



## The Investigation of Risk-Taking Behavior in Adolescents in Terms of Attachment Styles and Social Problem-Solving

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the risk-taking behavior of adolescents in terms of attachment styles and social problem-solving. The study group consists of 637 students from 9th, 10th and 11th grade, as 276 female (43.2%) and 361 male (56.7%). In order to collect data in the study, the Delinquent Behavior Scale, the Relationship Scale, the Social Problem-Solving Scale and Personal Information Form are used. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Technique and multidimensional hierarchical regression analysis are used to analyze the data. A positive correlation is found between delinquent behaviors of adolescents and preoccupied style, which is a sub-dimension of attachment styles. While there is a positive and significant relationship between adolescents' delinquent behaviors and negative problem orientation, which is a sub-dimension of social problem-solving, impulsive/careless style and avoidance style; there is a significant negative correlation between delinquent behaviors and rational problem-solving sub-dimension. Research results reveal that preoccupied style, rational problem-solving and avoidance style sub-dimensions are predictors of risk-taking behaviors.

**Keywords:** Risk-taking behavior, Attachment styles, Social problem-solving, Preoccupied Style, Rational problem-solving, Avoidance style, Adolescents.

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## Contribution of this paper to the literature

This study contributes to existing literature by examining the risk-taking behavior of adolescents in terms of attachment styles and social problem-solving.

## 1. Introduction

Each individual goes through certain periods in life. One of these is the period of adolescence which includes transition from childhood to adulthood (Kulaksızoğlu, 2006). In this period, adolescents are able to perform much more risky behaviors with the effect of adolescent self-centeredness (Elkind, 1967). Risk-taking is a behavior that is likely to endanger health, to cause illness or death (Alexander *et al.*, 1990). Adolescents are able to head for risky behaviors as proof of their identity's approval and maturation; in order to control their life, to resist to adult authority and society; to cope with anxiety, frustration, inability and failure and to be accepted in the peer group (Kloep *et al.*, 2009).

Risk-taking behavior further increases at the end of adolescence and with transition to adulthood. Risky behaviors among adolescents include crime, violence, smoking, alcohol or substance use, risky (drunk driving, without seat belt, fast, without driving license) driving, theft, early sexual activity, self-harm behavior, skipping school or eloping, dropping out, indifference to courses, lack of professional or social skills, unhealthy eating behaviors and sedentary life (Aras *et al.*, 2007). The reasons of risk-taking behavior in adolescents are to join peer groups, to oppose family repression and traditional social structure, to control one's own life, to wait for approval of identity, and failure to cope with feelings such as failure, anxiety, and inability (Karahana *et al.*, 2006). It is reported that resistance to restraint, coping skills, personality traits such as self-control and insight, ties with family, school and other social groups keep adolescents away from risky behaviors. Adolescents may be more prone to their peers who have risky behaviors because they think that they will not reach their desires by working or obeying rules, they cannot find closeness in their family, and they have weak ties in their family (Yılmaz, 2000).

One of the notions that are thought to affect the risk-taking behavior is attachment styles. Bowlby (1973) describes attachment as strong emotional bonds that people develop for those they consider important to them. Attachment is a system that shapes the person's pattern of forming a relationship with other people around her/him, which is thought to be shaped in infancy and continue in later periods of life. It is the first link between baby and mother or caregiver and constitutes the basic trust feeling (Budak, 2005). Therefore, the person who gives care to the baby has a significant role (Soysal *et al.*, 2005). Attachment style is the behavior of the person who makes generalizations in relation to her/his relationship with the people in the past (Özer, 2009). Attachment styles determine the behaviors of a person in social relations and have a direct effect on mental health (Terzi and Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009). While the children of the families who are sensitive to the needs of the child have a secure attachment style, the children of the families who do not meet the needs of the child have an insecure attachment style (Arslan *et al.*, 2011).

Another problem which is thought to affect adolescents' risk-taking behaviors is social problem-solving. Social problem-solving is defined by D' Zurilla and Nezu (1982) as the person-oriented cognitive-behavioral processes in the face of the problems encountered in daily life (D' Zurilla and Nezu, 1982). According to this, social problem-solving is a conscious, realistic, demanding, goal-oriented coping process that actually enhances the ability of the person to cope effectively with many stressful situations (D' Zurilla and Chang, 1995). The social problem-solving model consists of two main dimensions: problem orientation and problem-solving skills (D' Zurilla *et al.*, 2004). The orientation to the problem involves individual's realization of the problem, the causal burdens and expectations about the problem situations, and the motivation in the problem-solving process. It consists of two dimensions: positive problem orientation and negative problem orientation. Positive problem orientation is the evaluation of the problem as an opportunity to be utilized, believing that the problems can be solved, trusting in the problem-solving competences and constructive cognitive structures related to problem-solving. The negative problem orientation is a non-functional cognitive sequence that includes the problem as perceiving it as a threat to happiness, not relying on problem-solving competencies, easily irritating and grieving when faced with problems (D' Zurilla and Chang, 1995). Problem-solving skills are rational problem-solving, impulsive-careless style and avoidance style. Rational problem-solving is defined as the systematic application of rational, clear and effective problem solving skills. Impulsive-careless style is defined as non-functional problem-solving style, which uses problem-solving techniques actively. The avoidance style is the non-functional problem-solving style defined by procrastination, passivity and dependence (D' Zurilla *et al.*, 2004).

