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*Research Article*

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## Evaluation of Psychological Help Needs, Stress and Hopelessness Among Postgraduate Students

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### Abstract

Today, there is an observable increase in the demand for psychological help among individuals of all ages and educational levels. Hence, revealing the factors associated with the need for psychological help can support mental health professionals in planning more effective interventions. This study aims to examine the psychological help needs of graduate students concerning stress and hopelessness. The research sample comprises 255 master's and doctoral students from various universities. To measure the study's variables, the Perceived Stress Scale, Beck Hopelessness Scale, and Psychological Help Need Scale were employed. Multiple linear regression analysis was utilized in this research to determine the predictive relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. The results obtained from the analysis indicated a significant correlation between psychological help need, perceived stress, and hopelessness. Additionally, both stress and hopelessness were identified as significant predictors of psychological help need.

### Key Words

Hopelessness • Postgraduate student • Psychological help need • Stress

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## Introduction

In response to the demands of advancing technology and the information age, people are expected to be able to adapt to the changing world. In order to achieve this, individuals need to continuously update their knowledge and be willing to learn. In the face of the ever-increasing need for knowledge, the knowledge acquired through undergraduate education is not sufficient for individuals throughout their lives (Karakütük, 2001). After undergraduate education, individuals can continue their postgraduate education in order to improve their knowledge and skills and contribute more to society. The postgraduate education process includes master's degree with thesis, master's degree without thesis, doctorate and proficiency in art programs (İşcan & Bıkmaz, 2012). Students' expectations for graduate education are primarily to improve themselves, gain academic competence and build a career (Alabaş et al., 2012; Gömleksiz & Yıldırım, 2013). In Golde and Dore's (2001) study, it was determined that doctoral students' expectations from doctoral education were to have an academic career. In Gemme and Gingras' (2012) study, the primary motivations for students to pursue postgraduate education were to enhance their job prospects and elevate their social status.

According to Toprak and Taşğın (2017), one of the most important reasons why students do not pursue postgraduate education is that this process is quite intense and exhausting. It is stated that emotional burnout is frequently experienced during graduate education due to reasons such as attendance to courses, economic concerns, heavy workload, organizational injustice, and social conflict (Alabaş et al., 2012; Stubb et al., 2011; Toprak & Taşğın, 2017). Related studies show that negative emotional symptoms such as burnout, stress and anxiety are high in graduate students (Stubb et al., 2011), and stress has been found to have a direct correlation with depression and anxiety (Hassan, 2019). In a similar study conducted by Shete and Garkal (2015), it was emphasized that factors such as work intensity, lack of sleep, competitive environment during graduate education increase stress in students and this stress leads to destructive psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Stress is defined as a feeling of tension and pressure that occurs in an individual against a real or imagined situation or stimulus (Everly & Lating, 2002). While low levels of stress are considered beneficial because they support the individual's performance and adaptation to the environment, high levels of stress can harm the individual mentally and physically (Kamaruddin & Mamat, 2015). Intense stress is associated with a range of mental and physical problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal tendencies, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and substance abuse, and cardiovascular diseases (Kamaruddin & Mamat, 2015). It is stated that intense stress is effective in the increase of many mental and physical risk factors such as depression, anxiety disorders, suicidal tendency, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol-substance abuse, cardiovascular diseases (Hammen, 2005).

One of the important variables associated with stress in individuals is hopelessness (Özdemir et al., 2022). Hopelessness is defined as a mental state that includes negative expectations about the future. These expectations encompass beliefs that negative situations will remain unchanged, along with negative self-evaluations (Abbey, 2006; Beck, 2005). It is stated that hopelessness is closely related to depression, anxiety, somatization, negative self-perception and hostility, which are defined under psychological symptoms (Vatan & Dağ, 2009) and that many young people in Turkey are in the risk group in terms of hopelessness (Erkan et al., 2012). Considering the

significant impact of hopelessness on general well-being and psychological health, it is imperative to investigate its potential effect on individuals in need of psychological assistance.

