

An Investigation of Coping Skills with Stress of High School Students in Terms of Family Communication Patterns

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Article history

Received:

02.04.2025

Received in revised form:

04.06.2025

Accepted:

27.07.2025

Key words:

high school students, coping with stress, family communication

Coping with stress skills and having healthy communication within family of high school students are important protective factors in terms of preventive guidance and psychological counseling services. These protective factors can prevent many risk factors such as substance use, violence, school dropout, depression and anxiety. Stress and family communication are within basic study subjects for field workers who are providing services on psychological counseling to adolescents and their relatives. This study aimed to examine high school students' stress coping skills in terms of family communication patterns. 372 students participated in the study. The Family Communication Patterns Scale and the Coping with Stress Scale were used to collect research data. T-test, ANOVA analysis, Correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis were used to analyze the data. As a result of the analyses, there is a significant and positive relationship only between the dialogue dimension of the students' family communication patterns and the problem-focused coping and social support coping methods. It was found that the students' family communication pattern scores significantly predicted the levels of problem-focused coping and seeking social support coping methods. In light of this information, the importance of including individual and group guidance and psychological counseling activities in preventive family communication skills to increase students' stress coping skills was emphasized and discussed, and suggestions were made for future research on this subject.

Introduction

Secondary education level covers the adolescence period in terms of students' development (Santrock, 2020). Among the important developmental tasks of adolescence, creating a healthy identity, adapting to changes in this period, recognizing values and creating a connection between their own values and social values, gaining efficient, systematic and planned working habits, turning to higher education and business fields in line with career goals stands out (Ministry of Education, 2020). Important developmental tasks related to academic, social-emotional and career during adolescence naturally can cause adolescents to witness stressful life events. These stressful life events that individuals faced during this

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period are important for them to develop a healthy identity (Kulaksızoğlu, 2020; Santrock, 2020).

Stress is the effort that an individual expends beyond their physical and psychological limits due to the incompatible conditions of the physical and social environment (Atkinson et al., 2019; Cüceloğlu, 2023; Güzel, 2019). The intense stress that high school students experience could cause low self-esteem, lack of confidence and high-risk behaviors (Korkut, 2020). Stress is a reality of daily life while at the same time it is natural, normal and needed for development (Baltaş & Baltaş, 2024). It can be seen that what is important here is the how individuals cope with stress in the face of stressful life events. Every individual's way of coping with stress varies. According to the scale which was used in this study important coping ways can be listed as problem-oriented coping, avoiding and social support seeking (Türküm, 2002). Problem-focused coping style includes understanding the problem, seeking alternative solutions, implementation and evaluation. Denial, leaving it to time and accompany yourself with other things come to the fore in the avoidance approach (Tel, 2017). It is observed that seeking social support from peers, teachers and family is important for social support seeking (Korkut, 2020). Developing students' constructive and functional coping skills with stress is an important protective factor within developmental and preventive guidance and psychological counseling services.

It is thought that family has an important role in development of coping with stress skills of an individual (Cüceloğlu, 2023; Falloon et al., 2023; Korkut, 2020). A great amount of the stress in family life is caused by family members' relationship styles (Gladding, 2024). Attitudes which could cause tension within family increases stress and conflict while especially in families where family communication is open, learning about the factors that create stress understanding the problem, trying different options and looking for new solutions can be effective in developing individuals' skills to cope with stress (Baltaş & Baltaş, 2024; Canel, 2012; Cüceloğlu, 2019, 2021). Lohman and Jarvis (2000) have revealed that coping with stressful situations and family dynamics are related in the study they conducted with adolescents. Since individuals learn many basic things that are reflected in their behaviors, beliefs, and communication styles from their family members, parents who respect the child's personality, listen to him/her by trying to understand him/her, have open communication within the family, and allow the child to express himself/herself, provide great opportunities for the child's development (Jaspersen & Baumann, 2019; Vural, 2004). These family structures are called functional family structure. Demirbilek (2016) defined functional families as those who can share emotions that they experience, tolerate differences and cooperate, where family members can meet each other's needs and express their gratitude without hesitation, show their closeness without expecting anything in return, communicate effectively, cope in times of crisis, and support and encourage each other. Moreover, functionality of the family is an important factor in meeting psychological needs such as love, belonging, being free and amusement (Gervais & Jose, 2024; Usta, 2019). In addition to this when Satir (2017) observed families who are not functional, stated that they can use indirect and complex language while communicating, can be rigid against change and new possibilities, can be timid and rejecting, family members may feel lonely, weak and unhappy during times of crisis because they do not have a solidarity infrastructure which could affect their skills in coping with stress in this situation. Therefore, healthy communication, social support within family, supports children to coping with social, emotional and academic stressors (La Rosa et al., 2024; Maguire, 2012; Wills et al., 2014). Scale which had been used within the scope of this research, family communication patterns are handled in conversation and conformity dimensions. In the conformity dimension, the main thing in family

