An Investigation of Depression and Loneliness among School Principals

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate whether loneliness predicts depression, and to examine the levels of depression loneliness among school principals according to such variables as gender and educational background. The study was conducted on 232 school principals (37 females and 195 males). Thirty six of the participants had associate degrees, 164 had undergraduate degrees and 32 had graduate degrees. The UCLA Loneliness Questionnaire and the Beck Depression Inventory were used in order to gather the data. t-test, ANOVA, Pearson moments correlation coefficients and linear regression were used in order to analyze the data. Whether the levels of loneliness and depression differed significantly across gender was analyzed with a t-test. The results showed that the mean level of loneliness was x̄=34.38 for females and x̄=32.58 for males and the mean level of depression was x̄=29.11for females and x̄=28.39 for males. Neither of the mean differences was significant (p = .15, p= .49, respectively). ANOVA was used in order to observe whether loneliness and depression levels differed according to educational levels. The mean loneliness levels were found to be x̄=34.45 for those who had associate degrees; x̄=32.59 for those who had undergraduate degrees; and x̄=33.93 for those who hold graduate degrees. Similarly, the levels of depression were found to be x̄=29.60 for those who had associate degrees; x̄=28.37 for those who had undergraduate degrees; and x̄=28.50 for those who hold graduate degrees. Neither of the mean differences was significant (p = .39, p= .61). However there was a significant relationship between loneliness and depression when this relationship was observed with Pearson-product moments correlation coefficient (p =.05). A simple liner regression analysis showed that loneliness scores predicted 15.3% of depression.

Keywords

Loneliness, Depression, School Director.

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Loneliness is defined as the individual's noticing his/her alienation to him/herself and to the outer world and is an emotional state which shows itself as a form of behavior or perception at any period of the life (Delisle, 1988). The person who faces loneliness feels weak, feeble and friendless and goes aside from his environment and becomes indifferent to the surrounding (Dupont, & Lachance, 2007).

A lonely person lives with sense of guilt, feeling inefficient at the relations between the people around (Özodaşık, 2001). He blocks his behaviors and tries to control the state that makes him afraid. He starts to behave aggressively if he cannot manage to succeed (Cüceloğlu, 1999). He develops a philosophy of life that is pertained to his own character. He ignores the events which he does not like or takes care of the events that suit his own thought (Gençtan, 1993). For this reason, he cannot appraise his own behaviors realistically.

For Horney (1945), the fear of loneliness is one of the basic fears of people. An individual gives love and congeniality to people to defeat this fear. He looks for ways of exiting and escaping from this fact when he needs.

Studies conducted on the topic verify that loneliness is a very common problem today (Rokach, & Brock, 1997; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrano, 1980; Storr, 1989). Page and Cole (1991) found that 10% of the adult population had this problem of loneliness.

Loneliness, far beyond personal destruction, can cause serious diseases which may end up depression at the end. The person, who cannot avoid the vicious circle he is trapped into, feels unhappy, isolated, and lonely (Ministre de Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada, 2006).

Loneliness appears in different forms. For example, Leonard (1979) and Kallıopuska (1986) classified loneliness as deep loneliness which comes with depression, social statue loneliness which is formed by sensing self estranged in society, sensual loneliness which is formed when the person cannot get a respond to his mental expectations even if he is in fine physical and environmental circumstances, and hidden loneliness in which the behaviors are apparently normal.

For Sadler (1978), loneliness emerges as a feeling of intensive sadness and emptiness along with the sharpened need of depending someone and manifests itself in five different ways, namely interpersonal loneliness, social loneliness, cultural shock, psychological loneliness, existential loneliness

Some personal characteristics of people who experience loneliness are explained in the literature as well. While Horowitz and French (1979) determined these properties as non-functionality, Jones, Hobbs and Hockenbury (1982) determined them as lack of social skills and interests, and Özodaşık (1989) purposed them as pessimism, anxiety, lack of confidence, and introversion.

