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## The effects of positive psychological capital and negative feelings on students' violence tendency

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### Abstract

In this study, it was aimed to determine the effects of psychological capital and negative feelings of students on their violence tendency. A sample of 745 high school students agreed to participate in this study. For each scale, the exploratory factor analysis and the confirmatory factor analysis were performed. Then, the sum of each scale was taken and the data were analysed using the structural equation approach. The results of this study show that students' psychological capital reduces their violence tendency through their reduced negative feelings such as anxiety, stress and burnout. It would be beneficial for school managers and teachers to invest in strengthening psychological capital levels of their students if they want to reduce their violence tendency.

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*Keywords:* Violence Tendency; Positive Psychological Capital; Burnout; Stress

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### 1. Introduction

Violence, which is expected to decline with level of development of societies, is observed to continue from the past to the present day. Today, it is experienced in its primitive form, like it was in the past, as well as in a variety of ways through the use of technology. In this context, violence is a serious threat to human rights. Violence continues to exist as one of man's social problems in developed and developing countries of 21st century (WHO, 2002).

There are many causes of violence so it should be dealt with within a bio-psycho-social integrity. Its biological causes include genetics, hormones, physical and mental illnesses causing cognitive changes (Baltas, 2000). It is considered that its psychological causes encompass the gains of violence, parental attitudes, frustration, actuation,

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ensuring control and power, being dependent / needy and failure to learn communication and conflict resolution skills (Ogel, Tari & Yilmazcetin-Eke, 2006). Among social reasons are tolerance to violence in society, that it is seen as a problem solving method, inadequacy of family education, media influence, gender roles, life distress, migration and globalization (Kizmaz, 2006).

During adolescence, a period of rapid development, many new responsibilities and the requirement for creating an identity, which will lead to conflicts, emerge. Conflicts arise internally as well as with the society. These conflicts emerge in an adolescent as a revolt against society. At the same time, it is a period when risk-taking behaviour is observed the most. In such a case, an adolescent may feel insignificant, believe s/he can destroy everything that makes his/her life negative using violence, and use violence when faced with problems. As an adolescent feels insignificant and his/her belief in how much this will remain unchanged grows, the intensity of violence may be increased (Gelbal, 2006; Guney, 2008; Ozgur, Yorukoglu & Arabaci, 2011).

Increase in the tendency to violence seems to be concerned with changing social structure. Karasu (2008) suggests that social control may weaken and relationships may become shallow with urbanization, which may have an impact on violence and criminal behaviour. Presence of problems in urban areas, including environmental pollution, heavy traffic, transportation difficulties, survival anxiety, unemployment, high cost of services, economic crises, negatively affects the mental health of individuals, leading to increased tendency to violence and crime rates (Karasu, 2008). In addition, serious gaps are formed between social classes in terms of consumption, and tendency to violence based on urban distribution problem becomes widespread (Harvey, 2003).

Previous studies also associated aggression and violence with developmental features of adolescence. Gordon (1999) stated that adolescents may act reactive specifically when faced with frustration and not being understood, perceive authority figures as hostile and thus show tendency to violence.

Other results from previous research include the fact that violence is seen more in the early and mid-adolescent age group, that males are more prone to violent behaviour, and that hyperactivity, low self-concern, depression and anxiety enhance violent behaviors (Kapci, 2004). In the case of affective disorders, e.g. depression, etc. and some personality disorders (especially borderline personality disorder), violent behaviour is often observed in the form of self-harm and suicide.

Risk factors related to violence can be community-acquired or be associated with personal characteristics. Being involved in a bully peer group, academic failure, social loneliness and rejection are mentioned among personal risk factors in tendency to violence (Debarbieux, 2009).

According to Flannery (1997), tendency to violence is much more common among adolescents who use anger, violence as a means of coping while solving problems. Individuals with violent behaviors may often have problems with controlling their feelings. They can be easily hurt by others and may think that they can solve problems through violence and gain prestige.

### *1.1. Psychological Capital and Tendency to Violence*

Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2006) defined positive psychological capital as a positive psychological development of an individual. Positive psychological capital is concerned with "who an individual is" and "who s/he can be" in developmental sense (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2006).