communication is to emphasize common values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Families who are conversation - focused are a type of family that allows each member to develop as an independent individual and at the same time encourages this and includes it in family interaction and communication (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Segrin & Flora, 2005). It can be said that “conformity dimension” can be summarized as a communication style where parents try to convince their children to share their ideas, while “communication dimension” can be summarized as a communication style where parents include their children in communication within family (Erdoğan, 2018).

Coping with stress skills and having healthy communication within family of high school students are important protective factors in terms of preventive guidance and psychological counseling services. These protective factors can prevent many risk factors such as substance use, violence, school dropout (Korkut, 2020), depression and anxiety (Brewer, 2024; Pantaleao, & Ohannessian, 2019; Freed, 2016). Stress and family communication are within basic study subjects for field workers who are providing services on psychological counseling to adolescents and their relatives. Therefore, it is believed that the findings of the current study will contribute to preventive and developmental guidance and counseling services provided by field workers, both individually and in groups. This study is expected to contribute to the limited literature in the field by addressing the variables of coping with stress and family communication in high school students together. In line with the explanations made, the aim of this study is to address the relationship between coping with stress and family communication patterns, which are thought to have significant effects on individuals in high school. In line with this purpose, the questions to be answered in the study are as follows:

- (1) Do students' family communication patterns and stress coping scores differ according to the number of siblings and the status of their parents' relationship?
- (2) Is there a significant relationship between students' family communication patterns and coping with stress levels?
- (3) Do students' family communication patterns significantly predict their coping with stress levels?

Method

Research Model

This research is descriptive and designed based on a relational survey model. Relational survey models are research models where it is aimed to determine whether the existence and/or degree of covariation between two or more variables (Karasar, 2024). In this study, relational survey model was used to determine possible relationship between coping skills with stress, and their family communication patterns, as well as to determine whether there are significant differences according to some independent (demographic) variables.

Participants

The study was conducted in three public and one private Anatolian high schools in the center of Şanlıurfa, where permission was granted to the researchers. Convenient sampling method was used to determine the study group. The scales were administered face-to-face within one class hour to students who volunteered to participate in the study. The estimated sample size was based on the number of high school students in the city center (N:

10.000=<n: 370) (Büyüköztürk et al., 2024). Demographic features of the research group are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Distribution of the study group according to demographic variables

Variable	Group	N	%
Gender	Female	178	47,8
	Male	194	52,2
Age	14-15 years old	146	39,2
	16-18 years old	226	60,8
Grade	9-10th Grade	243	65,3
	11-12th Grade	129	34,7
Number of siblings	Only child	5	1,3
	2 or more siblings	367	98,7
Education status of the mother	Illiterate	36	9,7
	Primary school graduate	75	20,2
	Middle school graduate	42	11,3
	High school graduate	94	25,3
	University graduate	125	33,6
Education status of the father	Illiterate	6	1,6
	Primary school graduate	56	15,1
	Middle school graduate	28	7,5
	High school graduate	79	21,2
	University graduate	203	54,6
Relationship status of parents	Together	358	96,2
	Not together	14	3,8

The prominent demographic characteristics in Table 1 are as follows: 52.2% of the students are male, 60.8% are in the 16-18 age group, 65.3% are in the 9th-10th grades. 98.7% of the students had siblings. The mothers of 33.6% and fathers of 54.6% of the students graduated from a university program. The parents of 96.2% of the students are together.

Data Collection Tools

According to the aim of this research personal information form, family communication patterns instrument and coping with stress scale were applied.

Personal information form

In “Personal Information Form” which was developed by the researcher eight questions were asked to students. These questions cover information such as students’ gender, age, grade, number of siblings, parents’ education status, family income and parents’ relationship status.

