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## AN EXAMINATION OF FORGIVENESS AMONG ADMINISTRATORS IN TERMS OF EMPATHY AND STRESS COPING STYLES

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### ABSTRACT

In the study, the forgiveness among school administrators was examined in terms of empathy and stress coping styles. The research study was conducted with the high schools in Esenyurt, Beylikdüzü and Büyükçekmece districts of İstanbul upon the permission of İstanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education. The participants are composed of 270 school administrators (129 female, 141 male).

A questionnaire form involving demographics, the *Heartland Forgiveness Scale* developed by Thompson et al (2005), the *Stress Coping Style Inventory* adapted by Özbay and Şahin (1997) and the forgiveness developed by Devis (1983) were used in the research to collect data. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed on SPSS Statistics 17.0 software.

The research data indicate that the forgiveness differs by administrators' gender. It is seen that the female administrators have higher perceptions of forgiveness than the male administrators. In addition, the female administrators cope with stress in a better way than the male administrators. It is however seen that the female administrators consume substances such as cigarette, alcohol and similar harmful substances when they are subjected to stress.

**Keywords:** Forgiving, empathy, stress

### INTRODUCTION

It is seen in the literature that the first studies on the concept of **forgiveness** started in 1964. The concept of forgiveness is defined as renouncing punishing a guilty person despite the pain suffered by an individual as a result of a behavior they did not deserve and approaching that person with mercy in contrary to aggressive attitudes such as revenge and rage. In other words, it is a process between the person who is guilty and the other person who has been wronged (Kara, 2009, p. 222).

Levanson and Reuf (1992) regard *empathy* as a social entity that functions as a bridge between individual's feelings and others. In some cases, it is a type of

approach that emerges reflexively without any effort. This type of behavior is called “automatic empathy” (Tutarel, Kışlak, and Çabukçu, 2002).

Cüceloğlu (2000) defines stress as the “effort made by an individual beyond his/her physical and psychological boundaries due to negative circumstance stemming from the physical and social environment. It is thought that the research conducted to examine the forgiveness in regard to stress coping methods and empathic approaches will contribute to other studies on the topic. In addition, it is considered that positive contributions by forgiveness to individuals will provide educational administrators with useful information in practice.

## **PROBLEM QUESTION**

What effect do styles of stress coping have on empathy and forgiveness?

## **SUBPROBLEMS**

1. Do administrators' forgiveness, empathic approach and styles of stress coping differ by their demographics such as age, gender and term served?
2. What level of relationship is there between school administrators' stress coping behaviors and perceptions of forgiveness?
3. What level of relationship is there between school administrators' stress coping behaviors and perceptions of empathy?

## **METHOD**

**Research Model;** The research was conducted with the relational survey model. The research covers a study that investigates the relationship between school administrators' process of forgiveness and empathic approach and its effect on their stress coping styles and examine whether it differs by the demographic variables.

**Population and Sample;** The population is composed of the school administrators who are principals and deputy principals working at the high schools in Esenyurt, Beylikdüzü and Büyükçekmece under the body of İstanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education. The sample is 270 school administrators (129 females, 141 males) at different ages and with different levels of income and education, who were selected randomly.

**Collection of Data;** The data were collected with three different measurement tools in the research: The first tool used is the *Heartland Forgiveness Scale* developed by Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen and Billings (2005) to measure individuals' forgiveness tendencies and translated and adapted into Turkish language by Bugay and Demir (2010). The scale is composed of 18 items which are 7 point Likert-type. It has three different subdimensions: Forgiveness of Self, Forgiveness of Others, and Forgiveness of Situations. The second measurement tool is the *Stress Coping Style Inventory* developed by Özbay (1993) and adapted by Özbay and Şahin (1997). The scale is composed of 6 factors which are Active Planning, Outside Help Search, and Shelter in Religion, Escape-Abstraction (emotional and actual), Escape Abstraction (biochemical), and Acceptance-Cognitive Restructuring. Finally, the Interpersonal Reactivity Index developed by Devis (1983) and adapted by Özbay and Yıldırım (2005) *was utilized for measuring the empathic level.*

**Analysis of Data;** The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed on SPSS Statistics 17.0 software. Frequency-percentage- average and standard deviation analysis were used to evaluate the data as well as the correlation analysis, the regression analysis, the t-test and the ANOVA tests.