The concept of psychological capital has emerged as a result of studies on positive psychology and positive organizational school, its reflection on the school environment, and particularly positive organizational behavior research (Luthans et al., 2006). Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2006) concluded that positive psychological capital is the concept, which emerged as a branch of positive organizational behavior, and which best meets its properties. Psychological capital is a concept resulting from a combination of a person's characteristics open to development, such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience, and it makes more sense than the whole consisting of these characteristics.

Although positive psychological capital consists of self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience, the concept makes more than the sum of all these dimensions (Luthans et al., 2006). Self-efficacy is defined as trusting oneself that one can perform challenging tasks (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998); hope as being patient on the road to objectives to succeed and being able to reconsider options where necessary (Snyder, 2002); optimism as having positive thoughts that one can be successful now and in the future (Luthans et al., 2006); resilience as being strong against

challenges and difficulties and being able to pull oneself together (Avey et al., 2008; Luthans et al., 2006). Self-efficacy and hope are concepts related to a person's own, while optimism and resilience depend on the conditions of external environment (Kutani & Oruc, 2014).

The effect of positive psychological capital on performance and behaviour is larger than the effect of these four components comprising positive organizational behaviour. For example, hopeful people determine their own path to achieve success so they are more optimistic and resilient. In other words, each component of positive psychological capital is in interaction with others. Therefore, each component adds a feature to the concept of positive psychological capital, and the whole comprised of all these features describe a new concept, which is distinct from what its components comprise (Luthans et al., 2006).

In a relevant study by Taiwo (2004) conducted with second grade students in Nigeria, self-efficacy beliefs, social skills and socialization were reported to be effective variables in predicting the tendency to violence at school. Similarly, Chung and Elias (1996) reported that low self-efficacy, poor social skills and stressful life events are significant predictors of problem behavior. Considering the findings of the above studies as a whole, at least a portion of the violence seen in schools can be expected to be associated with self-efficacy beliefs. High level of self-efficacy shows a proactive protective effect against difficulties and challenges and also allows development of a successful adaptation process against a range of stressful situations (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Addressing psychological capital structure associated with health and happiness and investigating methods for development of this capital are of vital importance in prevention or reduction of stress and burnout (Cetin, Sesen & Basim, 2013).

As we know, stress is a change in an organism caused by psychological, social, cultural or physical agents. It was observed that if the stress is severe or long lasting, it is detrimental to physical and mental health of an individual (Sorias, 1992). On the other hand, given the fact that life events and satisfaction with education and school, and intensity of violence are proportional to the perception of the difficulty to adapt to the change caused by them (Adler, 1998), increasing build up of problems which a student is unable to resolve or have difficulty resolving will pave the way for him/her to experience more intensive stress. From this point on, it is possible that the student will show much more different and even unexpected behaviors. If it is assumed that stress increases with increasing sense of subjective discomfort of an individual, it is clear that reactions may vary with respect to those considered healthy and will usually contain negativity.

In the literature, although there are studies which investigated psychological capital, job satisfaction and burnout factors separately or in the context of bilateral relations, there are no studies which addressed these six interrelated variables. The purpose of this research is to determine the mediating effects of negative feelings (stress, anxiety, burnout and depression) in the relationship between psychological capital and tendency to violence.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Participants and Procedure*

The population of the study is comprised of the high school students that study in Cizre city centre during the 2013–2014 academic year. With the disproportional cluster sampling method, a total of 11 high schools in the Cizre city centre were selected randomly and the scales were administered to all the students at these schools. A sample of 745 students agreed to participate in this study.

### *2.2. Instruments*

Positive psychological capital Scale was originally developed by Luthans et al. (2007) and adapted to Turkish by Cetin and Basim (2012), measures the positive psychological capital. Stress was measured by a scale developed by Karakus (2013). Anxiety and depression were measured by public-domain International Personality Item Pool scales (Goldberg, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2006) that were adapted to Turkish by Karakus (2013). Maslach Burnout Inventory that was originally developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) and adapted to Turkish by Karakus (2013) and was used to measure the burnout. Violence Tendency was measured by Violence Tendency Scale developed by

Haskan and Yildirim (2012).