Family communication patterns instrument (FCPI)

Family communication patterns instrument was used to determine students’ status/level of communication with their families (conformity/ communication) which was developed by McLeod and Chaffee (2017), revised by Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990), and adapted to Turkish by Erdoğan and Anık (2018). The scale which consists of 26 items and 2 sub-dimensions designed as 5-point Likert style. Scale items are rated on a scale from “Definitely disagree” (1) to “Definitely agree” (5). The first 15 items measure the dimension

of communication between family members, while the other 11 measure the dimension of conformity (obedience). It was determined that the reliability coefficient of the communication orientation dimension of the scale was .88 and the reliability coefficient of the conformity orientation dimension was .81 (Erdoğan & Anık, 2018). The scale does not have a total score; however, it shows the level of orientation towards communication and conformity in individuals' communication with their families. A high score indicates a high level of communication/conformity, and a low score indicates a low level of communication/conformity. The reliability level of the Family Communication Patterns Instrument for this study was investigated using the Cronbach Alpha model. The reliability coefficient for the communication dimension was found to be (α) 0.884; for the conformity dimension, (α) 0.839. These results show that the reliability level of the Family Communication Patterns Instrument for this study is also quite high.

Coping with stress scale (CSS)

Coping with Stress Scale was used to determine levels of coping with stress of students which was developed by Türküm (2002), consists of 23 items and 3 sub-dimensions (factors). 5-point Likert style scale's statements evaluated between "Definitely not appropriate" (1) to "Definitely appropriate" (5). As a result of the validity and reliability study, the author determined that a 3-dimensional structure was obtained and that these three dimensions explained 41.7% of the total variance. In the reliability calculations, it was seen that the reliability (internal consistency) coefficient of the avoidance dimension was .85, the problem-focused dimension was .80, and the social support dimension was .65. A total score is not obtained for the scale consisting of three dimensions. The high score obtained shows the individual's level of coping with stress in that dimension (Türküm, 2002). The suitability and reliability of the Coping with Stress Scale for this study were examined through alpha coefficients. According to the reliability analysis results for the Coping with Stress Scale, the reliability coefficient (α) for the *avoidance dimension* was found to be 0.651; the reliability coefficient for *problem-focused coping* was found to be 0.694 and for *social support* was found to be 0.83. These values show that the items among the dimensions of the Coping with Stress Scale have high reliability and are suitable for this research.

Data Analysis

Data which was collected from high school students through the Personal Information Form, Family Communication Patterns Instrument and Coping with Stress Scale, were checked for errors and missing values, then transferred to the SPSS program afterwards statistical analysis started. Before determining the statistical analyses appropriate for the aim of this research, the normality of the data was investigated through exploratory analysis and skewness and kurtosis values were observed.

Results

Table 2 shows whether there is a significant difference in the participants' family communication patterns and coping with stress scores according to the number of siblings.

Table 2 Comparison of Family Communication Patterns and Coping with Stress Scores According to Number of Siblings

Dimension	Number of siblings	Descriptive Statistics			t-test			Effect Size (d)
		n	$\bar{X}$	Ss	t	sd	p	
Communication Dimension	Only child	5	2.41	0.11	3.40	370	0.000**	0.63
	2 or more siblings	367	2.94	0.84				
Conformity Dimension	Only child	5	3.14	0.55	2.29	370	0.028*	0.25
	2 or more siblings	367	2.86	0.86				
Avoidance	Only child	5	4.18	0.27	2.75	370	0.006**	1.24
	2 or more siblings	367	3.25	0.75				
Problem focused coping	Only child	5	3.56	0.48	2.41	370	0.016*	1.09
	2 or more siblings	367	4.35	0.73				
Social support	Only child	5	3.03	0.16	0.04	370	0.967	-
	2 or more siblings	367	3.04	0.84				

*p<.05, **p<.001

It was found that communication orientation level of students differ significantly according to number of siblings and this difference was in favor of participants who have 2 or more siblings [$t(370)=3.40$; $p<.001$]. It was also found that there was a significant difference between the levels of adjustment orientation, and this difference was in favor of the students who were only children [$t(370)=2.29$; $p<.005$]. It was found that there was a significant difference between the *avoidance* levels and that this difference was in favor of the students who were only children [$t(370)=2.75$; $p<.001$]. Also, it was found that there was a significant difference between the problem-focused coping levels and that this difference was in favor of the students who have siblings [$t(370)=2.41$; $p<.005$].

