

## **Stress Coping Approaches in Terms of Sociotropic and Autonomous Personalities: A cross-sectional study among Turkish university students**

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<b>Article history</b>	This study aims to discover if there is any associations between sociotropic/autonomous people in terms of the coping approaches they use, and if gender is effective covariate between sociotropic and autonomous personalities and stress coping approaches. Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale and Scale of Coping with Stress Styles were used to collect the data in this study. The scales were delivered to 400 university students in Turkey. Seventy four percent of the university students filled survey forms completely (n=298: female: 240, male: 58). It was found there was a significant association between sociotropic and autonomous people and stress coping approaches. However, gender was not a significant covariate between sociotropic and autonomous personalities and stress coping approaches. It was also found that people with higher level of sociotropy used helpless and obedient approaches more often and people with higher level of autonomy used optimistic, self-reliance and obedient, social support search stress coping approaches more often.
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### **Introduction**

Personality has an important role on how people cope with stressful situations (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Aydın, 2007). Individuals perform different behaviors when they are in a stressful situation. In this study, the relationship between coping and personality is investigated with an aim to find out if the sociotropic and autonomous personality have any connection with coping styles the participants use in a stressful situation.

### ***Coping and personality***

Coping is a complex process (Beutler & Moos, 2003) that explains the results of stress (Bolger, 1990). Knoll and his colleagues (2005) theorize coping as something changing and formed by environmental conditions and also by how people view these conditions. In stressful conditions, some people become distressed and others remain calm. Coping theorists suggests that people's coping style they use change the stressful situations or regulate their emotional responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Many researchers believe and show in their studies that there is a strong connection between coping and personality (Bakhshani, 2007; Aydın, 2007; Knoll, Rieckmann & Schwarzer, 2005; Beutler & Moos, 2003). In other words, personality appears to affect both coping and coping effectiveness. Considerable research (Connor-Smith & Compas, 2002; Knoll et al., 2005; DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005) that has been done so far establish a relationship between

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stressful events and personality. They focus on coping techniques (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and personality that increase susceptibility to stress (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005; Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010); in other words, the reason why some people are more vulnerable to stress than others (Knoll et al., 2005). There are some studies showing the relationship between stress coping styles and personality (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). It was found that personality and personality process has significant effect on the stress and coping process (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### ***Sociotropy and Autonomy***

Beck (1983) divided the personality as Sociotropy and Autonomy. Beck argued that highly sociotropic individuals are greatly invested in having close relationships with others. On the contrary, highly autonomous individuals are characterized as constantly motivated toward success and independence. Sociotropic and autonomous people can experience life events differently (Frewen and Dozois, 2006). Several studies (Dasch, Cohen, Sahl & Gunther, 2008; Smith & Compass, 2002) have so far focused on the relationship between Sociotropy –Autonomy and stress. Dasch et al. (2008) suggest that sociotropy has link with daily stressors while autonomy's role is unclear. Nelson, Hammen, Daley, Burge, & Davila (2001) note that sociotropic and autonomous individuals create chronic stressors. These personalities in other words have ongoing effect on creation of stressors. Smith and Compass (2002) also found that sociotropy has a clear effect on stress.

Personality also affects the choice of coping techniques and they may interact with each other (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). However, research on Sociotropy-Autonomy and coping approaches that are used under stress has not been addressed adequately in Turkey. Many studies explain a link between personality and coping and suppose that coping can clarify the association between personality and stress outcomes (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Beutler & Moos, 2003; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). However, what kind of people use what kind of specific coping styles in a stressful situation still remains to be elucidated.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between specific stress coping approaches (self-reliance approach, obedient approach, optimistic approach, asking for social support, helpless approach) and sociotropic and autonomous personalities. It was aimed to find out which coping approaches are used by sociotropic and autonomous people in Turkey. The final aim of the study is to discover whether the gender has a covariate effect between sociotropy/autonomy and coping styles used by the participants in a stressful situation.

### **Method**

In the study, a population based cross-sectional survey method was used to discover the relationship between personality and coping styles. The participants were chosen among the university students in Turkey.

