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| Extended Abstract |

Comparative examination of altruism, positive cognitive triad, and depression rates in volunteers and professionals working with cancer patientsÇağla Nacaroğlu¹ , Saime Vicdan Yücel² **Keywords**

altruism, volunteering, depression, positive cognitive triad, cancer patients

Abstract

The aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between volunteering, altruism, positive cognitive triad and depression rates. At this point, it was aimed to compare the rates of altruism, depression, and positive cognitive triad between two groups working voluntarily and professionally with cancer patients. The sample of this research selected with convenience sampling method consisted of two groups and 121 participants. The participants of the first group (61 females) were selected from the group named 'Mavi Melekler' who serve at Okmeydani Research and Training Hospital's Institute of Oncology voluntarily. The participants of the second group (60 females) were selected from hospital staff like doctor, nurse, technician, laborant who work at Istanbul University Istanbul Medical Faculty's Institute of Oncology. In the current study, Socio-demographic Information Form, Altruism Scale, Beck Depression Inventory and Cognitive Triad Inventory were applied. According to the findings, volunteers working with cancer patients had higher rates of altruism and positive cognitive triad, and lower rates of depression compared to professionals. As a result of the Pearson and Spearman correlation analysis, as altruism rates increased in both groups, depression levels decreased, and positive cognitive triad rates increased. The fact that volunteering is associated with the decrease in depression rates and the increase in the rates of positive cognitive triad may provide clinical benefit by producing a behavioral method for coping with depression which is one of the most common disorders and by providing a protective factor for psychological health.

How does it affect psychological health by getting rid of the burden of self-centered expectations and helping other people without expecting anything in return? Even if people who help with an altruistic intention do not set out with the expectation of self-interest. These behaviors have aspects that reward the person internally and most people state that it helps them feel good (Post, 2005). According to Wright's study, it was found that altruistic behavior negatively affects the severity of depressive symptoms through goal acquisition, increase in life satisfaction and relationships with people (Wright, 2013). In addition, altruism and volunteer work transform the self-perception of the individual into positive (Ryff & Singer, 2008), reduce the feeling of hopelessness (Miller et al., 1986), increase self-confidence (Feng & Guo, 2017), increase life satisfaction and add meaning to life (Midlarsky, 1991). This situation indirectly indicates the relationship of volunteer work with the concept of positive cognitive triad. Considering the relevant literature, the lack of direct research on the concept of altruism and the positive cognitive triad, and the scarcity of research on the relationship

between altruism and depression have led to the need to study these concepts. The aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between volunteering, altruism, positive cognitive triad, and depression rates. At this point, it was aimed to compare the rates of altruism, depression, and positive cognitive triad between two groups working voluntarily and professionally with cancer patients.

METHODS

The sample of this research selected with convenience sampling method consisted of two groups and 121 participants. The participants of the first group (61 females) were selected from the group named 'Mavi Melekler' who serve at Okmeydani Research and Training Hospital's Institute of Oncology voluntarily. The participants of the second group (60 females) were selected from hospital staff like doctors, nurses, technicians, laborants who work at Istanbul University Istanbul Medical Faculty's Institute of Oncology. In this study, Socio-demographic Information Form, Altruism Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, and Cog-

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✉ Çağla Nacaroğlu · caglanurnacaroglu@gmail.com | ¹Clinical Psychologist, ²Department of Psychology, Işık University, İstanbul, Turkey.

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nitive Triad Inventory were applied.

RESULTS

Mann Whitney U-test was used to compare the volunteer and professional group. According to the scores obtained from the Altruism Scale, a significant difference was found between the mean rank of the volunteer group and the professional group ($U = 621.500$; $p < .05$). A significant difference was found between the mean rank of the volunteer group and the professional group in terms of the scores obtained from the Beck Depression Inventory ($U = 1029.500$; $p < .05$). In addition, a significant difference was found between the mean rank of the volunteer group and the professional group in terms of the scores obtained from the Cognitive Triad Inventory ($U = 808.000$; $p < .05$). As a result, volunteers had higher rates of altruism and positive cognitive triad, and lower rates of depression compared to professionals.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the Altruism Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, and Cognitive Triad Inventory in the professional group. According to the results of the analysis, a significant negative relationship was found between the altruism rate of the professional group and the level of depression ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$). Also, a positive significant relationship was found between altruism rate and cognitive triad level of the professional group ($r = .37$, $p < .001$). Spearman correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between scales in the volunteer group. A positive significant relationship was found between the altruism rate of volunteer group and the cognitive triad level ($\rho = .48$, $p < .001$). Also, a significant negative correlation was found between altruism rate and depression level of the volunteer group ($\rho = -.38$, $p < .001$). As a result, as altruism rates increased in both groups, depression levels decreased, and positive cognitive triad rates increased.

