (for example, communication skills, relationship initiation and preservation skills, conflict resolution skills, responsibility, and emotion management skills) (Piskin et al. 2011; Cetin et al. 2014). Through the given training, students not only learn constructive problem-solving skills but also can apply these skills to their real-life problems (Johnson et al. 1997; Smith et al. 2002; Johnson and Johnson 2004). Applied experimental studies show that it is not possible for students to learn these skills without any training (Johnson and Johnson 1996). It is understood that individuals commonly use limited and inappropriate techniques that do not involve agreement and problem-solving (Longaretti and Wilson 2006). The mediation process has crucial advantages regarding the ease with which it can be learnt and applied. Among these advantages, the most prominent are the facts that it develops interpersonal skills, it only requires basic communication skills, the process is simple and plain, the parties can control the process, which is flexible and reliable (Il 2009).

According to research by Bickmore (2002), the tendency to use non-violent problem-solving methods increased in the students who had peer mediation education. The skills learned help with the mediation and negotiation process and contribute to the students' using constructive and functional problem-solving skills in the interpersonal problems they experience. Acquiring and practicing skills in the training process helps students remember these skills for a long time (Stevahn et al. 1996). The training contributes to the students acquiring new ways of thinking, the ability to talk about problems, and the ability to act on the problems experienced (Sellman 2011). Therefore, a more positive approach can be taken in the problems confronted later (Stevahn 2004). While the constructive and functional problem-solving skills improve, non-functional approaches like power assertion and avoidance decrease (Turnuklu et al. 2010). In the research done by Noaks and Noaks (2009) a more positive and happy school environment was cre-

ated after the school-based peer-mediation training. After the peer-mediation training, it was observed that the students' self-confidence increased, their self-control mechanisms improved, and their feelings regarding the school improved. An intervention program by McWilliam et al. (2015) on community mediation training has demonstrated increases in positive social climate as well.

Aim of the Study

In this paper, the peer mediation process' effect on the interpersonal problems of university students is studied. University students, as opposed to students in other grades, can face interpersonal problems in both school environments and in the dorms and houses where they live. These problems can negatively affect their social, emotional and academic lives. This paper is the first study that examines the effects of mediation processes on university students' interpersonal problems.

Within the framework of the stated purpose of the study, the following questions became the focus for the researchers:

1. In which environments does the interpersonal problem occur?
2. What is the gender distribution of the parties that experience interpersonal problem?
3. What are the reasons behind the interpersonal problems that are referred to the mediation process?
4. What is the rate of the mediation process resulting in agreement?
5. What are the contents of the agreements?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Group

This research was conducted in the 2013-2014 academic year. The trainings were completed within the scope of the interpersonal problem-solving skill training course, which is an elective course in the Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling. Thirty-two students were trained. Twenty-seven of these students managed mediation processes on a voluntary basis. Because peer-mediation requires voluntary participation in a structural process in which a third party, a neutral student peer assists the students experiencing a problem to compromise with each

other. Peer-mediation is based on a "mediator" student who takes on a facilitator role to help arguing students to designate their common interests.

Process

In the preparation for the training program the sources such as Turnuklu et al. (2009a), Turnuklu et al. (2009b) and Bedell and Lennox (1997) were used. The following main skills are expected to be acquired in the training: the nature of interpersonal problems, interpersonal problem-solving models, the problem-solving process and stages, and negotiation and mediation skills. The training program to be applied within this scope was to be completed in 12 sessions (36 hours). The training program is aimed at the students who would manage the peer-mediation process and acquire the basic skills for easing the negotiation between their friends who experience problems. The application of each group member is examined by other group members and three applications are examined by the trainer through the video recording method. This method is aimed at giving required supervisory support to the group members. When the training is completed, the university students were informed about the study with written and visual materials. After they were informed, the students managed the mediation process in the mediation office, dormitories and houses at the university. Because the researcher supervised the process, the student mediators were supported when necessary, and mediation forms that were obtained through the mediation process were examined and received through the mediator student.

Data Collection Tool

The mediation form developed by Turnuklu et al. (2009a) was used as the base for data collection. The data, such as the names of problem experiencing parties, time and place of the problem, subject of the problem, agreement options, agreement status, and follow-up results, was collected using this method. The mediator who filled out these forms ensured that the agreement was concrete by both signing and requiring the problem-experiencing parties to sign the form at the end of the mediation process. Additionally, the form ensures that the necessary questions are asked in the mediation process and

the necessary steps are followed and not overlooked by the mediator student.

