

## Learned Resourcefulness and Coping with Stress in Mothers of Children with Disabilities

Yüksel EROĞLU\*

Sırrı AKBABA\*\*

Orhan ADIGÜZEL\*\*\*

Adem PEKER\*\*\*\*

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### Abstract

*Problem Statement:* Research has indicated that some mothers can cope with stressful life conditions and continue their lives normally, whereas others are unable to overcome such challenging conditions. Recent research has shown that mothers of children with disabilities are likely to know more about why some mothers have relatively well-adjusted lives despite stressful conditions, as well as why they cope better with these conditions than others. However, to date, studies in Turkey have only concentrated on the degree to which mothers of children with disabilities feel stress and which coping ways they use to curb the negative effects of stress.

*Purpose of the Study:* This study aimed to examine the relationships between learned resourcefulness and ways of coping with stress.

*Methods:* The study sample consisted of 222 mothers of children attending special education institutions during the 2011-2012 academic year in Sakarya, Turkey. The Self-Control Schedule and Ways of Coping Inventory were used to assess learned resourcefulness and coping strategies, the relationships among which investigated using Pearson

\*Corresponding author: M.A., Research Assistant, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Uludağ University, e-mail: yeroglu45@gmail.com

\*\* Prof.Dr., Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Uludağ University, e-mail: sakbaba@uludag.edu.tr

\*\*\*Associate Professor, Department of Health Management, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Süleyman Demirel University, orhanadiguzel@sdu.edu.tr

\*\*\*\*Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Atatürk University, adem.peker@hotmail.com

correlations. The conceptual model was tested using structural equation modeling, and data were analyzed with LISREL 8.54 and SPSS version 13.0.

*Findings and Results:* Results showed that while three ways of coping—self-confidence, optimism, and support-seeking—correlated positively with learned resourcefulness, the other two—helplessness and submissiveness—were negatively associated with learned resourcefulness. The goodness-of-fit index values of the model ( $\chi^2/df = 2.10$ , RMSEA = .072, GFI = .97, CFI = .97, NFI = .95, and SRMR = .053) indicate that the model was of an acceptable fit. According to path analysis, learned resourcefulness positively predicted self-confidence, optimism, and support-seeking and negatively predicted helplessness and submissiveness. Learned resourcefulness accounted for 36% of the variance for self-confidence, 33% for optimism, 7% for support-seeking, 5% for helplessness, and 8% for submissiveness.

*Conclusions and Recommendations:* This study demonstrated that learned resourcefulness positively predicted three ways of coping—optimism, self-confidence, and support-seeking— and negatively predicted helplessness and submissiveness. These results suggest that highly resourceful mothers of children with disabilities are more likely to use self-confidence, optimism, and support-seeking and less likely to use helplessness and submissiveness when coping with stress.

*Keywords:* Learned resourcefulness, coping ways of stress, structural equation modeling, path analysis, mothers of children with disabilities

*Coping* has been defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands appraised as taxing or exceeding a person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). By extension, coping strategies have classified as focusing on appraisals (adaptive cognitive), problems (adaptive behavioral), or emotions (Weiten & Lloyd, 2008). Appraisal-focused strategies involve a person's modifying the way he or she thinks, such as by denying or distancing him or herself from the problem. Problem-focused strategies involve negotiating the cause of the problem and include defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, weighing alternatives by their costs and benefits, choosing among alternatives, and acting. In this sense, problem-focused strategies are directed at changing or eliminating the source of stress. Lastly, emotion-focused strategies involve disclaiming emotions, bottling up emotions, distracting one, and relaxing by consuming alcohol and/or chemicals. Emotion-focused coping is oriented toward managing emotions that accompany perceived stress (Brannon & Feist, 2009).

Strategies for coping with stress are also referred to as either adaptive or maladaptive (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Adaptive coping refers to coping skills that serve to minimize stress for the short and long term, whereas maladaptive coping refers to those which, despite resulting in a short-term reduction of stress, ultimately

result in a return of stress at similar or greater levels in the long term. Examples of maladaptive behavior strategies include dissociation, sensitization, safety behaviors, anxiety avoidance, substance use, and indulgence in drugs or alcohol (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Lazarus (1999) proposed that three personality repertoires affect a person's coping style and emphasized their central role in predicting coping strategies; they are sense of coherence (Antonovsky & Sourani, 1988), hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), and learned resourcefulness (Rosenbaum, 1980). *Sense of coherence* is defined as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring, yet dynamic feeling of confidence. According to Antonovsky (1996), a sense of coherence with a sense of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness seems to be crucial for maintaining health by successfully coping with stressful events. *Hardiness* is defined as a constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resource for resisting encounters with stressful events (Kobasa, 1979). Hardiness has also been shown to predict effective coping styles, apparently because individuals with a great deal of hardiness have a sense of commitment to their lives, a belief that they can control events, and a view that change is a positive challenge (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Meanwhile, *learned resourcefulness* was coined by Meichenbaum (1977) as a concept in conjunction with his stress inoculation program. Meichenbaum (1977) postulated that learned resourcefulness involves certain attitudes that help an individual to effectively cope with external stressors, as well as to achieve control over problematic and stressful life events. In stress inoculation programs, individuals are trained to use cognitive and behavioral skills that enable them to cope effectively with stressful events. The major components of Meichenbaum's program are a) self-monitoring maladaptive thoughts, images, feelings, and behaviors, b) problem-solving skills, and c) emotion regulation and self-control skills. Meichenbaum (1985) determined that people who have acquired these skills had also developed a sense of learned resourcefulness, or the belief that they could effectively negotiate manageable levels of stress.