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1. Participants' demographic distributions**

	<b>Demographics</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	141	52.2
	Female	129	47.8
<b>Age (Male)</b>	26-33	33	12.2
	34-41	141	52.2
	42-49	85	31.9
	50-57	10	3.7
<b>Educational Background</b>	Bachelor's Degree	240	88.9
	Master's Degree	30	11.1
	Doctorate	-	-
<b>Term Served in the Institution</b>	1-5 years	41	15.2
	6-10 years	123	45.6
	11-15 years	85	31.5
	16-20 years	15	5.6
	20 years and above	6	2.2
<b>Service Class</b>	Principal	32	11.9

	Deputy Principal	238	88.1
<b>Income Status</b>	2600-3000	122	45.2
	3000-4500	122	45.2
	4500 and above	26	9.6

**Table 2. The t-test analysis of school administrators' forgiveness, empathic approach and perceptions of stress by their genders**

Gender			n	x	Sd	f	p
School administrators' perceptions of forgiveness by their gender	Forgiveness of self	Male	141	3.86	.815	1.742	.802
		Female	129	3.89	.917		
	Forgiveness of others	Male	141	3.87	.504	1.051	.283
		Female	129	4.09	.982		
	Forgiveness of situations	Male	141	3.83	.918	.413	.367
		Female	129	3.73	.841		
	Forgiveness average	Male	141	3.87	.504	.260	.989
		Female	129	3.87	.524		
Stress coping situations	Active planning	Male	141	3.02	.468	.157	.160
		Female	129	3.07	.472		
	Outside help	Male	141	2.72	.539	.932	.158
		Female	129	2.82	5.67		
	Shelter in religion	Male	141	2.85	.830	.345	.607
		Female	129	2.90	.784		
	Escape ( <i>EmotionalActual</i> )	Male	141	1.44	.481	1.493	.407
		Female	129	1.49	.538		
	Escape ( <i>Biochemical</i> )	Male	141	.244	.589	10.081	.080
		Female	129	.395	.808		
Empathic approach	Acceptance Restructuring	Male	141	2.77	.422	.007	.550
		Female	129	2.80	.427		
	Stress average	Male	141	2.38	.324	1.872	.100
		Female	129	2.44	.338		
		Male	141	2.94	.438	.214	.114
		Female	129	2.85	.416		

In Table 2, t-test value was calculated to be ( $t = .260$   $p < .989$ ) in regard to whether school administrators' forgiveness differ by their gender. No significant difference was found between female and male participants' perceptions of forgiveness. As for the subdimensions of forgiveness, the t-test values are ( $t = 1.742$   $p < .802$ ) for forgiveness of self, ( $t = 1.051$   $p < .283$ ) for forgiveness of others, and ( $t = .413$   $p < .367$ ) for forgiveness of situations. There is no significant difference among school administrators in terms of the forgiveness subdimensions. It was found when the data were evaluated that school administrators' perceptions of forgiveness do not differ by their gender.

