

The Relationship Between Alexithymia and Positive Beliefs to Rumination and Psychological Resilience

Aleksitimi İle Ruminasyona Yönelik Olumlu İnançlar ve Psikolojik Sağlamlık Arasındaki İlişki

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to examine the relationships between alexithymia, positive beliefs towards rumination and psychological decisiveness in alexithymic individuals. In addition to determining the relationships between the variables, the mediating role of alexithymia in the relationship between positive beliefs about rumination and resilience was evaluated. The research was carried out on university students. Alexithymic individuals were identified by a two-stage process. First of all, students were asked to evaluate the measurement tools based on the convenient sampling method without any discrimination. Then, the data obtained were analyzed and 144 university students were determined as alexithymic in line with the cut-off score determined. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale, Psychological Resilience Scale and Positive Rumination Scale were used as data collection tools. Research findings show that there is a positive and significant relationship between positive beliefs about alexithymia and rumination in alexithymic individuals. However, a significant negative correlation was determined between resilience and alexithymia. According to the mediation analysis findings, the mediating role of alexithymia in the relationship between positive belief in rumination and resilience is significant. As a result, a model to explain resilience was tested in line with the mediation theory and the interaction between two variables that could explain resilience was found. In particular, it is evaluated that research findings may be functional in the therapy phase in clinical studies to be conducted on psychological resilience.

Keywords: Psychological resilience, rumination, positive rumination, alexithymia

Öz: Bu araştırmanın amacı, aleksitimik bireylerde aleksitimi, ruminasyona yönelik olumlu inançlar ve psikolojik sağlamlık arasındaki ilişkileri incelemektir. Değişkenler arasındaki ilişkilerin belirlenmesine ek olarak araştırmada, ruminasyona yönelik olumlu inançlar ve psikolojik sağlamlık arasındaki ilişkide aleksitiminin aracı rolü değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırma, üniversite öğrencileri üzerinde yürütülmüştür. Aleksitimik bireyler iki aşamalı bir süreç ile belirlenmiştir. İlk olarak herhangi bir ayırım yapılmaksızın uygun örneklemeye dayalı olarak öğrencilerin ölçme araçlarını değerlendirmeleri talep edilmiştir. Ardından elde edilen veriler çözümlenmiş ve belirlenen kesme puanı doğrultusunda 144 üniversite öğrencisi aleksitimik olarak belirlenmiştir. Toronto Aleksitimi Ölçeği, Psikolojik Sağlamlık Ölçeği ve Olumlu Ruminasyon Ölçeği veri toplama aracı olarak kullanılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, aleksitimik bireylerde aleksitimi ve ruminasyona yönelik olumlu inançlar arasında pozitif yönde anlamlı bir ilişkinin olduğunu göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, psikolojik sağlamlık ile aleksitimi arasında negatif yönde anlamlı bir ilişki belirlenmiştir. Aracılık analizi bulgularına göre, ruminasyona yönelik olumlu inanç ile psikolojik sağlamlık arasındaki ilişkide aleksitiminin aracı rolü anlamlıdır. Sonuç olarak, psikolojik sağlamlığı açıklamaya yönelik bir model aracılık teorisi doğrultusunda sınanmış ve psikolojik sağlamlığı açıklayabilen iki değişken arasındaki etkileşim bulgulanmıştır. Özellikle, psikolojik sağlamlık ile ilgili yapılacak olan klinik çalışmalarda araştırma bulgularının terapi aşamasında işlevsel olabileceği değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Psikolojik sağlamlık, ruminasyon, olumlu ruminasyon, aleksitimi

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Introduction

While trying to perfect the lives of individuals with scientific and technological developments in the last century, it can be thought that they are actually fighting a very difficult battle individually. It can be stated that individuals strive to achieve their well-being by overcoming many difficulties. However, individuals may also face sudden and unexpected negative situations. While some individuals easily overcome the negativity they experience, this negative process may cause various new problems for some individuals. Whether these events are considered as trauma or not is related to the individual's cognitive evaluation. In the process where the event is evaluated as a trauma, the individual may develop in a different direction. The individual can return to his old healthy life or manage the process such as post-traumatic growth by gaining positive gains (Calhoun et al., 2000). Another possibility is that the individual may have post-traumatic stress disorder. Different interpretations of the same event by individuals and different results have attracted the attention of researchers in recent years.