### 2.3. Analyses

Data were examined for normality assumption, outliers were eliminated and the necessary transformations were made to normalize the skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Exploratory factor analysis (with SPSS) and the confirmatory factor analysis (with AMOS) were performed for each scale. Structural equation approach was used through Maximum Likelihood method with AMOS. After the measurement model for each scale was confirmed, the structural model was developed according to the apriori hypotheses. The fit indices of Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA], Root Mean Square Residual [SRMR], Goodness of Fit Index [GFI], Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index [AGFI], Normed Fit Index [NFI], Comparative Fit Index [CFI], and Incremental Fit Index [IFI] were used to analyse the model fit in the structural equation modelling.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Reliability and Validity

A single factor “stress” scale consisting of four items which explained 41.82% of the variance fitted to the data well (KMO=.638, Bartlett=.000, Cronbach Alpha=.626, Chi-Square=0.11, df=2, P-value=0.9362, RMSEA=0.000, SRMR=0.004, GFI=1.00, AGFI=1.00, NFI=1.00, NNFI=1.00, CFI=1.00, IFI=1.00).

A single factor “anxiety” scale consisting of five items which explained 39.81% of the variance yielded good fit indices (KMO=.781, Bartlett=.000, Cronbach’s Alpha=.739, Chi-Square=0.15, df=5, P-value=0.8987, RMSEA=0.000, SRMR=0.005, GFI=1.00, AGFI=1.00, NFI=1.00, NNFI=1.00, CFI=1.00, IFI=1.00).

A single factor “depression” scale consisting of six items which explained 56.70% of the variance presented a good fit to the data (KMO=.895, Bartlett=.000, Cronbach Alpha=.881, Chi-Square=25.30, df=9, P-value=0.0786, RMSEA=0.012, SRMR=0.017, GFI=0.96, AGFI=0.95, NFI=0.95, NNFI=0.98, CFI=0.95, IFI=0.96).

In the “burnout” scale, a single factor consisting of seven items which explained 35.06% of the variance fitted to the data well (KMO=.835, Bartlett=.000, Cronbach’s Alpha=.782, Chi-Square=38, df=14, P-value=0.0640, RMSEA=0.056, SRMR=0.045, GFI=0.93, AGFI=0.92, NFI=0.94, NNFI=0.95, CFI=0.95, IFI=0.96).

In the psychological capital scale, four factors (hope, optimism, resilience, self efficacy) consisting of 20 items in total which explained 55% of the variance yielded acceptable fit indices (KMO=.891, Bartlett=.000, Cronbach’s Alpha=.873, Chi-Square=267.116, df=100, P-value=0.0353, RMSEA=0.078, SRMR=0.075, GFI=0.91, AGFI=0.90, NFI=0.91, NNFI=0.90, CFI=0.90, IFI=0.89).

In the violence tendency scale, two factors consisting of 11 items in total which explained 45% of the variance yielded acceptable fit indices (KMO=.899, Bartlett=.000, Cronbach’s Alpha=.867, Chi-Square=65, df=34, P-value=0.0502, RMSEA=0.065, SRMR=0.062, GFI=0.93, AGFI=0.92, NFI=0.92, NNFI=0.91, CFI=0.93, IFI=0.92).

### 3.2. Correlation Matrix

Table 1. Correlation matrix of the variables in this study.

	Psychological capital	Anxiety	Stress	Burnout	Depression	Violence tendency
Psychological capital	1					
Anxiety	-0.181**	1				
Stress	-0.109**	0.332**	1			
Burnout	-0.341**	0.352**	0.443**	1		
Depression	-0.393**	0.504**	0.362**	0.614**	1	
Violence tendency	-0.144**	0.089*	0.280**	0.326**	0.212**	1

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Correlation matrix of the variables in this study shows that there are significant correlations between each pair of

these variables. There are negative correlations between psychological capital and all the other variables (anxiety, stress, burnout, depression and violence tendency). Also there are positive correlations between anxiety, stress, burnout depression and violence tendency (Table 1). This correlation matrix offers proofs to develop a structural equation model based on the literature.