Analysis of Data

The data filled out in the mediation process the forms was used for analysis. Frequency and percentages were used for the digitization of the qualitative data. The data in the forms was analyzed with content analysis, which was one of the qualitative research methods. The purpose of content analysis is to reach the notions that can explain collected data (Yildirim and Simsek 2006). The first step of content analysis is the codification of data. Accordingly, all mediation forms were read for the codification of data. In the second step, the concepts were classified under a category as the result of codifications. To determine the consistency of codification in time, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated using the re-coding method. The correlation values were determined by codifying the data every three weeks. The reliability between the two applications was found to be between 92.1 percent and 100 percent.

FINDINGS

In the research, 40 interpersonal problems that problem-experiencing parties faced at school, home, dorms, and outside of school were mediated by the mediator students. The mediation process was performed by 27 of the students who were trained. It was seen that all (100%) of the student problems that are referred to the peer-mediation sessions occur between two parties.

When the distribution of the places in which the interpersonal problems of the students who attended the peer mediation process were examined, 11 (27.5%) of the problems took place at school, 13 (32.5%) at home, 13 (32.5 %) at the dorm, and 3 (7.5%) outside school.

When the student problems that were referred to mediation sessions were compared in terms of genders of the parties, 28 (70.0%) were female-female interpersonal problems, 3 (7.5%), were male-male problems, and 9 (22.5%) were female-male problems. It can be said that mostly female students' conflicts were referred to for peer mediation. The average age of parties attending the mediation sessions was 21.15 years. The reasons

these interpersonal problems were referred to the mediation process are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons of the interpersonal problems that were reflected to the mediation process

<i>Reasons of interpersonal problems</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Disagreement on the arrangements of housework	8	15.7
Communication barrier (not listening, criticizing, blaming, directing, interrogation)	19	37.2
Lack of confidence in relationship	8	15.7
Use of property without permission	8	15.7
Not following the room usage rules	8	15.7
Total	51	100

Table 1 shows the reasons interpersonal problems occurred according to the following distribution: 8 (15.7%) of the problems were caused by disagreement on the arrangements of housework, 19 (37.2%) of the problems were caused by communication barriers, 8 (15.7%) of the problems were caused by the lack of confidence in the relationship, 8 (15.7%) of the problems were caused by the use of property without permission, and 8 (15.7%) of the problems were caused by not following the room usage rules. The reason that the numbers of interpersonal problems' sources are more than the number of mediations performed is that problems arose for more than one reason.

The result of the mediation process performed with students experiencing interpersonal problems is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Rate of mediation processes that resulted with agreement

<i>Agreement result</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>χ^2</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>p</i>
Yes	38	95.0	32.40	1.	p<0.01
No	2	5.0			
Total	40	100			

The negotiation process shows that ninety-five percent of the 40 interpersonal problems resulted in an agreement and five percent percent did not. It was detected that it differed at a statistically significant level ($\chi^2_{(1)}=32.40, <0.05$) when comparing whether or not the inter-personal problems resulted in agreement.

The contents of the agreements that university students reached with their friends with whom they experienced interpersonal problems after mediation process are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Agreement contents

<i>Agreement contents</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Not repeating the undesired behavior	28	48.3
Better communication	28	48.3
Avoiding/Not talking	2	3.4
Total	58	100

Table 3 shows that 28 (48.3%) committed to not repeating the undesired behavior, 28 (48.3%) committed to better communication, and 2 (3.4%) committed to avoiding the problem in the agreements that the university students reached with their friends with whom they experienced interpersonal problems. The agreement contents show that parties attending the mediation process prefer constructive problem-solving at a rate of 96.6 percent.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the effect of the peer-mediation process on interpersonal problems in a sample of university students. With this purpose in mind, the following questions were examined:

1. In which environments does the interpersonal problem occur?
2. What is the gender distribution of the parties that experience the interpersonal problem?
3. What are the reasons of the interpersonal problems being referred to the mediation process?
4. What is the rate of the mediation process reaching an agreement?
5. What are the contents of the agreement?

When the data obtained from the mediation forms was examined, it was determined that all of the interpersonal problems of the students that were referred to a mediation process were between two individuals. Problem-experiencing students expressed that sometimes other friends were also negatively affected by the problems between these two parties. The distribution of the places in which the students' interpersonal problems occurred shows that the living spaces of university students are distributed in a balanced way (11 problems emerged at school, 13 at home, and 13 at dorm).