2.38 among the male participants, 2.44 among the female participants. The t-test value of the school administrators was accordingly calculated to be ( $t=1.872$   $p<.100$ ). No significant difference was found between female and male participants' perceptions of stress. As for the arithmetic averages of the subdimensions, the male participants have lower perceptions of stress coping than the female participants. The female administrators cope with the concept of stress in a better way than the male administrators. It is, however, seen that female participants have higher score averages than the male participants for the escape (biochemical) subdimension. According to the data the female administrators consume harmful substances such as cigarette and alcohol when they are subjected to stress. When examining school administrators' stress coping styles, the t-test score averages were calculated to be ( $t=.157$   $p<.692$ ) for active planning, ( $t=.932$   $p<.335$ ) for outside help search, ( $t=.345$   $p<.557$ ) for shelter in religion, ( $t=1.493$   $p<.223$ ) for escape (emotional-actual), ( $t=10.081$   $p>.080$ ) for escape (biochemical), and ( $t=.007$   $p<.550$ ) for acceptance and restructuring. No significant difference was found between female and male perception levels in terms of school administrators' perceptions of stress coping. When examining the t-test score averages of whether school administrators' perceptions of empathic approach differ by gender, it is seen that the t-test score averages for the levels of empathy perception are 2.94 among the male participants, 2.85 among the female participants. The t-test values were calculated to be ( $t=.214$   $p<.114$ ).

When examining the t-test score averages of whether school administrators' stress coping behaviors differ by service class, it is seen that the t-test score averages of stress coping are 2.41 among the male participants, 2.41 among the female participants. The t-test value of the school administrators by service class was calculated to be ( $t=11.293$   $p<.1982$ ). No significant difference was found among school administrators' perceptions of stress by their service class.

When examining school administrators' stress coping styles by service class, the t-test score averages were calculated to be ( $t=.10557$   $p<.742$ ) for active planning, ( $t=.120$   $p<.261$ ) for outside help search, ( $t=.3.310$   $p<.027$ ) for shelter in religion, ( $t=2.700$   $p<.117$ ) for escape (emotional-actual), ( $t=18.864$   $p>.030$ ) for escape (biochemical), and ( $t=.4.177$   $p<.120$ ) for acceptance and restructuring. No significant difference was found among school administrators' perceptions of stress coping by their service class. When examining the t-test score averages of whether school administrators' perceptions of empathic approach differ by service class, it is seen that the t-test score averages for the

levels of empathy perception are 3.11 among the male participants, 2.87 among the female participants. The t-test values were calculated to be ( $t=.125$   $p<.002$ ). It is seen that there is a significant difference among school administrators' perceptions of empathy by service class. The principals exhibit empathic behavior more frequently than the deputy principals.

According to the ANOVA results of school administrators' perceptions of forgiveness by age, it is seen that there is no significant difference among school administrators' perceptions of forgiveness by their age. In regard to the arithmetic averages of the data, the school administrators within the age range of 50-57 years have higher perceptions of forgiveness of self than other groups. It is thought that the reason is the experience of years and the perspective on events which is brought about it. In addition, school administrators' within the age range of 26-33 years have higher perceptions of forgiveness of situations than other groups.

When examining the ANOVA results of school administrators' perceptions of empathic approach and stress by age, the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f$  1.793  $p<.149$ ) for active planning, ( $f$  1.617  $p<.186$ ) for outside help search, ( $f$  1.229  $p<.267$ ) for forgiveness of situations, ( $f$  2.542  $p<.057$ ) for shelter in religion, ( $f$  .764  $p<.515$ ) for escape (emotional-actual), ( $f$  1.158  $p<.326$ ) for escape (biochemical), and ( $f$  2.295  $p<.078$ ) for acceptance-restructuring. There is no significant difference among school administrators' perceptions of the stress coping subdimensions by their ages. According to the arithmetic average of the data, the school administrators within the age range of 50-57 years have higher perceptions of active planning, escape (emotional-actual), and acceptance than other groups, and those within the age range of 34-41 years have higher perceptions of shelter in religion and outside help search than other groups. It is concluded that the school administrators within the age range of 26-33 years have lower perceptions of active planning than other groups.