Age, marital status, socio-economic level, career, and working conditions are cited among the important factors related with loneliness (Hecht & Baum, 1984; Noonan, 1988; West, Keliner, & West, 1986). Although career is not seen as a definite factor for the feeling of loneliness, it is reported that people who work at higher ranks face loneliness less frequently than the others (Revenson, & Johnson, 1984; West et al., 1986). On the other hand, the legal obligations they have to observe may cause some negative attitudes among the staff. According to Yahyaoğlu (2005), the management based on rules in a standardized way makes neither the superior nor the inferior ranks at the workplace happy. Therefore, leadership has become an important concept all around the world because leader management is the type of management that improves the job motivation which brings about job efficiency. However, it is also known that many factors affect people at management ranks no matter what definition is used or no matter what way it is performed.

Prolonged loneliness sets off depression. On the other hand, a person gets away from his friends, his family, and the social environment and therefore his loneliness and depression become a vicious circle (Blackburn, 1996; Quinn, 2002). Depression is a circumstance that develops following some genetic, environmental, or hormonal disorders (Blackburn, 1996). Depression is seen as an emotional impairment which may appear by itself or as a secondary result stemming from such problems as using alcohol, drugs, stimulants, and medicine or suffering from some types of metabolic diseases like cancer (Aşkın, 1999). Depression is a kind of non-functionality that appears as a result of the interaction between the genetic structure of the patient that is thought to determine the risk levels and his past. Depression comes to surface as a result of different variables like stress, difficult life conditions, secondary results of medicine and effects of VIH (Virus de l'immunodefience humaine) on the brain (World Federation for Mental Health [WPMH], 2004).

According to Dixon, Lehrman, and Lewin (1995), depression is accepted as a disease as it is not temporary. Along with depression, some

functional disorders are seen in the physical, biological, psychological, and social states of the patient. With it, capacity in taking pleasure decreases. The environment begins to get narrower. Depression results in people facing new problems with others and underging some social and economical losses, which may end up not only a physical and physiological but also a socio-economical collapse.

Depression is not related to some certain types of personality. Whatever personality individuals have, they may suffer from depression under some specific conditions. Personality patterns, such as low self-esteem, introversion, obsessive and compulsive thoughts set up the infrastructure of the disorder (Monaque, 2008; Poujol, 2008). As a result of depression, people may lose their interest in life and feel collapsed, which could lead them to think that life is meaningless. This negative outlook may affect their interpersonal affairs and bring about some performance losses in their school or working lives (Espasa, 2003).

People who are at the position of management such as a general director, director, or assistant manager are in communication with others because of their positions. Generally, it is thought that these people are never alone. However, quite the contrary to that belief, a person starts to feel himself more and more alone both at public or at politics, as he advances his position and becomes more inaccessible (Yahyaoğlu, 2005).

Loneliness is seen as a common problem that creates stress for the society (Cutrano & Cole, 1994; Rokach, & Brock, 1997). The reasons of loneliness have been investigated for a long time. Some studies found that the levels of social skill and points of views and thoughts of the individuals are related with loneliness (Hamamcı, & Duy, 2007; McWhirter, 1997). In other studies, loneliness is found to be related with depression (Brown, 1997; Özkürkçügil, 1988; Weeks, Michael, & Peplau, 1980). In this study, the relationship between loneliness and depression among school principal was examined. More particularly, the ability of predicting depression based on loneliness was the focus. For this aim, the answers for the following questions were investigated:

Do the loneliness and depression levels of school principal differ from each other according to their gender?

 Do the loneliness and depression levels of school principal differ from each other according to their educational background variable?

Do the loneliness levels of school principals predict their depression levels?