Psychological help-seeking behavior includes the process of contacting the necessary people for treatment, information and advice, or the need for understanding, as well as receiving support to cope with stress situations or to solve problems (Rickword et al., 2005). The process of seeking psychological help involves three key steps: awareness of one's problem and need, the decision to seek help, and contacting a mental health professional (Saunders, 1993). In this direction, individuals' awareness of their need for psychological help is seen as the first step. In studies related to the need for psychological help, it has been found that young people mostly seek help for issues such as emotional problems, romantic relationships, family relationships, substance / cigarette use (Topkaya & Meydan, 2013). It is seen that the number of studies on the need for psychological help in Turkey is quite limited and these studies were conducted with university students (Ay, 2014; Akeren & Ay 2019; Topkaya & Meydan, 2013) and adolescents (Savi Çakar & Kılınç, 2020).

In the literature review, no research was found that revealed the psychological problems experienced by individuals during graduate education and the need for psychological help in this process. Understanding the need for psychological help that may arise in this challenging and exhausting process, which includes many stress factors such as unemployment, economic difficulties, intense work tempo, intense competition; It is considered important to protect the mental health of individuals continuing postgraduate education and to plan and implement the necessary preventive and therapeutic mental health studies. In this context, it is thought that studies to determine the psychological help needs of graduate students are important for the more systematic implementation of preventive and preventive interventions carried out in universities and the creation of effective intervention plans that include crisis situations.

This study aimed to examine the predictive power of perceived stress and hopelessness on the level of psychological help needed by graduate students, In this direction, the following questions were included in the research:

1. Is there a significant relationship between perceived stress, hopelessness and psychological help need among graduate students?
2. Do perceived stress and hopelessness significantly predict the psychological help need in graduate students?

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

The research model is a relational survey model used to determine the existence and level of the relationship between variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996).

### **Working Group**

The participants in this study comprised 253 master's and doctoral students who were pursuing their postgraduate education at various universities during the 2022-2023 academic year. Snowball sampling, a non-

random sampling method, was employed to select participants, and data were collected using Google Forms. Demographic information for the participants is presented later in this paper.

Tble 1

*Demographic Information of the Participants*

		Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)	Total
Gender	Female	205	81	253
	Male	48	19	
Educational level	Master's degree	183	72.3	253
	PhD	70	27.7	
Work status	Working	147	58.1	253
	Not working	106	41.9	

There were 253 participants in the study, of which 205 (81%) were female and 48 (19%) were male. Regarding their educational level, 183 (72.3%) of the participants have a master's degree and 70 (27.7%) have a doctorate degree. In terms of employment status, 147 (58.1%) of the participants were employed and 106 (41.9%) were not employed.

**Data Collection Tools**

For this research , the Need for Psychological Help Scale was used to determine the participants' need for psychological help, the Perceived Stress Scale was used to determine their stress levels, and the Beck Hopelessness Scale was used to determine their hopelessness levels. "Personal Information Form" prepared by the researcher was used to determine the gender and education level of the participants.

**Personal Information Form.** The personal information form includes information about the participants' gender, education level and employment status.

**Psychological Help Need Scale.** The 'Psychological Help Need Scale,' developed by Ay in 2014, measures the need for psychological help. The 35-item 5-point Likert-type scale consists of sub-dimensions such as safety, love, respect, and self-actualization. The sub-dimensions of the scale can be scored separately or the psychological help needs of the individuals can be determined by calculating the total score. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was .92 and the test-retest coefficient was .72 (Ay, 2014). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of the scale was found to be .93.

**Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10 Form).** The Turkish adaptation of the Perceived Stress Scale, originally developed by Cohen et al., was conducted by Eskin et al. in 2013. Three different forms of the scale including 'Perception of Inadequate Self-Efficacy' and 'Perception of Stress/Discomfort' dimensions were developed as PSS-14, PSS-10 and PSS-4. In this study, the PSS-10 form, which consists of a total of 10 items, was used. The Perceived Stress Scale was developed to measure the extent to which individuals perceive various situations in their lives as stressful. The internal consistency coefficient of the 5-point Likert-type scale was calculated as 0.82 and the test-retest coefficient was calculated as .88 (Eskin et al., 2013). In this study, Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .84.