### ***Participants and Procedure***

Research sampling of the study consists of university students in Konya, Turkey. The data instruments were delivered to 400 university students. The students who were volunteers to participate in the study were informed about the study and were give some chocolates to motivate them. The participants were not required to write their names in the form and personal information were not included in the paper to guarantee the anonymity. Almost %74

of the university students filled out the survey forms completely (n=298: female: 240, male: 58).

### ***Instruments***

*Sociotropy-autonomy scale.* Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS) was developed by Beck and his colleagues (1983). It was adapted to Turkish by Savaşır and Şahin (1997). The scale consists of 60 items, 30 of which are related with sociotropy while the rest is concerned with autonomy. The scale is a five-point likert type scale, ranging between “it doesn’t describe me”, and “it describes me very well” with a maximum score of 120 (4 x 30) and a minimum score of 30. In this study, Alpha values were .86 for the autonomy and .83 for the sociotropy. The original scale had close values; total Scales have high internal reliability as indicated by coefficient alphas of .90 and .83, respectively in (Beck et al., 1983). The sociotropy scale has also been discovered to have moderate to good convergent validity with other measures of interpersonal dependency and affiliation, as well as with measures of psychopathology (Barnett & Gotlib, 1988; Bieling, Olshan, Beck, & Brown, 1998). However, the SAS autonomy scale displays inconsistent convergence with measures of achievement, independence, sychopathology, and vulnerability (Bieling, Olshan, Beck, & Brown, 1998; Clark & Beck, 1991).

*Ways of coping questionnaire.* The questionnaire was developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) and The Turkish translation of WCQ and adaptation study was performed by Siva (cited in Şahin & Durak, 1995). Siva added eight new items that were thought to be relevant to the Turkish culture and tapping at fatalism and superstition. This new instrument consists of 74 items. Şahin and Durak (1995) conducted a study with university students and derived Coping Style Scale. They found that the scale with 5-factor structure is a reliable and valid instrument to measure coping styles. The modified scale consisted of 30 items under five factors; self confident, optimistic, submissive, helpless styles and asking for social support adapted to Turkish by Şahin and Durak (1995). This latest form of the scale consists of 30 items which has 5 sub-dimensions: optimistic approach (items 2, 4, 6, 12 and 18), self-reliance approach (items 8, 10, 14, 16, 20, 23 and 26), helpless approach (items 3,7, 19, 22, 25, 27 and 28), obedient approach (items 5, 13, 15, 17, 21 and 24) and asking for social support (items 1, 9, 29 and 30). In this study, Cronbach Alpha values were .66 for optimistic, .77 for self-reliance, .73 for helpless and .73 for obedient .61 for asking for social support. The research data were analysed by using SPSS 16.0. In the original scale, the reliability values ranged between .47 and .80 (Şahin and Durak, 1995).

### **Results**

Statistical analyzes were also applied to find out the association between sociotropic/autonomous personalities and the coping approach they use when they are in a stressful situation. And, it was found that there was a significant association between personalities and the stress copping approaches that the participants use in a stressful situation.

It was found that sociotropic participants used helpless and obedient stress coping approaches more often than autonomous participants (Table 1). However, there was no significant association between coping approaches and sociotropic personality considering the gender variable.

**Table 1:** The Participants' Stress Coping Styles in terms of Sociotropy Personality Variable and Covariate Gender

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sociotropy	Optimistic Approach	18,018	1	18,018	1,853	,175
	Self-reliance Approach	47,427	1	47,427	3,173	,078
	Helpless Approach	649,190	1	649,190	29,901	,000*
	Obedient Approach	76,631	1	76,631	7,285	,008*
	Social support search	,014	1	,014	,003	,961
Gender	Optimistic Approach	7,611	1	7,611	,783	,378
	Self-reliance Approach	,264	1	,264	,018	,895
	Helpless Approach	68,045	1	68,045	3,134	,076
	Obedient Approach	1,040	1	1,040	,099	,755
	Social support search	15,852	1	15,852	2,854	,094

It is seen in the table 2 that there is a significant association between autonomous personality and optimistic, self-reliance and obedient, asking for social support stress coping approaches. It is in the table seen that the autonomous participants are more optimistic, self-reliant, and obedient and are asking for social support more often than sociotropic participants. On the other hand, no significant association is observed between autonomous participants and helpless stress coping approach. The corrected performance test means results also yield that there is no significant association between coping approaches and autonomous personality taking the gender into account.