DISCUSSION

The first finding of the study shows that the altruism rate of volunteers working with cancer patients is higher as compared to professionals. According to some studies, altruistic motivation increases as the duration of service increases (Clary & Miller, 1986; Clary & Orenstein, 1991). As a matter of fact, Mavi Melekler, which is preferred as a volunteer group in the current study, has been continuing its activities for more than 30 years, while the professional group consists of younger participants indicates that their service time is less.

Another finding of the study shows that the depression rates of volunteers are lower than those of professionals. According to the research conducted by

Wright (2013), it was determined that altruistic behavior negatively affects the severity of depression due to goal acquisition, increase in life satisfaction and increases relationships with people. Also, according to Wilson and Musick (2003), volunteering produces positive cognition and positive affect in the person; hence it resists negative ones such as depressive mood. Luks (1988) mentions that there are some internal changes that make the helpers feel better (helper's high). As a matter of fact, as a result of the measurements made while helping other people, it has been found that the dopamine chemical that makes the brain feel good and affects the sense of pain perception is secreted and the reward region of the brain is activated (Strobel et al., 2014). In this respect, it is thought that volunteer work has a protective effect against depression and can be used as a way to regulate emotions.

Another finding indicates that when altruism rates of volunteers and professionals increase, their depression levels decrease. The average age of the volunteer group is 58. According to the study of Wilson and Musick (2003), the involvement of aged individuals in voluntary activities was found to be associated with low depression rates. At this point, the literature supports the view that voluntary activities are protective against depression by filling the gap that occurs when the roles in life are reduced (Wilson, 2012; Wilson & Musick, 2003). The finding in the current study is explained in this way. Considering the findings obtained from the professional group, it is understood that when individuals' altruism rates increase, a positive effect is seen on their mental health. According to the literature, helping people in useful jobs is perceived as a civic duty by some people and fulfilling this duty is rewarded internally by the person (Wilson & Musick, 2003). This helps the person to form a life mission and adds meaning to his/her life (Wilson & Musick, 2003). This situation creates a protective effect against feelings of worthlessness and emptiness in depression (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). It is thought that the increase in altruism levels of professionals working with cancer patients is associated with low depression rates thanks to such mechanism.

In this study, it was found that the positive cognitive triad ratio of volunteers was higher compared to professionals. While there are studies in the literature that support the relationship of volunteer work with the three sub-dimensions of positive cognitive triad, there is no study that directly examines its relationship with the concept of positive cognitive triad (Lin et al., 1999; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Volunteer work transforms the self-perception of the individual into positive (Ryff & Singer, 2008), reduces the feeling of hopelessness (Miller et al., 1986), increases self-confidence (Feng & Guo, 2017), increases life satisfaction, and adds meaning to life (Midlarsky,

1991). This situation shows the relationship of volunteer work with the concept of positive cognitive triad indirectly. In addition, the hypothesis that a positive relationship is expected between altruism and positive cognitive triad rates of volunteers and professionals has been confirmed. Some studies conclude that professionals working with cancer patients have high levels of burnout syndrome (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), which is characterized by helplessness, hopelessness, and loss of self-confidence (Işıkhan, 2009). In the present study, it was found that professionals working with cancer patients with high altruism rates had high levels of positive perception, which is characterized by self-confidence (Ryff & Singer, 2008), sense of belonging (Lin et al., 1999) and an increase in the level of hope (Miller et al., 1986). This shows the importance of the altruism variable as a preventive factor against emotional problems that can be experienced as a result of working with cancer patients.

It is thought that this research would make an important contribution to the clinical field by producing a behavioral solution in the development of positive perceptions and coping with depression. In addition, it contributes to the literature as it is the first study, to the best of our knowledge, to show the importance of altruistic behaviors as a preventive factor against emotional problems that may be experienced as a result of working with cancer patients. Considering that the increase in the psychological health of people working with cancer patients will affect the quality of the service they provide to patients; it is understood to be a valuable contribution. Considering the limitations of the research, it is noteworthy that the number of participants is low. Data were collected from a total of 121 participants. This situation creates a limitation in terms of generalizing the research to the society. Furthermore, data were collected only from female participants in the study. Therefore, there is a limitation in terms of generalizing the obtained findings to men. Since altruism and voluntary work is a concept that has been the subject of very few studies in our country, it is thought that studies showing the importance of this concept are important in terms of providing data to encourage the use of altruistic behaviors in the clinical field. It is recommended to conduct studies on this subject with larger sample groups and to examine the effect of altruism by participating in treatment programs.

Compliance with Ethical Standards This study was approved by Işık University Ethical Committee (Trial Number: 236, Date: 01.16.2020) and İstanbul University Oncology Institute Directorate (Trial Number: 241817, Date: 10.22.2019).

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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