By some contrast, Rosenbaum (1983) defined *learned resourcefulness* as a behavioral repertoire comprised of (mostly cognitive) skill set with which an individual self-regulates internal events (e.g., emotions, cognitions, physiological responses, and pain) that interfere with the smooth execution of a desired behavior. According to Rosenbaum (1983), learned resourcefulness includes four components: (a) the use of self-statements to control emotional responses, (b) the application of problem-solving strategies, (c) the ability to delay immediate gratification, and (d) perceived self-efficacy, which is a general belief in one's ability to self-regulate internal events. Studies consistently report that people with significant resourcefulness are skillful in dealing with stressful events more constructively and effectively than less resourceful people. For instance, people who are more resourceful show a greater ability to tolerate pain (Rosenbaum, 1980), as well as cope more effectively with epileptic seizures (Rosenbaum & Palmon, 1984), hemodialysis (Baydoğan & Dağ, 2008), weight loss (Kennett & Ackerman, 1995), drinking (Carey,

Carey, Carnrike, & Meisler, 1990), substance use (Panitrat, 2000), and diabetes mellitus type II (Huang, Perng, Chen, & Lai, 2008), seasickness (Rosenbaum & Rolnick, 1983), depression and perinatal depression (Ngai & Chan, 2012; Siva, 1991), and academic stress (Goff, 2011).

Mothers of children with disabilities are generally more vulnerable to stress, as well as at a higher risk of depression, social isolation, marital discord, deep sadness, self-blame, helplessness, feelings of inadequacy, anger, shock, and fatigue (Gupta & Singhal, 2005). However, at least one study in Turkey (Akkök, Aşkar, & Karancı, 1992) have concentrated only on the degree to which mothers of children with disabilities feel stress and which coping strategies they employ to reduce the negative effects of stress. Other evidence suggests that some mothers with disabled children cope relatively well and can continue their lives normally, whereas others never fully adjust to this stressful event (Koller, Richardson, & Katz, 1992). Based on research that investigates relationships between learned resourcefulness and coping with stressful events, including epileptic seizures (Rosenbaum & Palmon, 1984), depression (Siva, 1991), hemodialysis (Baydoğan & Dağ, 2008), and diabetes mellitus type II (Huang et al., 2008), learned resourcefulness may play a crucial role in adjusting to having and raising children with physical and intellectual disabilities.

This study thus seeks to investigate the relationships between learned resourcefulness and coping strategies of mothers of children with disabilities. Considering relationships among coping strategies and learned resourcefulness, the following hypotheses are suggested. On the one hand, learned resourcefulness is positively correlated with coping styles of self-confidence, optimism, and support-seeking (i.e., problem-focused coping styles). On the other hand, learned resourcefulness is negatively correlated with the coping styles of submissiveness and helplessness (i.e., emotion-focused coping styles). Figure 1 presents a schematic model of these hypotheses.

## Method

### *Research Design*

A correlational design was used in this study. Correlational design aims to determine whether two or more variables change together and the strength of that relationship (Karasar, 2006). Correlational design was utilized to study the relationships between the learned resourcefulness and coping ways of stress in mothers of children with disabilities.

### *Study Sample*

The selection of participants used convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected due to their accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Bayram, 2009). The participant sample consisted of 222 mothers whose children were attending private special education and rehabilitation centers that offer special individual and/or group education during the 2011–2012

academic year in Sakarya, Turkey. Their ages ranged from 22 to 57 years old ( $M = 33.2$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ). Table 1 summarizes participant demographics.

#### *Research Instruments and Procedure*

*Self-Control Schedule.* Learned resourcefulness was measured using the Turkish version of the Self-Control Schedule (SCS) (Rosenbaum, 1980) that was adapted by Dağ (1991). This 36-item scale measures an individual's general repertoire of learned resourcefulness-related skills based on how they identify with positive self-statements that reflect their control of emotional and physiological responses (e.g., "When I am feeling depressed, I think about pleasant events"), problem-solving strategies (e.g., "When I am faced with a difficult problem, I approach it in a systematic way"), and delay of gratification (e.g., "I finish a job that I have to do before I start doing things I really like"). On the scale, each item is ranked on a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Uncharacteristic) to 5 (Very characteristic). As such, possible scores range from 36 to 180 in which a higher score signifies a greater repertoire of skills related to learned resourcefulness. Dağ (1991) found the internal consistency coefficient of the scale to be .78 and the item-total correlations to range from .11 to .51. Furthermore, a study on the criterion-related validity of the scale found a significant correlation between the scale and Rotter's internal and external locus of control scale (Dağ, 1991; Rosenbaum, 1980).