In regard to the ANOVA results of school administrators' perceptions of forgiveness, empathic approach and stress by educational levels, the values of the forgiveness perception level were found to be 3.86 for those who have a bachelor's degree and 3.96 for those who have a master's degree. The ANOVA test value of the school administrators by educational level was calculated to be ( $t=$  1.076  $p<.301$ ). There is no difference among school administrators' perception of forgiveness by their educational levels. When examining the score averages of school administrators' perceptions of stress coping subdimensions by educational level, the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f$  3.041  $p<.082$ ) for active planning, ( $f$  .125  $p<.724$ ) for outside help search, ( $f$  4.794  $p<.029$ ) for shelter in

religion, ( $f = 2.707$ ,  $p < .101$ ) for escape (emotional-actual), ( $f = .042$ ,  $p < .837$ ) for escape (biochemical), and ( $f = .901$ ,  $p < .343$ ) for acceptance-restructuring. There is no significant difference among school administrators' perceptions of the stress coping subdimensions by their educational levels. According to the arithmetic averages of school administrators' perceptions of stress coping subdimensions by their educational levels, it is seen that the school administrators with a master's degree have higher perceptions of active planning and restructuring than those with a bachelor's degree. School administrators' score averages of empathy perceptions by their educational levels were found to be 2.90 for the bachelor's degree, 2.89 for the master's degree whereas the ANOVA value was calculated to be ( $f = .011$ ,  $p < .918$ ). Accordingly, school administrators' perceptions of empathy do not differ significantly by educational level. It was also determined in the light of the arithmetic averages that the participants with a master's degree have higher perceptions of empathy than other groups. The reason is possibly the response given by those with a master's degree to how they were evaluated under the same category with those who have a bachelor's degree.

According to the data analysis performed to see whether school administrators' perceptions of stress coping differ by their term served in the profession, the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f = 2.174$ ,  $p < .072$ ) for active planning, ( $f = 1.084$ ,  $p < .365$ ) for outside help search. School administrators' perceptions of forgiveness of situations do not differ significantly by their term served in the profession. When examining the data to see whether school administrators' perceptions of stress coping differ by their term served in the profession, the scores for the perception of shelter in religion are 3.21 for 1-5 years, 2.79 for 6-10 years, 2.92 for 11-15 years, 2.24 for 16-20 years, and 3.05 for 20 years and above. The ANOVA value was calculated to be ( $f = .859$ ,  $p > .001$ ). School administrators' perceptions of shelter in religion differ significantly by their term served in the profession. It is seen that the school administrators whose term served in the profession is 1-5 years have higher perceptions of shelter in religion than other groups. When examining the data to see whether school administrators' perceptions of stress coping differ by term served in the profession, the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f = 1.583$ ,  $p < .179$ ) for escape (emotional-actual), ( $f = 2.209$ ,  $p < .179$ ) for escape (biochemical), and ( $f = 2.805$ ,  $p < .026$ ) for acceptance-restructuring. School administrators' perceptions of stress coping subdimensions do not differ significantly by their term served in the profession.

School administrators' perceptions of shelter in religion differ significantly by their term served in the profession. School administrators whose term served

in the profession is 15 years have higher perceptions of shelter in religion than other groups. It is thought that younger ages and environmental-upbringing environment factors have an impact on this result. In addition, as for the arithmetic averages of school administrators' perceptions of stress coping by their terms served in the profession, it is seen that the school administrators whose term served in the profession is 1-5 years have higher perceptions of active planning than other groups.