Method

Population and Sampling

The survey model was used in the study. The population of the study was the primary school principals employed in Afyon, Kütahya, Eskişehir and Denizli the during the years 2006-2007. Through the help of the school superintendents, the assessment tools were aministered to 232 school principals who participated in the evaluation seminars held by the Ministry of Education in July 2007. The principal attending the annual evaluation seminars were chosen as a sampling group, which is a commonly used method recommended to be used carefully in making generalizations due to its limitations (Mertens, 2005).

Instruments

A personal data form, the UCLA scale of loneliness and the Beck Depression Scale were used as the data collection tools in the research.

Personal Data Form: It was developed by the researcher and consisted of questions aiming to collect data about the gender and educational background of the participating principals.

The UCLA Loneliness Scale: It was developed by Russell, Peplau and Ferguson and was re-ordered in 1980 (Russell et al., 1980). It is a scale made of 20 items of which 10 are direct and the other 10 are reverse coded. In each item of the scale, a circumstance that states a sense or a thought about the social relation is presented and the individuals are asked to state how often they meet this circumstance, on a four –point Likert scale. Higher score are accepted as a sign of loneliness that is met very occasionally. The lowest scores to be received from the scale is 20 and the highest is 80. In Turkey, the validity and reliability study of the UCLA Loneliness Scale was completed by Demir (1989), who found the internal consistency coefficient as 0.96; and the correlation coefficient as 0.94 by the test-retest method.

The Beck Depression Scale: It is a scale that is formed of 21-symtom categories and is prepared to determine the levels of depression based on the appraisal of person himself. The specific form of this is formed by Beck, Ward, & Mendelson (1961) by observing depressive patients' symptoms they often show, and the attitudes specific to depression at the clinical field and the behaviors that are seen often. Each symptom category in the scale consisted of four "self-appraisal" items. The subs-

tances are assessed between 0-3 points. The highest possible score that can be received from the scale is 63. The distribution of the scores given at making out the depression diagnosis is as follows: 1- Depression at a low level (11-17 points) 2- depression at a middle level (18-29 points) 3- depression at an important level (30-63 points) (Ceyhun, 2001).

The validity and reliability of the depression scale in Turkey was conducted by Tegin (1980) and Hisli (1989). Tegin determined the coefficients as .78 and .65, respectively during the studies made by two incomplete tests and test-retest method. Hisli calculated the correlation of two incomplete tests that consisted of one and pair substances as .74 and the internal consistency coefficient as .80. At a similar study, Yüksel (2003) found the reliability coefficient of the depression scale as .86.

Analysis of the Data

Whether the loneliness and depression levels of school principals differ according to their gender at a significance level was tested by t-test. In addition, whether their depression levels differ on their educational background was tested by one-way analysis of variance. Lastly, the relationship between loneliness and depression was investigated and lonliness scores were used to predict depression levels among school principals by the regression analysis.

Procedure

The dependent variables of the study were loneliness and depression while the independent variables were the gender and educational background of school principals. The study was carried out from January 2007 to December 2007. The literature review and the preparation of the assessment tools were completed by June 2007 and the study was conducted on the participants in July 2007. The other phases such as gathering analyzing and evaluating the data were finished in December 20007.

Results

Whether the levels of loneliness and depression differed significantly across gender was analyzed with a t-test. The results showed that the mean level of loneliness was $\bar{x}=34.38$ for females and $\bar{x}=32.58$ for males and the mean level of depression was $\bar{x}=29.11$ for females and $\bar{x}=28.39$

for males. Neither of the mean differences was significant (p = .15, p= .49, respectively). ANOVA was used in order to observe whether loneliness and depression levels differed according to educational levels. The mean loneliness levels were found to be x̄=34.45 for those who had associate degrees; x̄=32.59 for those who had undergraduate degrees; and x̄=33.93 for those who hold graduate degrees. Similarly, the levels of depression were found to be x̄=29.60 for those who had associate degrees; x̄=28.37 for those who had undergraduate degrees; and x̄=28.50 for those who hold graduate degrees. Neither of the mean differences was significant (p = .39, p= .61). However there was a significant positive relationship between loneliness and depression when this relationship was observed with Pearson-product moments correlation coefficient (r = .39 p =.001). A simple liner regression analysis showed that loneliness scores predicted 15.3% of depression (R^2 =0,15). This result is significant at 0.05 level.