*Ways of Coping Inventory.* The Ways of Coping Inventory (WCI) developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980) was adapted to Turkish by Şahin and Durak (1995). Though the original WCI consists of 66 items, Şahin and Durak's (1995) version for a study conducted upon university students reduced the number of items to 30. Exploratory factor analysis revealed five ways of coping with stress: optimism, self-confidence, submissiveness, helplessness, and support-seeking. Each way of coping has its own subscale with a different set of items: seven for self-confidence, five for optimism, eight for helplessness, six for submissiveness, and four for support-seeking. Each subscale's internal consistency revealed a different Cronbach's alpha value: .68 for optimism, .80 for self-confidence, .70 for submissiveness, .73 for helplessness and .47 for support-seeking. Stress symptom scale correlations ranged from  $r = -.13$  (optimism) to  $r = .53$  (helplessness). The Turkish WCI is a 30-item measure containing two negatively worded items for support-seeking. Responding requires participants to rate the extent to which they agree with each item on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not appropriate) to 4 (Very appropriate).

Table 1  
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

<i>Education level</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Illiterate	94	42
Literate without school education	60	27
Elementary school	35	16
High school	20	9
University	13	6
<b>Perceived socioeconomic status</b>		
Low	52	23
Middle	151	68
High	19	9
<b>Type of family</b>		
Nuclear	148	66
Joint	52	23
Single parent	32	14
<b>Child's type of disability</b>		
Down syndrome	50	23
Mental disability	73	33
Autism spectrum disorder	19	9
Other disabilities (e.g., epilepsy and cerebral palsy)	38	17

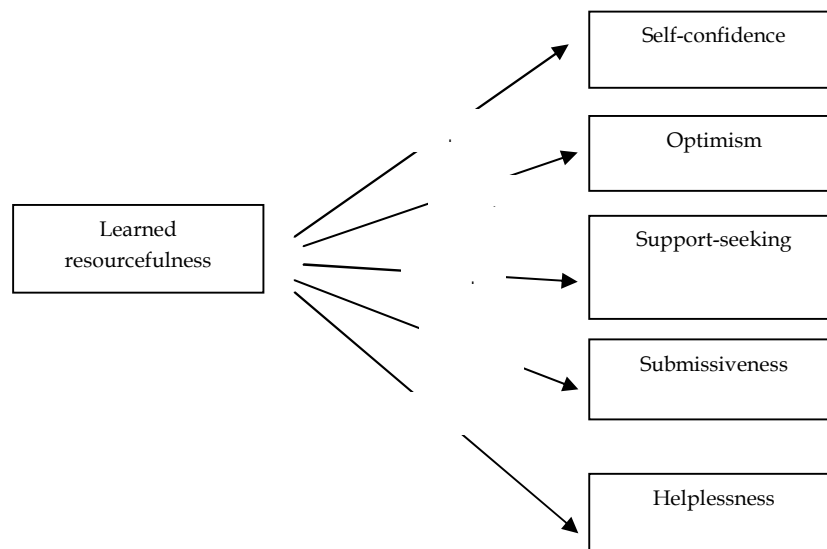


Figure 1. Conceptual model of correlations between learned resourcefulness and ways of coping with stress

The average scores are raw scores divided by the number of items in each subscale. Though a total score of WCI cannot be computed, higher scores for optimism, self-confidence, and support-seeking indicate effective coping, whereas higher scores for submissiveness and helplessness indicate ineffective coping. These factors also can be divided into two broad categories; problem-focused coping strategies include optimism, self-confidence, and support-seeking, while emotion-focused coping strategies include submissiveness and helplessness.

Data were collected from 222 mothers whose children were attending different private education and rehabilitation centers that offer individual and/or group special education during the 2011–2012 academic year in Sakarya, Turkey. After obtaining required written consent from the administration of the private special education and rehabilitation center where the study was to be carried out, the mothers of the children receiving either individual or group education received information about the study. Mothers who volunteered to participate in the study were taken into a classroom, where they were informed about the aim and importance of the study and where they were invited to provide their informed consent to participate to ensure that their personal information would be kept confidential and that the results of the study would not be publicized. Informed consent was offered verbally by illiterate mothers and literate mothers without school education; all other mothers signed a written consent form. While the questionnaires were administered, the items included in the questionnaires were read individually by researchers for the benefit of illiterate participants and those who reported being literate school without education. When necessary, unclear points were explained to these participants, and their responses marked on the scales by the researchers.