The above studies have drawn attention to the relationship between adolescents' attachment styles and social problem-solving skills. In this study, it is aimed to determine the predictive relationships between adolescents' risk-taking behavior, attachment styles and social problem-solving.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Model

The research was conducted with relational screening model in order to explain the relationship between risk-taking behavior and attachment styles and social problem-solving of adolescents. Being a type of screening models, the relational scanning is a research model aiming to determine the presence and/or degree of coexistence between two or more variables (Karasar, 1994).

### 2.2. Study Group

The study group included 637 high school students in total from 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, -276 (43.3%) female, and 361 (56.7%) male- from different secondary schools in Aksaray.

### 2.3. Data Collection Tools

**Delinquent Behavior Scale:** The Delinquent Behavior Scale, was developed by Kaner (2009) in order to determine behaviors among adolescents that would not be reflected to official institutions, but if they had been

caught, that would be considered as crimes and get the adolescents on the wrong side of the laws. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the test was 0.93 and the test reliability coefficient was 0.89. The scale consists of 9 sub-scales and 38 items. The subscales of the Delinquent Behavior Scale are: 1) Status Offense and Violating School Rules (7 items), 2) Theft (6 items), 3) Inability to Control Anger and Fighting (6 items), 4) Petty Larceny (4 items), 5) Remarkable Vandalizing (3 items), 6) Status Offense and Deceiving Others (5 items), 7) Drugs and Crime of Violence (3 items), 8) Damaging Buildings (2 items), 9) Cheating in Exams (2) Article (Kaner, 2001). The Delinquent Behavior Scale is answered according to four options regarding the frequency of the behaviors mentioned above in the last 6 months. These options; "never" (1 point), "one or two times" (2 points), "three or four times" (3 points), "five or more times" (4 points) (Yilmaz, 2011). In addition, within the scope of this research, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated to examine the internal consistency of the Delinquent Behavior Scale. Accordingly, Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be .92 for the total score.

**Relationship Scale:** It was developed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) and adapted to Turkish by Sümer and Güngör (1999). The scale consists of 30 items and aims to measure four attachment styles as secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful. Participants have marked on a 7-stage scale, in which each item defines their general attitude in themselves and their close relations (1= does not define me at all; 7 = defines me entirely) (Sümer and Güngör, 1999). The validity and reliability studies of the scale were conducted by Sümer and Güngör (1999). Test-retest reliability and internal consistency coefficient were between 0.54 and 0.78, and 0.27 to 0.61 alpha values, respectively. The subscales of the Relationship Scale are: 1) Fearful Style, 2) Dismissing Style, 3) Secure Style and 4) Preoccupied Style (Altundağ, 2011). In addition, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated to examine the internal consistency of the Relationship Scale. Accordingly, Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be .75 for the total score.

**Social Problem-Solving Scale:** The Social Problem-Solving Scale was developed by D'Zurilla and Nezu (1990) and adapted to Turkish by Dora (2003). The Social Problem-Solving Scale consists of 52 items and 5 subscales (positive problem orientation, negative problem orientation, rational problem-solving and impulsive/careless style and avoidance style). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.81 for the scale, 0.62 for the positive orientation subscale, 0.83 for the negative orientation subscale, 0.91 for the rational problem-solving subscale, 0.62 for the impulsive-careless style subscale, and 0.76 for the avoidance style subscale. The subscales of Social Problem-Solving Scale are: 1) Positive Problem Orientation (PPO), 2) Negative Problem Orientation (NPO), 3) Impulsive/Careless Style (ICS), 4) Rational Problem-Solving (RPS) and 5) Avoidance Style (AS). In addition, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated to examine the internal consistency of the Social Problem-Solving Scale. Accordingly, Cronbach's Alpha value was .87 for the total score.

**Personal Information Form:** The personal information form prepared by the researchers was used to determine the demographic information of the participants such as gender, class level, education status of mother and father.