There are many theoretical approaches to the interpretation of such life events. One of these approaches is the positive psychology approach. In addition to the implications of traditional psychology, positive psychology aims to reveal the potential of the individual with a perspective away from psychopathology and to increase well-being by increasing their competencies (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). In this direction, it is emphasized that the real feelings, thoughts and behaviors that individuals functionalize in all processes of their existential struggle are extremely important for the individual (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003). In general, fulfilling vital tasks by focusing on their competencies as a whole offers important gains to the individual (Peterson, 2000). Psychological resilience has an important place among these achievements and shapes the cognitive and affective evaluations of the individual (Masten, 2001). Resilience is defined as the ability to successfully return to normal and ordinary life despite difficult living conditions (Masten, 2001). Psychological resilience refers to the sum of the individual's ability to cope, adapt and be successful in the face of negative situations and obstacles (Block & Kremen, 1996).

The impact of past traumatic events is evaluated individually. After an event is perceived as traumatic, cognitive structures that exist in individuals may be shaken. Adapting to the change in the cognitive structure initiates the rumination process. When defining rumination, it is stated that thoughts arise without an environmental stimulus and repeat on the same mental structure (Ehring et al. 2008). It is known that ruminations, fed by negative aspects of the past and the individual's self-perception, are invasive thoughts (Martin & Tesser, 1996). According to the metacognitive theory (Matthews & Wells, 2004), it is stated that repetitive negative emotions can be seen in all people and may be temporary. However, the fact that some individuals are more sensitive shows that they can be more insistent on these repetitive feelings and thoughts. It has been found that individuals who develop a positive belief in rumination on groups who do not have a psychological disorder show depressive symptoms (Yılmaz et al., 2015). It can be thought that these individuals perceive rumination as a coping strategy beyond evaluating it as a factor that causes depressive behaviors. In simpler terms, individuals develop a positive belief towards ruminative thinking (Ozdel et al., 2021).

The importance of biological, psychological and social systems is revealed in the multidimensional evaluations carried out for individuals. The communication that individuals develop among themselves thanks to their skills and competencies is also very important in managing their relations with others (Çıkrıkçı & Cinpolat, 2021). In this study, apart from a mere lack of communication skills, the concept of alexithymia, which is associated with psychological health, was discussed. It is known that alexithymia is observed in psychiatric patients with depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (Sifneos, 1996). However, in field studies, it has been reported that alexithymic features are also seen in healthy individuals (Aslan & Alparslan, 2001; Özgün & Kanak, 2022). As a personality trait of alexithymic individuals, it is stated that they tend to express their emotions and think inwardly (Nemiah, 2000).

While evaluating the reactions of individuals after the painful events they have experienced in their lives, the process of returning to a positive life can be accelerated thanks to their psychological resilience skills. Examination of the relationship between alexithymia, which is associated with psychological health, and positive belief in repetitive negative thoughts in the mind can make an original contribution to the literature. In this study, it is aimed to examine the relationships between alexithymia, positive beliefs about rumination, and psychological resilience in individuals with alexithymia. While it is predicted that the determination of the relationships between the variables can fill an important deficiency in the literature, it is thought to have the potential to direct new research. With the determination of the relations, it is aimed to present significant findings for mental health employees and thus contribute to the field.

Method of Research

Participants

While determining the study group for the research, a two-stage process was followed. In the first stage, a total of 215

university students, 165 women (76.7%) and 50 men (23.3%), were reached and they were able to evaluate the measurement tools. In the second stage, alexithymic individuals were determined by making an evaluation based on the alexithymia scores of the study group from the obtained data. Individuals who scored 51 or higher on the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS) were considered alexithymic. After the evaluation, a total of 144 university students, 120 females (83.3%) and 24 males (16.7%), were found to be alexithymic. The ages of these individuals ranged from 18 to 33, with a mean age of 21.56 (SD = 2.56). All other processes related to the research were carried out on the data collected from alexithymic individuals.

Data Collection Process

Toronto alexithymia scale: By Bagby et al. (1994) validity and reliability study was carried out in order to determine the suitability of the measurement tool for Turkish culture (Güleç et al., 2009). The Cronbach alpha value of the total scale is 0.78. The five-point Likert scale is based on a self-report. High scores indicate a high alexithymic level. It has been reported that individuals who score 51 and above in the measurement tool show alexithymic characteristics (Güleç & Yenel, 2010).