### 3.3. Structural Equation Model

At this stage, according to the apriori hypotheses, a structural equation model was developed among the variables in this study. In this model, the paths of; depression → violence tendency ( $B=0.027$ ,  $p=0.804$ ), psychological capital → stress ( $B=-0.014$ ,  $p=0.146$ ), psychological capital → violence tendency ( $B=-0.054$ ,  $p=0.165$ ), stress → depression ( $B=0.096$ ,  $p=0.059$ ) and anxiety → violence tendency ( $B=0.209$ ,  $p=0.074$ ) were deleted because of the insignificant path coefficients (Table 2). The final model yielded good fit indices implying this structural equation model is acceptable. In the final model (Figure 1), psychological capital; has a direct negative effect on anxiety, has a negative effect on stress through the full mediation effect of anxiety, has a negative effect on burnout through the partial mediation effects of anxiety and stress, has a negative effect on depression through the partial mediation effects of anxiety, stress and burnout, also has a negative effect on violence tendency through the full mediation effects of anxiety, stress and burnout. Also, anxiety has a positive effect on violence tendency through the full mediation effects of stress and burnout, stress has a positive effect on violence tendency through the partial mediation effect of burnout, anxiety has a positive effect on depression through the partial mediation effects of stress and burnout, stress has a positive effect on depression through the full mediation effect of burnout.

Table 2. Parameters related to the structural equation model.

Models	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMR	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	$\Delta \chi^2$
Saturated Model	0.000	0	0	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	-
Deletion 1	0.062	1	0.062	0.110	0.000	1.000	1.000	1.001	1.000	0.999	0.062
Deletion 2	2.171	2	1.085	0.853	0.011	0.998	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.990	2.109
Deletion 3	4.089	3	1.363	0.334	0.022	0.996	0.999	0.999	0.998	0.987	1.918
Deletion 4	7.278	4	1.819	0.221	0.033	0.993	0.997	0.997	0.997	0.983	3.189
Deletion 5 (final model)	10.826	5	2.165	0.239	0.040	0.989	0.994	0.994	0.995	0.980	3.548

Notes: Deletion 1: deletion of the path of depression → violence tendency  
 Deletion 2: deletion of the path of psychological capital → stress  
 Deletion 3: deletion of the path of psychological capital → violence tendency  
 Deletion 4: deletion of the path of anxiety → violence tendency  
 Deletion 5: deletion of the path of stress → depression

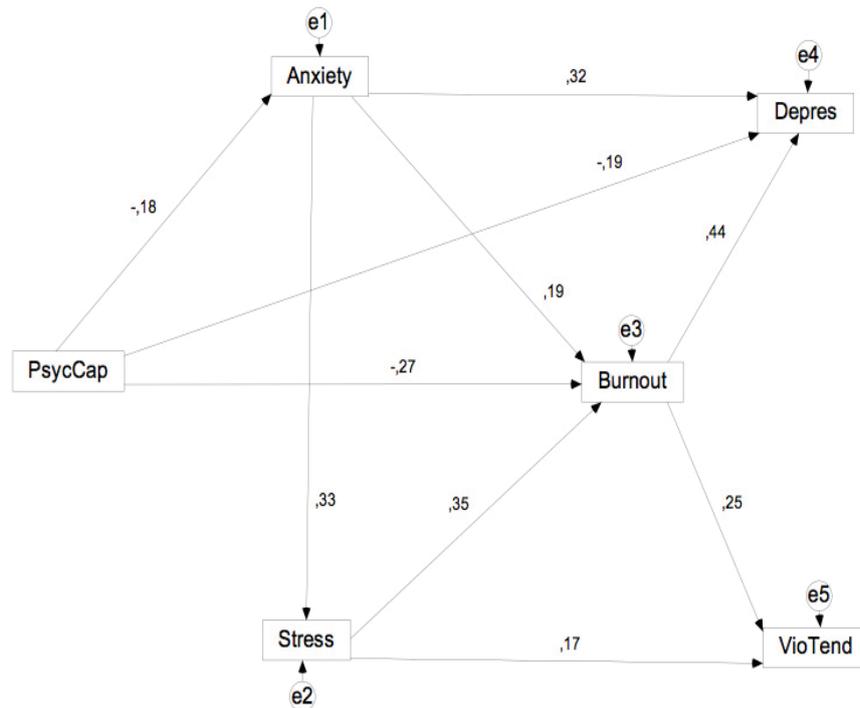


Fig. 1. Structural equation model of the variables in the study.