#### *Data Analysis*

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was applied to assess whether relationships between learned resourcefulness and ways of coping with stress were significant. To test the hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. SEM can account for measurement error by including measurement error variables that correspond to the measurement error rate of observed variables. Therefore, conclusions about relationships between constructs are not biased by measurement error, yet are equivalent to relationships between variables of perfect reliability. SEM also allows users to model and test complex relationship patterns, including multiple hypotheses together at once (Kline, 2005). Lastly, analyses were performed using SPSS version (Chicago, IL, USA) 13.0 and LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1996).

## **Results**

#### *Descriptive Data and Inter-Correlations*

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the variables. As shown there, learned resourcefulness positively correlated with the

ways of coping of self-confidence ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ), optimism ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ), and support-seeking ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ). By contrast, learned resourcefulness was negatively correlated to submissiveness ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ) and helplessness ( $r = -.23, p < .01$ ).

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations of Variables*

<i>Variables</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
1. Learned resourcefulness						
2. Self-confidence	.60**					
3. Optimism	.58**	.71**				
4. Support-seeking	.26**	.14*	.08			
5. Submissiveness	-.29**	-.15*	-.10	-.30**		
6. Helplessness	-.23**	-.18**	-.15*	-.01	.20**	
<i>M</i>	1.20	22.84	15.60	11.51	13.37	19.84
<i>SD</i>	17.30	3.67	2.71	2.13	3.12	4.22

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

*Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)*

Before applying SEM, the assumptions of SEM were investigated. Multivariate normality tests that check a given dataset of similarity to the multivariate normal distribution were conducted with LISREL. The results of these tests indicated evidence sufficient to show that data were normally distributed. Multivariate outliers were investigated using the Mahalanobis distance, after which 15 cases were identified as outliers with  $p < .001$  and thus deleted, given their potential to bias the model and affect major assumptions (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000). Box's *M* test for the equality of variance-covariance matrices resulted in statistically insignificant results, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity had been met. Pearson correlation tests revealed no multicollinearity problem between the subscales of the way of coping with stress and learned resourcefulness. Using SEM, all parameters of the model were tested simultaneously, the results of which appear in Figure 2. Results obtained from structural equation modeling demonstrated that the model was well fit. Table 3 shows this and other goodness-of-fit indices. For the ways of coping with stress, learned resourcefulness accounted for 36% of variance for self-confidence, 33% for optimism, 7% for support-seeking, 5% for helplessness, and 8% for submissiveness. The standardized coefficients in Figure 2 clearly show that learned resourcefulness positively predicted self-confidence ( $\beta = .60$ ), optimism ( $\beta = .58$ ), and support-seeking ( $\beta = .26$ ), yet negatively predicted helplessness ( $\beta = -.23$ ) and submissiveness ( $\beta = -.29$ ).



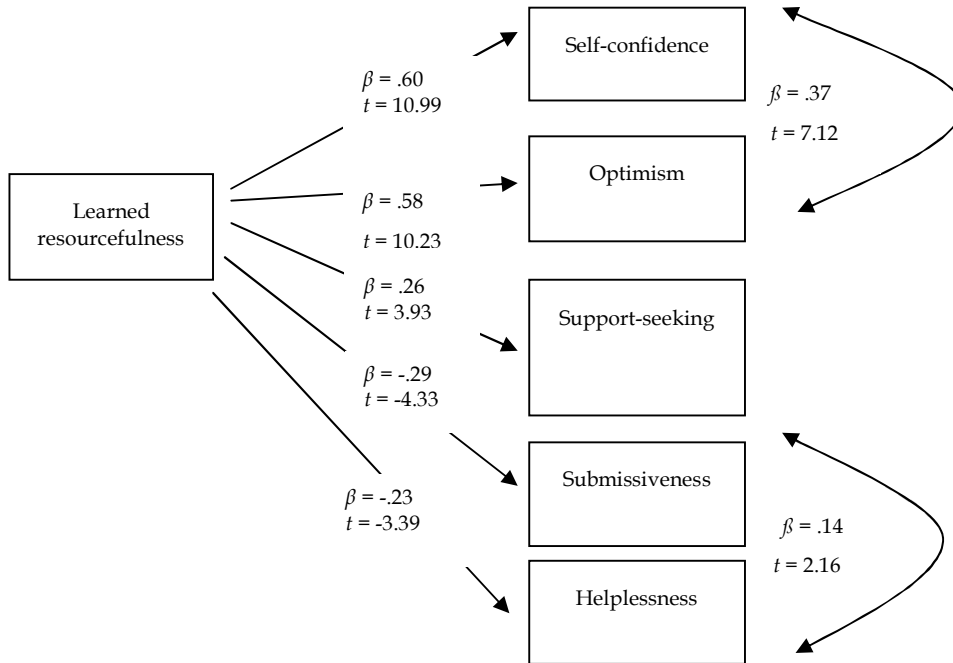


Figure 2. Path analysis between learned resourcefulness and ways of coping with stress.