Positive rumination scale: The measurement tool aims to evaluate individuals' positive beliefs about rumination. The original form of the measuring instrument was published by Papageorgiou and Wells (2001). A validity and reliability study was conducted by Yılmaz et al. (2015). The measurement tool has a single factor structure and the Cronbach's alpha value was found to be .92.

Psychological resilience scale: It was developed by Liebenberg, Ungar and LeBlanc (2013) and adapted to Turkish culture by Arslan (2015). The measurement tool has a single factor structure. Cronbach's alpha value was determined as .84.

Ethical Approval and Process

While conducting this research, ethical criteria recommended by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011) and the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) were adopted. During the data collection process, in which voluntary participation was ensured, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage of the study. Information to identify the individuals participating in the study was not requested. In addition to the ethical procedures adopted, the ethical suitability of the research was approved by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of the university where the first author works (Decision 22.10.2021).

Within the scope of the research, data were collected online. The faculty members assigned as consultants at universities were contacted. The advisors sent the links to the students via class groups and e-mail. Participants were asked to fill in the link whenever they saw fit. In the link sent to participate in the research, the content of the research was presented and it was asked whether it was voluntary. The contact information of the participants, who stated a pseudonym at any stage of the research, was shared so that they could submit their withdrawal requests. The measurement tools specified within the scope of the research were applied to the participants who declared their voluntariness

Table 1. Relationships between variables

Variable	Means	SS	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
PBR (1)	27.06	5.70	-.570	.120	1		
ALX (2)	60.90	6.63	.764	.379	.243**	1	
PR (3)	45.70	7.08	-.543	.155	.004	-.334*	1

Note. ** $p < .01$; PBR = Positive Beliefs About Rumination, ALX = Alexithymia, PR = Psychological Resilience

Within the scope of the research, data were collected online. The faculty members assigned as consultants at universities were contacted. The advisors sent the links to the students via class groups and e-mail. Participants were asked to fill in the link whenever they saw fit. In the link sent to participate in the research, the content of the research was presented and it was asked whether it was voluntary. The contact information of the participants, who stated a pseudonym at any stage of the research, was shared so that they could submit their withdrawal requests. The measurement tools specified within the scope of the research were applied to the participants who declared their voluntariness.

Analysis of Data

For the analysis of the data, the fulfillment of various assumptions was evaluated. Outlier analysis, missing value analysis, normality assumption, linearity and multicollinearity were investigated regarding the data set. Then, since the research was conducted in a relational design, the Pearson Product Moments Correlation Coefficient technique was applied to determine the relationships between the variables. After determining the relationships between the variables, the theoretically created mediation model was tested. While conducting the mediation test, the mediation procedures recommended by Hayes (2018) were followed. While applying all the techniques used in the analysis of the data, the resampling value was determined as 10000 (k). When reporting the findings, the 95% confidence interval is presented with lower and upper limits.

Findings

Relationships Between Variables

Relationships between positive beliefs about rumination, alexithymia, and resilience in alexithymic individuals were

examined with correlation values (Table 1). When the correlation values were examined, it was determined that there was a significant positive correlation between positive beliefs about rumination and alexithymia ($r = .243, p < .01$; 95% CI [.071, .404]). There was no significant relationship between positive beliefs about rumination and resilience ($r = .004, p > .05$). There is a significant negative correlation between alexithymia, which is considered as a mediator variable, and resilience, which is considered as a dependent variable ($r = -.334, p < .01$; 95% CI [-.487, -.181]).

Mediation Analysis

For the purpose of this research, the mediation procedures recommended by Hayes (2018) were applied. It was determined that the mediation model to be examined within the scope of the research was consistent with the Process Macro Model 4 application and the processes related to this application were adopted. In simpler terms, the mediating role of alexithymia in the relationship between positive beliefs about rumination and resilience was evaluated. According to standardized regression coefficients, the overall effect of positive belief in rumination on resilience was insignificant ($\beta = .003, p > .05$; path c). However, the overall effect of positive belief in rumination on alexithymia was significant ($\beta = .242, p < .001$; 95% CI [.095, .469]; path a). The overall effect of alexithymia, which was examined as a mediator variable, on resilience was found to be significant ($\beta = -.356, p < .001$; 95% CI [-.551, -.208]; path b). When the mediator variable is included in the model, the indirect effect of positive belief in rumination on resilience through alexithymia is significant ($\beta = -.086, SE = .03$; 95% CI [-.173, -.022], ab) (Figure 1).