Seventy-five percent of the problems were experienced between female students. It can be said that mostly female students brought their

disagreements to the mediation process. According to research conducted among the university students by Gizir (2014) and Erkan et al. (2012), female students who volunteered were more often to seek help with their experienced problems. This result might also have been caused by the fact that all students managing the mediation process were female students. It is thought that the fact that there were more female students in the school, home, and dorm environments in which the mediator female students worked affected this result.

When the distribution of the problems experienced according to the topics was examined, it was seen that the topics included communication barriers, lack of confidence in the relationship, disagreement on the arrangements of housework, use of property without permission and not following the room usage rules. The research shows that the problems experienced by the university students regarding human relationships (Kaygusuz 2002) and friends' attitudes and behaviors (Erdogan et al. 2005) are significant. It is a natural part of life that interpersonal problems are experienced in the school, dorm and home environments in which the university students, some of whom are far from their families, live and spend time together. The important thing is to provide a constructive problem-solving approach to these problems. The fact that the university students consult with mediators in order to negotiate the problems they experience is a crucial indicator that they have a positive point of view regarding these problems.

In the research, 38 (95%) of 40 interpersonal problems that were referred to the mediation process resulted in agreement. When agreement contents are taken into consideration, it is seen that the parties signed off on constructive and functional problem solving agreements like not repeating the undesired behavior or communicating better. Sitting down at the negotiation table for agreement is important in obtaining positive results. To have positive thinking regarding the problems experienced eases the problem-solving process (Ogulmus 2001). When the data obtained from the mediation forms and the results obtained from the interviews conducted with mediators are examined, it is seen that the peer-mediation process is an effective method for negotiating problems. When the studies on dispute resolution, conflict resolution, negotiation and peer mediation are examined, it is seen

that there are some studies that show these methods are effective for solving students' problems and improving problem-solving skills (Zuure 2014). According to the result of the meta-analysis conducted by Burrell et al. (2003), the school-based mediation process resulted in agreement at the rate of ninety-three percent, and eighty-eight percent of the parties were pleased about the agreement. Turnuklu et al. (2009b) examined the effect of conflict resolution and peer mediation training in their study. In this study, the peer mediation forms determined that 444 student conflicts resulted in peer mediation and the agreement rate was 98.4 percent. Similar results were obtained in the other studies on mediation-process training (Turnuklu et al. 2010; Turk and Turnuklu 2013). As a result of the meta analysis on conflict resolution training programs in the mediation process conducted by Garrad and Lipsey (2007), it was seen that the school-based conflict resolution programs made critical contributions to decreasing antisocial behavior among students from preschool to twelfth grade. It was detected that the conflict resolution and peer mediation experiences were internalized by mediator students through communication, empathy (Turnuklu et al. 2009) self-respect, and self-confidence of mediator students was improved, disagreements and fights among the students decreased, peer relationships were developed (Turnuklu 2011), and constructive problem-solving skills were improved (Turk 2008; Kasik and Kumcagiz 2014). The research conducted by Johnson et al. (1994) shows that the students applied the given training successfully to their real life problems after the training. The research conducted by Stevahn et al. (2002) demonstrated that children followed a more positive approach regarding their conflicts after the conflict resolution and mediation training, which also helped the increase in their academic achievements and decrease in their withdrawing from school (Schellenberg et al. 2007). Mediation principles also resulted in the development of a positive outlook concerning school friends and the school environment (Frizzell 2015). In another study, the teachers of the students who were trained in peer mediation stated that social problems significantly decreased, and the acquired skills became useful outside of the school and classroom (Johnson et al. 1992).

CONCLUSION

According to the data, female students applied for mediation more often than male students. Thirty-eight interpersonal problems (95%) resulted in agreement, and agreement contents were constructive and functional at the rate of 96.6 percent. When the obtained results were evaluated, it was seen that the peer-mediation process was an effective method for solving the interpersonal problems of university students in a desired, constructive and functional way. Accordingly, the importance of peer guidance offices that may assist the university students seeking help from their peers about the problems they experience is clear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The activities and studies to help students acquire more positive interpersonal problem-solving skills in the guidance and psychological consultation services especially at the universities and in dormitories will be useful to increase the individuals' capacities to deal with the problems in a constructive and functional way. It is thought that this study will have crucial contributions to the literature on peer mediation. Extending this study to include peer-mediation services in the dormitories where students live might lead to more individuals benefitting from these services.

NOTE

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