Table 3 Comparison of Family Communication Patterns and Coping with Stress Scores According to Relationship Status of Parents

Dimension	Relationship Status of Parents	Descriptive Statistics			t-test			Effect Size (d)
		n	$\bar{X}$	ss	t	sd	p	
Communication Dimension	Together	358	2.94	0.83	0.72	370	0.472	-
	Not together	14	2.78	1.14				
Conformity Dimension	Together	358	2.98	0.85	2.22	370	0.027*	0.60
	Not together	14	2.47	0.96				
Avoidance	Together	358	3.25	0.74	2.55	370	0.002**	0.70
	Not together	14	3.57	1.01				
Problem focused coping	Together	358	3.56	0.73	0.88	370	0.377	-
	Not together	14	3.74	0.86				
Social support	Together	358	3.05	0.84	0.25	370	0.805	-
	Not together	14	2.99	0.73				

*p<.05, **p<.001

The results show that there was a significant difference between the levels of conformity orientation dimension of the orientations related to family communication patterns depending on whether their parents were together and that difference was in favor of students whose parents were together [$t(370)=2.22$; $p<.005$]. It was found that there was a significant difference between the levels of avoidance dimension of the orientations related to coping with stress styles and that difference was in favor of students whose parents were not together [$t(370)=2.55$;

$p < .001$].

Table 4 Correlation Coefficients for Relationships Between Family Communication Patterns and Coping with Stress

Scale/Dimension				Coping with Stress		
				Avoidance	Problem-focused coping	Social support
Family Communication Patterns	Communication dimension	r		0.051	.145**	.163**
	Conformity dimension	r		-0.076	-0.066	0.018

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

According to Table 4, there was a significant and positive relationship between the communication dimension of family communication patterns and problem-focused coping ($r = .145$; $p < .001$) and social support ($r = .163$; $p = 0.002$), while there was no significant relationship between the conformity dimension and styles of coping with stress.

Table 5 Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Family Communication Patterns of Students on Their Coping with Stress Styles

Predicted Variable	Predictor	B	β	t	R	R ²	ΔR^2	F
Avoidance	(constant)	3.33		16.78**	0.089	0.008	0.003	1.49
	Communication	0.04	0.05	0.92				
	Conformity	-0.06	-0.07	-1.42				
Problem-focused coping	(constant)	3.36		16.48**	0.157	0.025	0.019	2.44*
	Communication	0.12	0.14	2.77**				
	Conformity	-0.05	-0.06	-1.42				
Social support	(constant)	2.50		11.42**	0.165	0.027	0.022	3.50**
	Communication	0.16	0.16	3.20**				
	Conformity	0.02	0.02	0.48				

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

It shows that students' levels of family communication patterns orientations (communication and conformity) together do not significantly predict their levels of *avoidance* of ways of coping with stress [$F_{(2; 369)} = 1.49$; $p > .05$]. When regression coefficients were examined, it was found that family communication patterns scores together significantly predicted problem-focused coping levels among coping with stress styles, but conformity dimension ($\beta = -0.06$; $p > .05$) did not have a significant contribution to this prediction. It was seen that the communication dimension of students did not have a significant effect ($\beta = 0.14$; $p < .001$). It can be seen that the scores of the dimensions of family communication patterns orientations (communication and conformity) together explain 1.9% of problem-focused coping with stress of students. When regression coefficients were examined, it was found that the scores of family communication patterns orientations together significantly predicted social support levels of students which is one of the dimensions of coping with stress, but conformity dimension ($\beta = 0.02$; $p > .05$) did not have a significant effect. Communication dimension of students had a significant effect ($\beta = 0.16$; $p < .001$). It is seen that the scores of the dimensions of family communication patterns orientations (communication and conformity) together explain the *social support* level of the students by 2.2%.

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendation

Research results showed that family communication patterns differentiate according to number of siblings both for communication dimension and conformity dimension. Accordingly, it was found that there was a significant difference between the communication orientation levels of the students depending on the number of siblings and that this difference was in favor of the students with 2 or more siblings. Students who have 2 or more siblings have higher communication orientation levels than students who are only child. It was found that there was a significant difference in the level of conformity orientation of students according to the number of siblings they had, with the difference favoring only children. Students who are only children are more likely to be conformity-oriented than students who have 2 or more siblings. In sum, having siblings increases family communication environment, while the conformity scores decrease. In their study with adolescents, Özey (2022) reported that the number of siblings does not have an effect on both dimensions. In their study with university students, Bilgici and Deniz (2021) found that students who grow up in small families have higher levels of communication orientation than students who grow up in large families. In their study with 13-18 years old Algan (2022) reported that students who have fewer siblings have higher communication orientation levels. In this study the finding where number of siblings increase communication orientation level differs from studies in the literature. In this study, the presence of siblings shows that the students participating in the research are involved in family communication. Increased family communication contributes to the development of each member as an independent individual.