#### 2.4. Data Collection

In order to collect the data, the administrators and guidance counselors of the high schools in the central district of Aksaray were selected. "Delinquent Behavior Scale", "Relationship Scale", "Social Problem-Solving Scale" and "Personal Information Form" were applied to the study group. During the implementation, the principle of volunteerism was mentioned, then the students were informed about the purpose of the application and the instructions of scales were read. The implementation lasted for approximately 35-40 minutes.

#### 2.5. Data Analysis

The scale was applied to 700 students; 63 of them were excluded from the analysis because there were unanswered items in their papers. A total of 637 scales data were analyzed. SPSS 20.0 package program was used for data analysis. The statistical analysis of the data was discussed in a way to reveal the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Technique was used to determine the relationship between adolescents' delinquent behavior scale scores, attachment styles and social problem-solving scores. Multidimensional hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine whether adolescents' risk-taking behavior score averages were predicted in terms of attachment styles and social problem-solving.

### 3. Findings

Table 1 presents the correlation results for delinquent behavior, attachment styles and social problem-solving.

When Table 1 was examined, it was observed that there was a significant relationship between the mean scores of the adolescents on the scale of delinquent behavior and the mean scores of fearful style sub-dimension ( $r = .057$ ,  $p = .148$ ,  $p > .01$ ), and the mean scores obtained from dismissing style sub-dimension ( $r = .063$ ,  $p = .111$ ,  $p > .01$ ) and the secure style sub-dimension mean scores ( $r = .068$ ,  $p = .087$ ,  $p > .01$ ). The mean scores of the adolescents on the delinquent behavior scale and the mean scores of the preoccupied style subscale ( $r = .102$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were found to be significantly low. There was no significant relationship between the mean scores of the adolescents on the delinquent behavior scale and the mean scores of the positive orientation sub-dimension ( $r = -.063$ ,  $p = .114$ ,  $p > .01$ ). It was found that there was a low and significant relationship between the mean scores of the adolescents on the delinquent behavior scale and the mean scores of the negative orientation sub-dimension ( $r = .110$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $p < .01$ ). While there was a low and significant relationship between the mean scores of the adolescents on the scale of delinquent behavior and the mean scores of the sub-dimension of the impulsive/careless style ( $r = .102$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $p < .01$ ), a low and significant relationship was found between the mean scores of the of the delinquent behavior scale and the mean scores they obtained from the rational problem-solving sub-dimension ( $r = -.151$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The mean scores of the adolescents from the delinquent behavior scale and the mean scores of the avoidance style ( $r = .201$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were found to be low and significant.

**Table-1. Correlation Results for Delinquent Behavior, Attachment Styles and Social Problem-Solving in Adolescents.**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Delinquent Behavior	Pearson Correlation	-									
	P										
	N	637									
2.Fearful Style	Pearson Correlation	.057	-								
	P	.148									
	N	637	637								
3.Dismissing Style	Pearson Correlation	.063	.469**	-							
	P	.111	.000								
	N	637	637	637							
4.Secure Style	Pearson Correlation	.068	.483**	.339**	-						
	P	.087	.000	.000							
	N	637	637	637	637						
5.Preoccupied Style	Pearson Correlation	.102**	.329**	.450**	.377**	-					
	P	.010	.000	.000	.000						
	N	637	637	637	637	637					
6.Positive Problem Orientation	Pearson Correlation	-.063	.166**	.179**	.054	.092*	-				
	P	.114	.000	.000	.173	.020					
	N	637	637	637	637	637	637				
7.Negative Problem Orientation	Pearson Correlation	.110**	.244**	.335**	.262**	.222**	.011	-			
	P	.005	.000	.000	.000	.000	.784				
	N	637	637	637	637	637	637	637			
8.Impulsive/ Careless Style	Pearson Correlation	.102**	.159**	.206**	.220**	.152**	.068	.445**	-		
	P	.010	.000	.000	.000	.000	.085	.000			
	N	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	637		
9.Rational Problem-Solving	Pearson Correlation	-	.151**	.221**	.105**	.121**	.561**	.225**	.098*	-	
	P	.000	.000	.000	.008	.002	.000	.000	.013		
	N	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	
10. Avoidance Style	Pearson Correlation	.201**	.136**	.065	.190**	.148**	-.107**	.533**	.378**	-.027	-
	P	.000	.001	.101	.000	.000	.007	.000	.000	.504	
	N	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	637	637

\*p< .05 \*\*p< .01.

### 3.1. Findings for Predicting the Risk-Taking Behavior

**Table-2. Regression Analysis Results for Prediction of Delinquent Behavior of Adolescents by Sub-Dimensions of Attachment Styles.**

Factors	B	SE	B	T	P
Constant	1.157	.056		20.725	.000
Preoccupied Style	.207	.101	.086	2.046	.041

R= .283 R<sup>2</sup>= .080 F= 6.086 \*p< .05.