**Table 2:** The Participants' Stress Coping Styles in terms of Autonomous Personality Variable and Covariate Gender

Source	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Autonomy	Optimistic Approach	166,799	1	166,799	18,102	,000*
	Self-reliance Approach	530,665	1	530,665	40,029	,000*
	Helpless Approach	10,227	1	10,227	,424	,513
	Obedient Approach	74,418	1	74,418	7,089	,009*
	Social support search	74,114	1	74,114	13,883	,000*
Gender	Optimistic Approach	10,636	1	10,636	1,155	,282
	Self-reliance Approach	,118	1	,118	,009	,923
	Helpless Approach	87,621	1	87,621	3,668	,054
	Obedient Approach	2,649	1	2,649	,252	,618
	Social support search	14,284	1	14,284	2,691	,103

## Discussion

As the study of stress and coping has increased and matured, it has been plausible to explore the relationship of stress coping approaches and personality differences. In previous studies (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Aydın, 2007; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), it was suggested that there was a relationship between these personalities and stress coping approaches. However, the relationship between Sociotropy-Autonomy personality types and the coping approaches used under stress has not been addressed adequately in Turkey. This study investigated the relationship between stress coping approaches (self-reliance approach, obedient approach, optimistic approach, asking for social support and helpless approach) and sociotropic and autonomous personalities.

It was found that sociotropic participants were more helpless in a stressful situation than those participants who were autonomous. Dasch et al. (2008) also found that sociotropic people had

decreased self-esteem in a stressful situation and Nelson et al. (2001) suggested that sociotropic people were more sensitive to stress. It was also in this study discovered that sociotropic participants were more obedient in a stressful situation than the participants who were autonomous which is supported by Beck's (1983) definition of sociotropic personality that sociotropic individuals are greatly invested in having close relationship with others.

Other significant findings of the study were that those who were autonomous were more optimistic, self-reliant and obedient than those are sociotropic. In addition, those participants who were autonomous asked for social support more often than those who were sociotropic. Although Dasch et al. (2008) noted that the relationship between autonomous personality and stressors were unclear, the findings of the present study, suggest a clear relationship between autonomous personality and stress coping, which is also supported by Nelson et al. (2001).

It is seen in the present study that personality is an important factor that affects the type of coping approach people use in a stressful situation in line with numerous studies (Knoll et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2001), in which it is suggested that personality is an important element affecting the choice of coping approach.

However, it was also found out that gender was not a significant factor affecting stress coping approaches in terms of sociotropic and autonomous personalities. Ortega, Brenner & Leather (2007) also found that there was not a significant relationship between gender and stress and personality. On the contrary, Vingerhoets, Van den Berg, Kortekaas, Van Heck, & Croon, (2002) in their research suggested that the gender was a significant factor that affects the relationship between personality, stress and coping approach. From the point of me, further researches should be made to make the association between gender, sociotropy/autonomy and coping clear.

One of the limitations of this study was its cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional designs provide information about the current condition of the population. However, this cross-sectional comparison of sociotropic/autonomous personalities in terms of coping does not allow cause-effect relationships to be established. In addition, several other limitations of this study should be noted. One of the limitations of the study is that the sample size being limited to the university students studying in the city of Konya, Turkey, which may cause problems in generalizing the results. Moreover, it was difficult to identify the reasons for the choice of the participants' stress coping approaches other than the personality types. A further limitation of the present study was that the stress coping approaches investigated were limited with the content of the scales used. However, despite these limitations, the findings of this important contributions to the research on association between coping styles and personality types and that there is no association between gender and sociotropy and autonomy in terms of coping style preferred at the stressful situation.

Despite the importance of the interplay between stress and personality types, the role of personality types in stress coping approaches will be crucial in developing intervention and prevention techniques for sensitive individuals. As the one first studies to underline the relationship between stress coping approaches and personality types in Turkey, this study paves the way for further studies. In future research, other factors such as family control, sibling order, family income and parent education level can be accounted as covariates as they may be significant factors that could affect coping approaches in terms of personality.

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