According to the t-test conducted to compare the students' coping with stress scores according to the number of siblings, the number of siblings causes a significant difference in terms of avoidance and problem-focused coping. Accordingly, it was found that the difference between avoidance levels was in favor of students who are only one child. Avoidance levels of students who are only child are higher than those of students with 2 or more siblings. The difference between the problem-focused coping scores of the students was found to be in favor of the students with siblings. The problem-focused coping levels of students with siblings are higher than those of only child students. In a study conducted with university students, Yıldız (2021) found that those with only one sibling used problem solving more than those with more siblings. Abdullayev (2019) also found that students who are only children use problem solving more than those who have more siblings. The results on the relationship between the number of siblings and coping with stress in the current study and the literature are different. In the limited number of studies in the literature, it can be thought that older (university-age) individuals cause this situation. Students attending university are more obliged to solve their own problems, whether they stay with their families or in a dormitory/home. High school students, on the other hand, are still limited in their ability to act independently. In this case, it can be expected that students with more siblings will experience and acquire more experience in solving problems (e.g. within the family).

It was found that there was a significant difference in the conformity dimension of family communication patterns depending on whether the students' parents were together or not, and this difference was in favor of the students whose parents were together. The conformity of students whose parents were together was higher than that of students whose parents were not together. Özey (2022), in her study with adolescents, reported that the cohabitation status of the parents had no effect on both dimensions. It is seen that there are not enough studies to make an evaluation on this issue. It is seen that students whose parents are together will be more under the supervision of their parents, and more emphasis will be placed on common values, thoughts and behaviors in family communication.



In another finding, it was found that there was a significant difference between the avoidance scores of the students' parents' being together or not and this difference was found to be in favor of the students whose parents were not together. The avoidance levels of students whose parents were not together were higher than those of students whose parents were together. The study conducted by Yıldız (2021) concluded that having others living at home other than parents and siblings was effective in the high avoidance scores. It is thought that psychosocial factors such as stress (Satir, 2017) that may be caused by parents not being together may be effective in obtaining this result.

While there was a significant and positive relationship between the communication dimension of the students' family communication patterns and problem-focused coping and social support, no significant relationship was found between the conformity dimension and the ways of coping with stress. According to the results of multiple linear regression analyses on whether family communication patterns (communication and conformity) together significantly predicted students' levels of coping with stress (avoidance, problem-focused coping and social support); it was found that family communication patterns (communication and conformity) together did not significantly predict their levels of avoidance among ways of coping with stress. When the regression coefficients were examined, it was found that the scores of the orientations of family communication patterns together significantly predicted the students' levels of problem-focused coping from ways of coping with stress, but the conformity dimension did not have a significant contribution to this prediction. It is seen that the communication level of the students has a significant effect. It was found that the participants' family communication patterns (communication and conformity) together significantly predicted their social support levels, one of the ways of coping with stress. However, it is seen that the conformity dimension does not have a significant contribution in this prediction. It is understood that the communication level of the students has a significant effect. In the study conducted by Yıldız (2021), it was concluded that the positive relationship between parents and adolescents has a significant contribution to coping with stress. This finding of our research shows that the family style that allows each individual to develop as an independent individual and includes family interaction and communication is an important factor in coping with stress, problem-oriented coping and seeking social support. Healthy communication within the family is an important factor in coping with difficulties and being resilient in stressful life events (Asmala, & Syahbani, 2025; Carr & Kellas, 2018; Gervais, & Jose, 2024). Equality and balance in family communication is an important protective factor (DeVito, 2015; Elkin, 2016; Körün & Satıcı, 2025; Pantaleao & Ohannessian, 2019).

When the research findings are evaluated in general, it is possible to say that communication among family communication patterns has a significant effect on high school students' coping strategies (avoidance, problem-focused coping and seeking social support). In this direction, "Family School" programs, which are also emphasized in the Ministry of National Education's Maarif model, should be expanded. Individuals who complete these trainings are expected to increase their communication skills in the family, school and social environment by knowing the basic principles of effective communication and communication barriers. Therefore, with increased communication skills, individuals will be able to reach the awareness of avoiding attitudes and behaviors that may cause conflict in stressful moments with the information they acquire about the factors that may cause conflict (Falloon et al., 2023; Ministry of Education, 2024). It is recommended that seminars and psychoeducation studies should be conducted by professionals in the field on family communication and stress coping skills. These studies will make significant contributions to the social - emotional development of individuals. The participants of the study consisted of high school students in

the center of Şanlıurfa. Future studies can expand the sample size and consider different age groups, socioeconomic levels and cultural contexts to increase the generalizability of the findings.

Declarations

Acknowledgments: This article was prepared based on the master's thesis completed at Maltepe University.

Declaration of conflicting interests: There are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the publication, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Ethic approval statement: The Research Ethics Board (REB) of Maltepe University provided approval for the study (2021/33-10)

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