Table 3

Goodness-of-fit indices of the model

Goodness-of-fit indices	Calculated fit indices	Levels of acceptable fit	Levels of perfect fit
$\chi^2$	16.82		
df	8		
$\chi^2/df$	2.10	$\chi^2/df \leq 5$	$\chi^2/df \leq 2$
GFI	.97	$.90 \leq GFI < .95$	$.95 \leq GFI \leq 1.00$
NFI	.95	$.90 \leq NFI < .95$	$.95 \leq NFI \leq 1.00$
CFI	.97	$.90 \leq CFI < .95$	$.95 \leq CFI \leq 1.00$
RMSEA	.072	$.05 < RMSEA \leq .08$	$0 \leq RMSEA \leq .05$
SRMR	.053	$.05 \leq SRMR \leq .08$	$0 \leq SRMR \leq .05$

Note: This table was constructed using criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999).

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationships among learned resourcefulness and the five ways of coping with stress in mothers of children with disabilities. Findings demonstrated significant relationships between learned resourcefulness and the dimensions of each way of coping with stress. Furthermore, goodness-of-fit indices of the path model indicate the model's acceptability (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

As expected, the model first showed that learned resourcefulness positively predicted the ways of coping of self-confidence, optimism, and support-seeking. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Rosenbaum & Ben-Ari, 1985; Rosenbaum & Jaffe, 1983; Rosenbaum & Palmon, 1984), which have suggested that learned resourcefulness relates to coping effectively with various stressful and challenging situations. Mothers of children with disabilities in Turkey deal with general adaptive problems—preserving a satisfactory self-image, keeping the family together, educating the child through necessary lenses, and preparing for an uncertain future—as well as disability-related problems, including struggling with symptoms of disabilities, developmental delays, treatment-related stressors, and establishing functional relationships with caregivers (Yıldırım & Conk, 2005). In coping, mothers of children with disabilities try to manage upsetting feelings aroused by having children with disabilities and to preserve reasonable emotional balance (Karadağ, 2009). These mothers' psychological adjustments depend on their ability to maintain a balance between the demands of stressful situations and the availability of personal capacities (e.g., optimism) and social resources (e.g., social support from extended family and friends) (King, King, Rosenbaum, & Goffin, 1999). On this point, Kaner (2004) found that the life satisfaction levels of mothers of children with disabilities changed according to the levels of social support they received.

According to the findings of the present study, learned resourcefulness is of central importance to understanding the psychological adjustments by which mothers estimate whether their personal capacities and resources of social support meet the demands of stressful situations. Since no study has yet investigated the role of these mothers' level of learned resourcefulness, such findings are remarkable. Mothers with significant learned resourcefulness are purported to be better at managing stressful events by using personal capacities and social sources. They attempt to change situations to benefit them, for they believe in their competence to do so. As such, they tend to use self-confidence when confronting stressful events. In a similar vein, Yıldız (1997) found that individuals with significant resourcefulness more often attribute success to their own efforts and abilities, while less resourceful individuals more often attribute success to external changes. Highly resourceful individuals also often appeal to optimism as a way of coping with stress. The fact that highly resourceful people possess a self-help skill set, including self-control, problem-solving, and a belief in their ability to cope effectively with adversity (Rosenbaum, 1990) suggests that they are likely to use optimism, based on their assumption that they can do something to change situations for the better (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2007). Yet, highly resourceful mothers were found to ask for social support while experiencing stressful events more often than less resourceful mothers.

In this sense, social resources are determined by the extent to which mothers have access to emotional and instrumental support from their relationships with others—for example, from marital support, family support, informal support from extended family and friends, and formal support from professional caregivers (Vermaes, Janssens, Bosman, & Gerris, 2005). Likewise, studies concerning learned resourcefulness reported remarkably positive relationships between support-seeking and learned resourcefulness (Dirksen, 2000). Considering that highly resourceful people are better equipped to decrease the negative effects of stress on their adaptive functioning, it is unsurprising to find that learned resourcefulness is closely related to support-seeking and making contact with others to partly reduce feelings of distress (Mortenson, 2009).

Secondly, and also as anticipated, learned resourcefulness was negatively related to the coping methods of helplessness and submissiveness, also known as emotion-focused coping strategies. A key feature of learned resourcefulness is that individuals cope effectively with difficult life events, believe in their capacity to deal with problems, and avoid negative thinking about a situation beyond their control. In addition to its direct prevention of depression (Huang, Sousa, Tu, & Hwang, 2005), learned resourcefulness inhibits feelings of helplessness, which reflects a negative view of the self and the belief that one has little control over his or her life (Sacco & Beck, 1995). By extension, mothers of children with disabilities with greater resourcefulness are less likely to feel helpless, particularly in the act of being resourceful. Since people with higher levels of learned resourcefulness believe that they have control over their lives and that such can help them to feel better, develop greater self-confidence, and implement problem-solving skills (Baydoğan & Dağ, 2008), they therefore control, cut back, and/or stop helpless thoughts at will. To support these findings, other studies (Rosenbaum & Ben-Ari, 1985; Rosenbaum & Jaffe, 1983; Rosenbaum & Palmon, 1984) have suggested that learned resourcefulness is an important factor for coping with learned helplessness. Learned resourcefulness helps mothers of children with disabilities avoid the way of coping of not only helplessness but also submissiveness. Considering that people with greater resourcefulness perceive themselves to be autonomous (Zauszniewski & Martin, 1999) and, for mothers, competent in their maternal roles (Ngai & Chan, 2012), such a relationship is reasonable. As a result, mothers of children with disabilities who feel competent tend to be effectual under stressful circumstances, while less resourceful people tend to behave submissively.