When Table 2 was examined, according to the multiple regression results for adolescents' predictive strength dimensions, it was seen that the variables of attachment styles explain 8% of the adolescents' delinquent behavior dimensions (R= .283, R<sup>2</sup>= .080, F= 6.086). It was seen that the total score (β= .086, p< .05) obtained from the preoccupied style sub-dimension significantly predicted the delinquent behavior scale dimensions.

**Table-3. Regression Analysis Results for the Prediction of Delinquent Behavior of Adolescents by Social Problem-Solving Sub-dimensions.**

Factors	B	SE	β	T	P
Constant	1.316	.045		29.236	.000
Rational Problem-Solving	-.064	.017	-.146	-3.794	.000
Avoidance Style	.077	.015	.197	5.130	.000

R= .249 R<sup>2</sup>= .062 F= 20.886 \*\*p< .01.

When Table 3 was examined, according to the multiple regression results for adolescents' predictive behavior dimensions, it was seen that the variables of social problem-solving explain 6% of adolescents' delinquent behavior (R= .249, R<sup>2</sup>= .062, F= 20.886). It was seen that the total score obtained from the rational problem-solving sub-dimension (β= -.146, p< .01) and the total score (β= .197, p< .01) obtained from the avoidance style sub-dimension significantly predicted the dimensions of the delinquent behavior scale.

#### 4. Discussion and Recommendations

According to the findings of the research, it was observed that there was no significant relationship between the delinquent behaviors of adolescents, fearful style, dismissing style and Secure Style sub-dimensions. According to the findings, there was a positive, low and significant relationship between the delinquent behavior of adolescents and the preoccupied style sub-dimension. According to the findings, it was observed that the attachment styles and social problem-solving significantly predicted the risk-taking behavior.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there is a significant relationship between the sub-dimensions of the risk-taking behavior and the attachment styles in a similar way to the results of this research (DeMulder *et al.*, 2000; İmamoglu, 2003; Çelik, 2007; Gilbert *et al.*, 2007; Akmaz, 2009; Gökmen, 2009; Morsünbül, 2009; Uluman, 2011; Kaplan and Aksel, 2013; Taniş, 2014; Arslan, 2015; Kahraman, 2015; Körük, 2016; Usta, 2018). Casas *et al.* (2006) in their study examining the relationship between attachment styles and physical aggression, found a linear and significant relationship between insecure attachment styles and physical aggression. In another research, it was found that there was a significant relationship between insecure attachment styles and severity of violence in a study, which examined the relationship between violence to children and attachment (Mayda, 2019). The results of all these studies show us that adolescents with risk-taking behavior have insecure attachment styles.

According to another finding of the research, it was found that there was no significant relationship between the delinquent behaviors of adolescents and the positive orientation sub-dimension of social problem-solving. According to the findings, a positive and significant relationship was found between the delinquent behaviors of adolescents and the negative problem orientation, impulsive-careless style and avoidance style. According to the findings, a negative and significant relationship was found between the delinquent behaviors of adolescents and the rational problem-solving sub-dimension of social problem-solving. For this reason, adolescents' taking support from their social environment will positively affect the positive orientation to social problem-solving and rational problem-solving style and delinquent behaviors of the adolescents (Traş, 2013). In addition, according to the findings, total score obtained from rational problem-solving and avoidance style sub-dimensions was found to predict the dimensions of delinquent behavior significantly.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there is a significant relationship between social problem-solving and sub-dimensions of risk-taking behavior in a similar way to the results of this research (Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2002; Arslan *et al.*, 2010; Öztürk, 2013; Kaygusuz, 2018). D'zurilla *et al.* (2003) in their study examining self-esteem and social problem-solving as a determinant of aggression in university students, found that those with positive approach to the problem and those with rational problem-solving skills have low aggression tendencies. In another study, the relationship between aggressive behaviors in adolescence and anger and social problem-solving skills were examined and it was found that there was a negative correlation between social problem-solving and aggression (Albayrak Sargın, 2008). The results of all these studies show us that adolescents with risk-taking behavior are insufficient in social problem-solving.

Risk-taking behavior can be more clearly demonstrated in future studies by working with different samples and variables. Longitudinal studies examining the differences in risk-taking behaviors during adolescence can be done. Preventive guidance programs can be developed and applied to adolescents with risk-taking behavior.

Preventive guidance studies, individual recognition techniques and positive problem-solving techniques can be used especially in the students in the risk group. In addition, skills training programs such as improving friendships, social problem-solving skills, communication skills, "saying no" skills, and healthy coping skills can be organized for adolescents who display risk-taking behavior.

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