Notes: PsycCap: Psychological capital, Depres: depression, VioTend: Violence tendency.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study show that students' psychological capital reduces their violence tendency through their reduced negative feelings such as anxiety, stress and burnout. Students who have higher levels of psychological capital are more resilient, hopeful, optimism and self-efficient, so they may be less vulnerable to the negative feelings such as anxiety, stress, burnout and depression which cause them to feel more violence tendency. Contrary to the previous contention, depression has not a significant effect on violence tendency of the students in this study.

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of positive psychological capital on negative emotions (burnout, stress, anxiety, depression) and tendency to violence using samples selected among students.

As a result of the study, it was seen that there is a positive correlation between psychological capital and burnout. Psychological capital was seen to lower burnout level. Burnout, in general terms, is referred to as a negative state of mind related to stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Research in the literature seems to be associated with the results of this study. In a study by Salanova (2004), perception of self-efficacy, one of the sub-dimensions of psychological capital, was found to increase happiness and performance but decrease burnout.

Likewise, Cetin et al. (2013) indicated that positive psychology and psychological capital, which stands out in this context, play an important role in decreasing and preventing burnout. Overall, it was determined that individuals' psychological capitals correlated negatively with burnout feelings. In this correlation, particularly self-efficacy and hope factors can be said to be more dominant within the structure of psychological capital. Other research also supports the result of this research. A negative relationship was established between psychological capital (Herbert, 2011) and its dimensions, including self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Bandura et al., 1985), optimism (Herbert, 2011), hope (Chang et al., 2000), resilience and (Herbert, 2011) burnout. General scores for psychological capital and burnout were also compared. In this context, it was suggested that psychological capital correlated negatively with burnout (Topcu & Ocak, 2012).

On the other hand, it was seen in the findings of the study that there is a positive correlation between stress and burnout. In other words, increased level of stress in people causes burnout. According to Pines and Aronson (1988), burnout is a loss of enthusiasm, energy, idealism, perspective and purpose as well as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion causing permanent stress, hopelessness, despair, and a feeling of being trapped. These negative attitudes also spread to an individual's whole life, causing problems in his/her marriage and interpersonal relationships. According to Maslach and Goldberg (1998), various environmental factors such as familial and social demands or technological progress cause people to be exposed to a variety of pressures and have more stress. People who experience long-term and intensive organizational as well as environmental stress are negatively affected in terms of mental and physical health and may soon develop burnout in organizational settings. Burnout is a result of physical, psychological or spiritual emptiness experienced by employees and of their inability to deal with this situation for a long time (Crampton et al., 1995).

In this study, it is clear that psychological capital directly affected anxiety. In other words, individual's level of anxiety decreases with increasing psychological capital. As psychological capital increases, it decreases individual's anxiety, resulting in reduced burnout and tendency to violence. Similar to this study, Klinteberg et al. (1993) and Hill et al. (1996) found that violence increases with increasing level of anxiety.

Emotions always have the power to disturb thoughts. Mood disorders such as anxiety, anger coming from the limbic system affects thinking processes by causing nervous tension. Therefore, individuals with disturbed emotional balance cannot think properly (Usta, 2009).

People who can not find proper, nice, positive, creative means and methods to earn respect and realize oneself try to avoid their mental tension, concerns, fears, anger, boredom through aggressive behaviour or acts of violence. They cause violence and assault incidents or are involved in such events, either related or unrelated to them (Adana Security Directorate, 2005).

Looking at other results of the study, it was seen that psychological capital decreased level of depression. Gudlaugsdottir (2004) demonstrated that tendency to violence is more than fourfold in people who experienced negative life events to a larger extent as compared to those who have never experienced a negative life event and that adolescents with high levels of depression and anger have more tendency to violence.

In other results consistent with the results of this study, it was noted that violence is more common among adolescents, and that hyperactivity, low self anxiety, emotional deprivation, depression and anxiety increase acts of violence (Cetin, 2004; Kapci, 2004; Bowlby, 1969). Based on all these results, it can be concluded that if level of psychological capital is increased and level of depression is decreased, tendency to violence can be reduced.

The results of this study imply that students' psychological well-being may be improved and by this way their violence tendency may be reduced through strengthening their psychological capital levels. It would be beneficial for school managers and teachers to invest in strengthening psychological capital levels of their students if they want to reduce their violence tendency.

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