Regarding future research, this study poses several implications. First, further studies that investigate the relationships among learned resourcefulness, ways of coping with stress, and other psychological constructs are necessary to enhance the understanding some of this study's findings. Additionally, future studies can investigate the relationships suggested by this study's results by using SEM and establishing a mediating variable. At the same time, this study has also several implications for prevention programs that target mothers of children with disabilities. Since these mothers suffer from depression, guilt, anxiety about the future, family discord, less social support, life restrictions, and hopelessness, it is important for mental health professionals to develop prevention strategies tailored to

treat them (Küçükler, 2001; Küçükler, 2006; Yıldırım & Conk, 2005). Moreover, because how children's self-perceptions and behavioral emotional strengths are affected most by mothers' learned resourcefulness has been taken into consideration (Argun, 2007), related intervention programs prepared for these mothers should develop children's independent living skills as well. It is thus necessary to examine both protective and risk factors for resilience to encourage mothers to develop such preventative strategies.

Based on this study's findings, preventive strategies targeting mothers of children with disabilities require learned resourcefulness. Furthermore, these mothers in Turkey tend to use optimism while confronting stressful conditions due to fatalist thoughts (Gülşen & Özer, 2009). However, adopting a coping style of fatalism to negotiate stress cannot aid their struggles with stress-related problems derived from their having disabled children. Therefore, the efficacy of any coping-based prevention program will likely to be strengthened if the interventions prioritize resourcefulness and are tailored to respond to mothers' sociocultural contexts. For this, factors include self-acceptance, optimism, autonomy, commitment to a purpose in life, and a belief that is possible to learn and grow from negative events—all of which can promote the well-being and adaptability of mothers of children with disabilities. It is likely that these factors also reflect generally positive core beliefs about the self, the world, and the future, and as such, coping prevention programs should address these strengths and assets (Akbaba & Gözüm, 1998).

Though the results of this study pose implications for interventions that strengthen people's ability to use effective coping strategies by increasing learned resourcefulness, a number of limitations of this study should be made clear. First, the data reported here for ways of coping with stress and learned resourcefulness are limited to self-reported data. Second, correlational statistics only permit observations regarding whether factors change alongside others; as such, causality cannot be inferred. Thirdly, the participants for this study were selected by using convenient sampling, which may therefore limit the generalizability of its findings to the general population. Fourthly, the inclusion of illiterate participants and the literate participants without school education may pose another limitation. The items included in the questionnaires were read one by one by the researchers administering the study to the participants who reported being illiterate or literate without school education; furthermore, unclear points were explained and the participants' answers recorded by the researchers. However, other than this verbal reading method (Boratav, 2003), different methods are also available to help illiterate individuals and literate individuals without school education to understand and rate items on scales; such methods include administering the scales to the same individuals with different researchers and calculating the relationship between two administrations by using statistical analysis (e.g., kappa analysis) to gauge reliability. Finally, the lack of data regarding the ages of disabled children is another important limitation in this study. On this point, future studies should examine whether the relationship between mothers' ways of coping with stress and their levels of learned resourcefulness change according to the ages of their children via testing for factorial invariance.

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## Engelli Çocuğa Sahip Annelerde Öğrenilmiş Güçlülüğün Stresle Başa Çıkma Tarzlarına Etkisinin İncelenmesi

### Atıf:

Eroğlu, Y., Akbaba, S., Adıgüzel, O., & Peker, A. (2014). Learned resourcefulness and coping with stress in mothers of children with disabilities. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 55, 243-262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2014.55.14>

### Özet

*Problem Durumu:* Başa çıkma, bireyin kendisi için sıkıntı oluşturan içsel ve dışsal durumları değiştirmek için bilişsel ve davranışsal olarak çabalaması olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Başa çıkma stratejileri; bilişsel değerlendirme, problem odaklı ve duygu odaklı olmak üzere üçe ayrılmaktadır. Bilişsel değerlendirmeler, bireylerin düşünme biçimlerini düzenlemesini içermektedir. Bu başa çıkma stratejisine örnek olarak problemi yadsıma ve problemden kaçma verilebilir. Problem odaklı başa çıkma stratejileri, problemin tanımlanmasını, alternatif çözüm yolları üretilmesini, bu çözüm yollarının olası yararlarının ve zararlarının değerlendirilmesini ve bunların arasından birinin seçilerek uygulanmasını içermektedir. Duygu odaklı başa çıkma stratejileri ise reddetmeyi, yaklaşma-kaçınmayı, suçlamayı, sorun hakkında düşünmekten kaçınmayı, duygularını bastırmayı, dikkatini başa yöne çevirmeyi veya alkol ve ilaç kullanarak rahatlamayı içermektedir.