In conclusion, alexithymia's mediator role was found to be significant in the relationship between positive belief in rumination and resilience (Table 2).

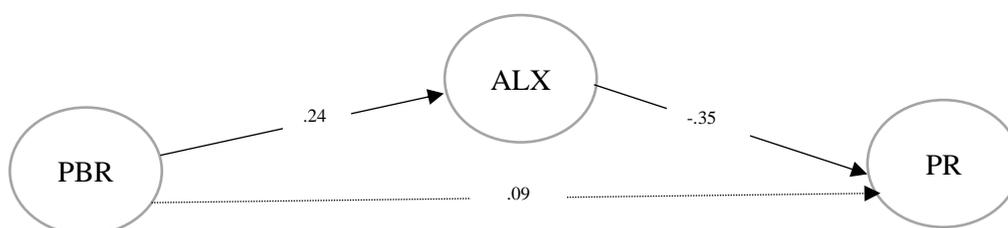


Figure 1. Mediating role of alexithymia

Note. PBR = Positive Beliefs About Rumination, ALX = Alexithymia, PR = Psychological Resilience

Table 2. Mediating role of alexithymia

Parameter Estimates		Result Variables			
		M (ALX)		Y (PR)	
		β	SE	β	SE
X (PBR)	a	.242**	.09	c'	.09
M (ALX)	---	---	---	b	-.356**
Constant	i _M	53.27	2.61	i _Y	65.82
		$R^2 = .06$		$R^2 = .12$	
		$F(1;142) = 8.88; p < .01$		$F(2;141) = 9.57; p < .001$	

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$; PBR = Positive Beliefs About Rumination, ALX = Alexithymia, PR = Psychological Resilience

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between positive beliefs about rumination and alexithymia in individuals with alexithymia. It can be stated that the increase in positive beliefs towards rumination may also lead to an increase in alexithymia. No significant relationship was found between positive beliefs about rumination and psychological resilience, which is another concept discussed in the research. It can be thought that a change in the positive beliefs of individuals towards rumination will not pave the way for any change in the level of resilience. Finally, a significant negative correlation was found between alexithymia and resilience. This finding provides information that an increase in the level of alexithymia may decrease the level of resilience. This finding was discussed in detail in the explanation of the model in which the mediator role of alexithymia was evaluated.

The main emphasis of research on resilience is that individuals have a basic recovery power. Masten & Reed (2002) conducted a study on children at risk from a psychopathological point of view, and their evaluations that some children are successful despite all the difficulties stand out. While this remarkable power has been investigated as a striking variable in recent years, it has been focused on the development of protective factors and strengthening the psychological resilience of individuals. However, besides the importance of determining the protective factors, it is also very important to evaluate the risk factors.

In the evaluation and development of the concept of psychological resilience, there was an emphasis on targeted difficult living conditions. The concept developed on the axis of positive psychology focused on the positive development of healthy individuals. While planning this research, individuals without a diagnosis of mental disorder were included in the study. While evaluating healthy individuals, the concept of rumination, which is associated with depression in metacognition theory, was included (Wells, 2009). Persistent suicidal thoughts other than depression could be considered as a factor increasing the risk of suicide (Ghamarigivi et al., 2022). It could be considered that these individuals were at risk because they developed a positive belief in rumination rather than a deterioration. However, it is known that alexithymia could be at different levels in individuals with normal development, as well as being used to explain some psychopathologies. There were studies investigating the effect of attachment styles of individuals in the evaluation of alexithymia (Radetzki et al., 2021; Troisi et al., 2021). These studies provided valuable information in terms of associating alexithymia with early childhood experiences. It could be thought that the difficulty individuals experience in finding and sharing emotions that will reflect their thoughts (Sifneos, 1996) might be a reflection of the attachment styles they developed. However, it is known that the individual could develop alexithymic characteristics with the influence of his culture (Stoudemire, 1991).