**Beck Hopelessness Scale.** The Turkish adaptation study of the Beck Hopelessness Scale, originally developed by Beck was conducted by [Seber et al. \(1993\)](#). In the study, the scale demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .86 and a test-retest coefficient of .73. In responding to the IPS, participants are instructed to mark 'true' for statements that apply to them and 'false' for statements that do not. The scale items are categorized into three sub-dimensions: feelings about the future, loss of motivation and expectations about the future. There are 1st, 6th, 13th, 15th, 19th items in the feelings about the future dimension, 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 1st, 12th, 16th, 17th, 20th items in the loss of motivation dimension, and 4th, 7th, 8th, 14th and 18th items in the expectations about the future dimension. The total score obtained from the scale corresponds to the 'hopelessness' score. The scale has a score range of 0-20, where a higher score indicates a higher level of hopelessness ([Seber et al., 1993](#)). In this study, the scale exhibited strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The research data were obtained online through google forms from individuals continuing their postgraduate education at various universities. In the analysis of the data, Pearson Correlation Coefficient Analysis was used to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was used to determine the predictive power between variables ([Büyükoztürk, 2010](#)).

### Results

In this section, the findings of the statistical analyses are reported.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics on Participants' Psychological Help Need, Perceived Stress and Hopelessness Level*

	Mean	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
Psychological Help Need	81.7149	19.32205	.492	.802
Perceived Stress	25.6024	5.99652	-.316	.641
Hopelessness	8.6747	5.59040	.354	-1.043

When the data in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that the Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients are within the range of  $\pm 1$ . The fact that these coefficients are within the  $\pm 1$  limits is interpreted as a normal distribution of the data ([Büyükoztürk, 2010](#)).

Table 3

*Correlation Results for Determining the Relationship between Psychological Help Need, Stress and Hopelessness*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Psychological Help Need	1		
2. Perceived Stress	.408**	1	
3. Hopelessness	.553**	.412**	1

As a result of the correlation analysis, it was found that the psychological help need had a moderately significant relationship with perceived stress ( $r=.408$   $p<.01$ ) and hopelessness ( $r=.553$   $p<.01$ ). There was also a moderately significant relationship between perceived stress and hopelessness variables ( $r=.412$   $p<.01$ ).

Before conducting the multiple linear regression analysis, it was necessary to verify whether the prerequisites for the analysis had been met. In order to perform a multiple linear regression analysis, certain conditions must be satisfied: the variables should exhibit a normal distribution, there should be a linear relationship between predictor and predicted variables, and no multicollinearity issue should exist among the independent variables (Büyüköztürk, 2010). The skewness and kurtosis coefficients in Table 2 indicate that the data are normally distributed. The correlation coefficients in Table 3 show that there are linear relationships between the dependent and independent variables ( $p<.01$ ). The Durbin Watson value of 1.91 indicates that there is no autocorrelation. In addition, the fact that the correlation between perceived stress and hopelessness variables is below .80 and the Tolerance and VIF values (Tolerance $>.20$ ), (VIF $<10$ ) are in the desired range shows that there is no multicollinearity problem between variables.

Table 4

*Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results Regarding the Prediction Level of Perceived Stress and Hopelessness on the Psychological Help Need*

Predictor Variable	<i>B</i>	St. Error ( <i>B</i> )	$\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	Zero-order <i>r</i>	Partial <i>R</i>
Constant	49.750	4.410	--	11.281	.000	--	--
Perceived Stress	.724	.185	.225	3.919	.000	.415	.242
Hopelessness	1.547	.198	.448	7.805	.000	.543	.446
				$R = .58$ $R^2 = .34$			
				$F(2,251) = 62,298$			
				* $p = .000$			
				Durbin-Watson=1.91			

The fact that the *F* value is significant ( $F(2,251) = 62,298$   $*p=.000$ ) shows that the model is significant. According to the findings, perceived stress and hopelessness have a moderately significant relationship with the psychological help need. These two variables together explain 34% of the psychological help need scores ( $R = .58$ ,  $R^2 = .34$ ,  $*p<.001$ ). When the binary and partial correlations between the variables were examined, it was seen that there was a moderately positive relationship between perceived stress and psychological help need ( $r = -.42$ ) and when the hopelessness variable was controlled, this relationship was calculated as  $r = -.24$ . While there was a moderate positive relationship ( $r = -.54$ ) between hopelessness and psychological help need, this relationship was calculated as  $r = -.45$  when the perceived stress variable was controlled.

According to the ( $\beta$ ) coefficient, the order of importance of the predictor variables on the psychological help need is (1) hopelessness and (2) perceived stress. According to the t-test results regarding the significance of the

regression coefficients, both perceived stress ( $p=.00$ ) and hopelessness ( $p=.00$ ) variables were found to be significant predictors of the psychological help need.