Lazarus kişilerin stresle başa çıkmasında üç önemli etmenin rol oynadığını ifade etmiştir: uyum duygusu, dayanıklılık ve öğrenilmiş güçlülük. Uyum duygusu, durumu doğru tanıyıp anlamayı, karar ve eylemleri ayarlamayı ve içinde bulunulan durumdan anlam çıkarmayı içermektedir. Dayanıklılık, stres verici durumla karşılaştığında kişiye mücadele gücü sağlamaktadır. Dayanıklılık duygusu yüksek insanlar, yaşamlarına sıkı şekilde bağlanmakta, olayları kontrol edebileceğine dair güçlü bir inanç taşımakta ve değişimi mücadele edilecek olumlu bir durum olarak görmektedir.

Öğrenilmiş güçlülük kavramı Meichenbaum tarafından ortaya atılmıştır. Meichenbaum öğrenilmiş güçlülüğün stres yaratan durumları kontrol etmek kadar dışsal stres kaynaklarıyla etkin şekilde mücadele etmeyi de içerdiğini ifade etmiştir. Daha sonra Rosenbaum, öğrenilmiş güçlülük kavramını geliştirerek kişilerin stres verici bir durumla karşılaştıklarında bilişsel başa çıkma stratejilerini kullanma ve kendilerini denetleme düzeyleri şeklinde tanımlamıştır. Rosenbaum'a göre öğrenilmiş güçlülük; duygusal tepkilerin kontrol edilmesini, problem çözme stratejilerinin kullanılmasını, zevk verici dürtülerin ertelenebilmesini, bireylerin içsel tepkilerini kontrol edebileceklerine ilişkin algılanan öz-yeterliği içermektedir. Araştırmalar öğrenilmiş güçlülüğü yüksek bireylerin stres yaratıcı durumlarla yapıcı şekilde başa çıkabildiklerini göstermektedir.

Engelli çocuğa sahip annelerin yoğun stres yaşadıkları ve yoğun stresin depresyon, sosyal yalıtım, evlilik çatışması, öz-suçlama, çaresizlik, yetersizlik duygusu, öfke, şok ve yorgunluğa yol açtığı ifade edilmektedir. Türkiye'deki araştırmalar yalnızca engelli çocuğa sahip annelerin ne düzeyde stres yaşadığına ve stresin olumsuz etkilerini azaltmak için kullandıkları baş etme stratejilerine odaklanmaktadır. Engelli çocuğa sahip annelerin bir kısmının engelli çocuğa sahip olmanın yarattığı stresle etkin şekilde başa çıktığı ve yaşamlarını olağan şekilde sürdürdüğü, buna karşın bir kısmının bu duruma hiçbir zaman uyum sağlayamadığı ifade edilmektedir. Öğrenilmiş güçlülük ile epilepsi nöbetleri, depresyon, hemodiyaliz ve diabetes mellitus tip II gibi stres verici durumlarla başa çıkma arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyen araştırmalara dayanarak, öğrenilmiş güçlülüğün engelli bir çocuğa sahip olma durumuna uyum sağlamada kritik bir rol oynadığı ileri sürülebilir. Bundan dolayı bu araştırmada engelli çocuğa sahip annelerde öğrenilmiş güçlülük ile stresle başa çıkma tutumları arasındaki ilişkilerin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

*Araştırmanın Amacı:* Bu araştırmanın amacı öğrenilmiş güçlülüğün stresle başa çıkma tutumları üzerindeki yordayıcı etkisini incelemektir.