When examining school administrators' score averages of empathy differ by their term served in the profession, the perception scores are 2.98 for 1-5 years, 2.91 for 6-10 years, 2.90 for 11-15 years, 2.50 for 16-20 years, and 3.17 for 20 years and above. The ANOVA value was calculated to be ( $f 4.429 p > .002$ ). School administrators' perceptions of empathy differ significantly by their term served in the profession. School administrators with 20 years and above of term served in the profession have higher perceptions of empathy than other groups. The fact that they have been working as an administrator for a long time is thought to be a factor in that they exhibit more constructive and tolerant attitude towards others. Based on this finding, it can be said that individuals who have been working as an administrator at a school are more successful in establishing communication with others. When examining the ANOVA results of school administrators' perceptions of forgiveness, empathic approach and stress by income level, the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f 1.567 p < .211$ ) for forgiveness of self and ( $f 1.903 p < .167$ ) for forgiveness of others. School administrators' perceptions of forgiveness of self and others do differ significantly by their income levels. The ANOVA value for the forgiveness of others was calculated to be ( $f 9.761 p > .001$ ). School administrators' perceptions of forgiveness of self differ significantly by their income levels. Those who receive a monthly wage of TRY 2600-3000 have higher perceptions of forgiveness of situations than other groups. According to the data analysis performed to see whether school administrators' perceptions of stress coping differ by their income levels, the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f 6.319 p < .002$ ) for active planning, School administrators' perceptions of active planning differ significantly by their income levels. Those who receive a monthly wage of TRY 3000- 4500 have higher perceptions of active planning than other groups. Score of outside help search perception was calculated to be ( $f .480 p < .619$ ). School administrators' perceptions of outside help search do not differ significantly by their income levels. The ANOVA value for the shelter in religion perception was calculated to be ( $f 5.716 p > .004$ ). School administrators' perceptions of shelter in religion differ significantly by their income levels. Perceptions of shelter in religion among the school administrators with earning a



monthly wage of TRY 3000-45000 are higher than other groups and differ significantly by their income levels, and the ANOVA values were calculated to be ( $f .157$   $p < .855$ ) for escape (emotional-actual), ( $f .712$   $p < .491$ ) for escape (biochemical), and ( $f 7.414$   $p < .001$ ) for acceptance-restructuring. School administrators' perceptions of stress coping subdimensions differ significantly by their income levels.

*According to the correlation analysis of the relationship between school administrators' forgiveness and their empathic approaches and perceptions of stress, there is a positive relationship (.095) between their perceptions of forgiveness and stress coping. As their perceptions of forgiveness get stronger, their perceptions of stress coping will increase at .095. When considered otherwise, school administrators' perception of stress coping will decline as their perceptions of forgiveness decrease. There is a negative relationship (-.163) between school administrators' perceptions of empathy and stress coping. As their perceptions of empathy decreases, their perceptions of stress coping will decrease, too.*

## **CONCLUSION**

In regard to school administrators' average perceptions of forgiveness, it is seen that there is no significant difference between male and female perceptions of forgiveness. The arithmetic averages of the data in general dictate that the female participants have higher perceptions of forgiveness of self and others. As for the forgiveness of situations, the male participants have higher perceptions than the female participants. It was concluded that the female school administrators have higher perceptions of forgiveness of the personnel emotionally. The female administrators cope with the concept of stress in a better way than the male administrators. However, it is understood that the female administrators consume harmful substances such as cigarette and alcohol more frequently when they are subjected to stress.

School administrators' perceptions of shelter in religion differ significantly by their term served in the profession. School administrators whose term served in the profession is 15 years have higher perceptions of shelter in religion than other groups. It is thought that younger ages and environmental-upbringing environment factors have an impact on this result. In addition, as for the arithmetic averages of school administrators' perceptions of stress coping by their terms served in the profession, it is seen that the school administrators whose term served in the profession is 1-5 years have higher perceptions of active

planning than other groups. The younger age range and inexperience in administration can be regarded as reasons. Moreover, it is understood that the school administrators whose time served in the profession is 20 years and above tend to consume harmful substances such as cigarette and alcohol in the cases of stress coping more frequently than other groups. The fact that this group of administrators are older than other groups and they have been continuing the habit since the time they entered upon the profession when fight against cigarette and its derivatives was not a state policy is thought to be the reason for this result. School administrators with 20 years and above of term served in the profession have higher perceptions of empathy than other groups. The fact that they have been working as an administrator for a long time is thought to be a factor in that they exhibit more constructive and tolerant attitude towards others. Based on this finding, it can be said that individuals who have been working as an administrator at a school are more successful in establishing communication with others.

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