### **Discussion, Conclusion & Suggestions**

In the study, it was found that the need for psychological help was positively correlated with stress and hopelessness in graduate students and that stress and hopelessness were also positively correlated with each other. Another finding of the study reveals that stress and hopelessness serve as notable predictors of the necessity for psychological assistance.

In the literature, there is no research directly revealing the relationship between stress, hopelessness and need for psychological help. In [Aydemir and Çam's \(2015\)](#) study, it is emphasized that one of the most important reasons for students to start graduate education is to gain prestige. Considering that one of the components of the psychological help need is the search for respect, it can be argued that individuals who cannot achieve the respect they seek will be under more stress, feel more hopeless about their future, and therefore need more psychological help. On the other hand, individuals in the emerging adulthood period, which lasts until the middle and even the end of their twenties, face many developmental tasks such as regulating their outlook on life, choosing a partner and career development, and searching for an identity ([Arnett and Eisenberg, 2007](#)). In other words, individuals in this period are directing their lives in the areas of educational, personal, social and career development and are trying to discover their identities. During this process, it is seen that individuals face many problems in the fields of personal, social, educational and career development ([Mutlu et al., 2019](#)). [Kaygusuz \(2002\)](#) revealed that university students experience problems related to school and future concerns the most, in addition, there are intense problems related to emotional issues and human relations. It may be conjectured that individuals undergoing stress and experiencing feelings of hopelessness in connection with matters such as future anxiety, career indecision, and challenges in securing employment would likely require an increased level of psychological support.

The findings of the literature show that the need for psychological help is related to variables such as suppression of emotions ([Komiya et al., 2000](#)), social support ([Erkan et al., 2012](#)), self-efficacy, self-regulation, subjective well-being and learned resilience ([Ay, 2014](#)). From this point of view, it can be thought that individuals who experience deficiencies in areas such as self-skills and social support will be under more stress and will have more difficulty in coping with this stress and therefore will need psychological help more intensely.

In the literature examining the relationship between stress and hopelessness, it is emphasized that coping skills with stress reduce hopelessness ([Clements & Sawhney, 2011](#); [Öztürk & Maçkalı, 2022](#)), while hope facilitates coping with stress ([Snyder et al., 2002](#)). The relationship between stress and hopelessness can often turn into a cycle that triggers and reinforces each other. When stress causes negative emotional and physical reactions, a person's hopelessness may increase. In this instance, stress can exert a detrimental influence by diminishing an individual's motivation, attenuating their sense of hope, and fostering a pessimistic perspective on life in a broader sense.

On the other hand, hopelessness can also increase stress levels. A person in despair often feels that they have lost their hopes and expectations for the future and may go through life with low energy and motivation. This can

culminate in elevated stress levels and a heightened challenge in effectively managing stress. From this point of view, it can be argued that future anxiety and academic problems that arise during graduate education will trigger both stress and hopelessness and individuals will need more help.

In conclusion, this study is a first in the literature in terms of being conducted with graduate students and addressing the relationship between stress and hopelessness, two important risk factors in the field of mental health, and the need for psychological help. In this direction, it is useful to address the limitations of the study before moving on to the recommendations. In this study, snowball sampling method was used as the sampling type and it was seen that the distribution of gender and education type of the participants in the sample was not balanced. Due to the low number of male participants and the low number of participants with doctoral level, the differences related to these variables were not analyzed. In samples with a larger number of participants and a balanced distribution of gender and education type, gender and education level-based differences in stress, hopelessness and the need for psychological help can be examined. However, in future studies, different psychological and demographic variables that may be related to the need for psychological help can be addressed; preventive and curative mental health interventions for graduate students at universities can be planned and put into practice. Considering the cyclical relationship between stress and hopelessness and their predictive effects on the need for psychological help, interventions aimed at providing students with the ability to cope with stress and a positive outlook towards the future are considered important. Academic counselors can be given awareness trainings to recognize students' needs and provide necessary guidance. In essence, it becomes imperative to take into account the requirements of graduate students, along with other cohorts of students, within the framework of psychological support services administered within academic institutions, and to facilitate the dissemination of requisite interventions. In addition, it is important to disseminate studies that address the psychological characteristics, risk factors and needs of this group in literature studies in order to plan and implement the necessary mental health services.

### **Ethic**

I declare that the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the national research committee and the 1964 Helsinki declaration.

### **Author Contributions**

This article was written by a single author.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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