*Araştırmanın Yöntemi:* Araştırmanın örneklemini uygun örneklem yöntemiyle seçilen çocukları Sakarya'daki çeşitli özel eğitim kurumlarına devam eden 222 anne oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada ölçme aracı olarak Öğrenilmiş Güçlülük Ölçeği ve Stresle Başa Çıkma Tarzları Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Öğrenilmiş Güçlülük Ölçeği 36 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Bu ölçek bireylerin öğrenilmiş güçlülüklerini; duygusal ve fizyolojik tepkileri kontrol etmeye (12 madde), problem çözme stratejilerine (11 madde), zevk verici dürtüleri engellemeye (4 madde) ve içsel olayları düzenlemeye (9 madde) yönelik sorular yardımıyla ölçmektedir. Katılımcılar her bir soruya ilişkin düşüncelerini; "Hiç tanımlamıyor (1)"dan "Çok iyi tanımlıyor (5)"a kadar uzanan 5'li likert bir ölçek yardımıyla cevaplamaktadır. Ölçekten en düşük 36, en yüksek 180 puan alınabilmektedir. 11 madde ters puanlanmaktadır. Ölçekteki yüksek puanlar öğrenilmiş güçlülük düzeyinin yüksekliğine işaret etmektedir. Dağ tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan ölçeğin iç tutarlılığı .78 olarak bulunmuştur. Ölçüt-bağıntılı geçerlik için yapılan çalışmada ise Rotter'in İç ve Dış Kontrol Odağı Ölçeği ile anlamlı ilişkiler gösterdiği bulunmuştur. Stresle Başa Çıkma Tarzları Ölçeği Şahin ve Durak tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanarak özgün formu 66 maddeden oluşan ölçek 30 maddeye indirilmiştir. Açımlayıcı faktör analizi sonucunda ölçeğin kendine güvenli, iyimser, boyun eğici, çaresiz ve sosyal destek arama alt boyutlarından oluştuğu bulunmuştur. Ölçekte sosyal destek arama boyutundaki iki madde tersten puanlanmaktadır. Katılımcılar maddelerin kendilerine uygunluklarını "Hiç Uygun Değil (1)"den "Tamamen uygun (4)"a kadar uzanan dörtlü likert tipi bir ölçek yardımıyla belirtmektedir. Her bir alt ölçeğe ilişkin ortalama puanlar; o alt ölçekten alınan puanın madde sayısına bölünmesiyle elde edilmektedir. Kendine güvenli, sosyal destek arama ve iyimser alt ölçeklerinden alınan puanların yükselmesi etkili; boyun eğici ve çaresiz alt ölçeklerinden alınan puanların yükselmesi ise etkisiz başa çıkma stratejilerinin kullanıldığını göstermektedir. Bu alt boyutlar ayrıca problem odaklı (kendine güvenli, iyimser ve sosyal destek arama) ve duygu odaklı (çaresiz ve boyun eğici) başa çıkma stratejileri olarak da isimlendirilmektedir. Öğrenilmiş güçlülük ile stresle başa çıkma tarzları arasındaki ilişkiler korelasyon ve yapısal

eşitlik modellemesi aracılığıyla incelenmiştir. Elde edilen veriler SPSS 13.0 ve LISREL 8.54 programları yardımıyla incelenmiştir.

*Araştırmanın Bulguları:* Pearson korelasyon analizi sonuçları; öğrenilmiş güçlülüğün kendine güvenli ( $r=.58$ ,  $p<.01$ ), iyimser ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.01$ ) ve sosyal destek arama ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.01$ ) ile pozitif, çaresiz ( $r=-.23$ ,  $p<.01$ ) ve boyun eğici ( $r=-.29$ ,  $p<.01$ ) başa çıkma stratejileriyle negatif ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Öğrenilmiş güçlülüğün stresle başa çıkma tarzlarını yordayıcılığını incelemek amacıyla kurulan yapısal eşitlik modelinden elde edilen bulgular ki-kare değerinin ( $\chi^2=16.82$ ,  $p=0.03$ ) anlamlı olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca uyum iyiliği indeksleri (RMSEA=0.072, GFI=0.97, CFI=0.97, AGFI=0.93, NFI=0.95, SRMR=.053) modelin kabul edilebilir düzeyde uyum verdiğini göstermiştir. Öğrenilmiş güçlülük başa çıkma stratejilerinden kendine güvenli, iyimser ve sosyal destek aramayı pozitif, çaresiz ve boyun eğici yaklaşımlarını negatif olarak yordamaktadır. Açıklanan varyans oranlarına bakıldığında kendine güvenlideki varyansın %36'sını, iyimser başa çıkma stratejisindeki varyansın %33'ünü, sosyal destek aramadaki varyansın %7'sini, çaresiz yaklaşımdaki varyansın %5'ini ve boyun eğici yaklaşımdaki varyansın %8'ini açıklamaktadır.

*Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Önerileri:* Araştırma bulguları incelendiğinde öğrenilmiş güçlülüğün kendine güvenli, iyimser ve sosyal destek arama yaklaşımlarını kullanarak stresle başa çıkmayı arttırdığı; çaresiz ve boyun eğici yaklaşımları kullanarak stresle başa çıkma durumunu ise azalttığı söylenebilir. Araştırma sonucunda ilk olarak öğrenilmiş güçlülük ile stresle başa çıkma tarzları arasındaki ilişkinin aracı değişkenler kullanılarak incelenmesi önerilebilir. Ayrıca engelli çocuğa sahip annelerin stresle başa çıkma düzeylerini arttırmak için hazırlanan programların öğrenilmiş güçlülüğü arttırmayı amaçlamasının yararlı olacağı ifade edilebilir.

Bu çalışmanın bazı sınırlılıkları bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak bu çalışmada öz-bildirime dayalı ölçme araçları kullanılmıştır. İkinci olarak korelasyonel verilerin kullanılması neden-sonuç ilişkisine yönelik çıkarımların yapılmasına izin vermemektedir. Son olarak uygun örnekleme yönteminin kullanılması bulgular genellenirken dikkatli olunmasını gerektirmektedir.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Öğrenilmiş güçlülük, stresle başa çıkma tutumları, yapısal eşitlik modellemesi, yol analizi, engelli çocuk anneleri