Discussion

When the average scores of loneliness were taken into consideration, the loneliness levels of school administrators were found to be significantly different, which could mean that gender is not a variant affecting the loneliness at school principals.

Studies on loneliness reveal that there is a significant relationship between gender and loneliness. The studies of West et al. (1986) and Gierveld (1987) found that loneliness levels were higher among females, but in a study by Demir (1990) male university students' loneliness average was found higher compared to the female students. Özkürkçügil (1988), Arı and Hamarta (2000) found a significant relationship between gender and loneliness. This research's results showed differences from the results of the studies mentioned above whereas, there are similarities between the findings of Çeçen's study (2008). This difference might be resulted from the homogenous structure of the sampling group in our study.

The research results also revealed that the depression levels of school principals do not show a significant difference according to gender. Though some differences are found in various studies, 17 points are thought to be enough for determining the clinical depression (Ceyhun, 2001). While determining depression, 30 points indicate high depression level. In this study, average points of principals were found as follows: females = 29. 11 and males = 8.34.

In the similar studies conducted, different results have been found. In a study on the university students by Hisli (1989), the average depression levels were found to be 9.33 for females and 10. 27 for males, and the sum of the BDE average points were found as 9.58. The study of Tiggemann and Winefield (1984) found that unemployed males have more depression levels than unemployed females. In the study of Siva (1991) on acquired difficulty and depression, the depression levels of females were found to be higher than those of males. Sütoluk, Nazlıcan, Azizoğlu and Akbaba (2005) found that the incidence of psychiatric disorders is significantly higher among females than males. However, the research of Kaya, Çilli and Güler (2003) showed no significant difference between females and males.

Although the findings of this research generally show parallelism with the studies conducted by Küey and Güleç (1989), it was, nevertheless, found that the average depression scores of males were quite higher than the general average of Turkey and the average depression levels of females were below the general average of Turkey. Whereas, Küey and Güleç determined that the depression frequency in general population in Turkey was 24% among males and 33% among females. The result of this study is thought to be related with the fact that school principals are a more homogenous group than the other social groups as regards to their economical, social, and cultural circumstances.

Some studies have pointed out that loneliness levels decrease as education levels increase (Batıgün, 2005; Kozaklı, 2006; Tan, 2000). Sarıhan (2007) also found that the lower level of education might cause loneliness. However, the findings in this study showed that there was not any significant relationship between educational background and depression levels among school principals.

Similar results were obtained on the depression levels of school principals. Average depression score of the school principals did not show a difference according to their educational background. The research results show similarities to the research results of Hürol (1985) while they also present some differnces to the others (Çilli, Kaya, Bodur, Özkan, & Kucur, 2004; Yüksel, 2003). Although not showing similarities to them, this research's results revealed that educational background is not an important variable affecting the school principal's depression levels.

The results of the research revealed that loneliness is a variable predic-

ting depression. If the loneliness levels of school principals rise, their depression levels rise, too. This result shows similarities to the research findings of Özden, İzmir, Ergun and Göğüş (1995). Brown (1997) expressed that physically ill women show symptoms of loneliness and psychological disorders. Saatçıoğlu, Türkcan and Işıklı (1996) confirmed a direct relation between loneliness and depression. Also, Özkürkçügil (1988) found a significant relation between loneliness and depression. Weeks et al. (1980), found a correlation between loneliness and depression and revealed that they share similar and /or common origins though they do not have a cause and effect relation.

The research results also revealed that school principals face loneliness and depression and they are at risk. For this reason, it is very important for principals to be aware of these risks and possible results so that they can find the most suitable ways to cope with them and to be affected by the difficulties as slightly as possible.

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