Evaluation of rumination as a coping strategy could pave the way for positive belief development and internal repetition. It was known that individuals with alexithymia could not be successful in recognizing their emotions and in shaping their relationships by naming the sensations correctly (Bagby et al., 1991). The sample of this study consisted of individuals with

alexithymia. In the evaluation of this relationship, it should be kept in mind that the group from which the data were collected showed alexithymic characteristics. However, it was known in the literature that the relationship of alexithymic individuals with their social environment often proceeds smoothly (Dougal, 1982). While Young and Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) talked about the effects of rumination on the lives of individuals, it was stated that it developed depressive thoughts and prevented the relationship between people. With the effect of rumination, the persistent sharing of repetitive thoughts with the people around could also lead to deterioration in relations with other people. Individuals' positive perception of cognitive repetition behavior against negative events could increase their alexithymia levels by increasing their difficulties in naming and expressing their feelings.

It is known that rumination can be the repetition of invasive negative thoughts that come to mind after a negative event (Calhoun et al., 2010). It has been reported that rumination, especially about behaviors that the individual regrets, leads to ruthless self-reactions and contributes to more post-traumatic stress disorder (Ramon et al., 2022). However, it is also stated that rumination can contribute to individuals in order to understand and make sense of the experienced event and move to a more positive structure (Calhoun et al., 2010). Psychological resilience is defined as the strength of individuals to return to their old routines in a healthy way after negative life events (Masten, 2001). The fact that there was no relationship between positive beliefs about rumination and psychological resilience in individuals with alexithymia, might suggest that individuals do not use rumination as a positive construct.

It is known that individuals with alexithymia had problems with expressing their feelings and thoughts beyond a decrease in effect or a basic communication crisis (Sifneos, 1996). It is known that individuals with emotional bluntness were more motivated to respond appropriately to environmental stimuli rather than motivated to focus on their inner strength (Dougal, 1982). The increase in alexithymic behaviors could be considered as an incompatible process in order to distance individuals from their inner powers even more and return to a healthy structure after the negativity experienced.

A decrease in positive beliefs about rumination could reduce alexithymia, and a decrease in alexithymia could increase resilience. A positive view of the rumination process, which develops after a negative event and causes mental fatigue by removing the individual from active coping skills, could alienate individuals from their social relationships. In a recent study, the mediating role of rumination in the relationship between obsessive-compulsive disorder and relationship satisfaction was determined (Kılıç ve Altınok, 2021). A decrease in positive beliefs about rumination could have prompted the individual to develop alternative and functional coping behaviors. It was thought that the individual who activated the support mechanisms might be more willing to share their feelings with others. This situation may have caused a decrease in the level of alexithymia. The tendency of individuals to share their feelings instead of repeating them in their minds could have contributed to a decrease in alexithymic characteristics and an increase in sharing. The fact that individuals with alexithymic behaviors focused on their own feelings by getting rid of the influence of early relationships or

cultural elements could pave the way for a decrease in alexithymic characteristics. In order to examine the nature of resilience more deeply, the characteristics of individuals with high resilience should be evaluated. In the literature, it is stated that these individuals are sufficiently equipped to establish relationships with others, to see possible changes as a part of themselves, to be goal-oriented, to be cautious, to be open to new opportunities, to develop positively and to take care of themselves (Aydın, 2018). These characteristics could be considered important for increasing psychological resilience. It was considered that reductions in alexithymic behaviors could increase the likelihood of displaying these behaviors and, as a result, contribute to the development of psychological resilience.

In addition to its strong contributions to the related literature, this study had some limitations. First of all, it could be stated that the power of the study group to represent the universe was not sufficient. Therefore, there may be some limitations in generalizing the findings of this study to the population. Secondly, the fact that the study was a cross-sectional study made it difficult to draw cause and effect from the results of the study. Performing future studies in experimental designs could comprehensively present the cause-and-effect effect between variables. Third, the lack of a homogeneous distribution based on gender in the data set could be expressed as a limitation. It is recommended that future studies can be conducted with a focus on gender homogeneity. Finally, social desirability and response bias could be demonstrated within the limitations.

Author Contribution

The first author carried out the planning, collecting and analyzing the data, the second author writing the draft manuscript. All authors contributed to the writing of the article and read and approved the final version of the study.

Ethical Declaration

This study was carried out by Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Social in the Ethics Committee of Human Research in Sciences (Protocol No. 90079) approval received at the 22/06 meeting dated 08.11.2021 it was carried out by decision.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within this study.

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