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Predictors of Psychological Well-Being in Special Education Teachers: Fear of Covid-19 and Quality of Work Life

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Abstract

The ultimate aim of this research is to investigate the COVID-19 fear and quality of work life variables' extent to predict psychological well-being among special education teachers. Relational scanning was carried out in the research by the general scanning model. Convenience sampling technique, which is a type of non-random sampling method, was employed in the selection of special education teachers as participants in the research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, who work as special education professionals in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the Republic of Turkey (TR) were reached in online settings through Google Forms. The sample of research constituted by 133 special education teachers working in TRNC and 448 special education teachers working in TR. A total of 581 special education teachers were reached. "Demographic Information Form", "COVID-19 Fear Scale", "Work Life Quality Scale" and "Psychological Well-Being Scale" were utilized to obtain data for the study. This study yielded no statistical difference between the scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR within the COVID-19 Fear Scale (p>0.05). It has been noticed that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of the teachers participating in the study from the general work life quality scale and the subscales of work career satisfaction, general well-being, ability to control work, working conditions, stress in work life, family work life balance considering the region they work in (p<0.05). It was also revealed that the difference between the scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR from the Psychological Well-being scale was statistically significant (p<0.05). Additionally, the COVID-19 Fear Scale scores of the special education teachers in TRNC and TR did not statistically predict the "Psychological Well-Being Scale" scores. It was found out that the scores obtained by special education teachers in TRNC and TR from the "Work Career Satisfaction, General Well-being and Family-Work Life Balance" sub-dimensions in the "Work Life Quality Scale" predicted the "Psychological Well-Being Scale" scores in a statistically significant and positive way.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, fear of Covid-19, quality of work life, special education teacher

Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic process, several countries and people all around the world have been influenced physically, socially, spiritually, economically and emotionally (WHO, 2021). The reason for this is the unforeseen Covid-19 outbreak, which

caused the alienation of individuals from their regular lives, the lack of function in individuals' daily tasks and the reactions to the crisis. At the same time, this process, which brings uncertainties along with it, has also caused individuals to experience anxiety. Therefore, such uncertainties regarding the end of pandemic raise concerns even more. The rate of transmission of the virus from person to person during the pandemic also had impacts on individual relationships. Experiencing intense stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic can also have negative effects on the level of psychological well-being (Akbayrak, Vural & Ağar, 2021; Cicek, Tanhan & Tanrıverdi, 2020).

In light with this, to facilitate the learning process, teachers work in collaboration with parents and school administration as they provide support to their students. This attempt proves that the teachers have great significance and key roles in this process (Korthagen, 2017). Therefore, teachers can be considered as an important role models who integrate students' competencies, behaviors, personality and beliefs in line with the objectives (Karatas, 2020; Korthagen, 2004; Okutan, Pürsün, & Atbaşı, 2020). Bringing uniqueness, planning some innovations and supporting students to acquire more real-life experiences are crucial attributes that teachers bring, plan and create (Ayers, 2015; Colak & Cetin, 2014; Okutan, Pursun, & Atbası, 2020). Teachers can undertake functional and vital tasks, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic process with their current motivation. Distance education implementations were carried out by the Ministries of Education in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey, and thus, learners were tried to be reached through digital media. Given this, educators have taken an important part in the healthy functioning, control and execution of the teaching and learning processes.

According to Yamamoto and Altun (2020), the education sector, as well as other sectors, has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic process. When considering the regulations taken in this regard, it was noticed that various measures have been taken in schools to control the pandemic and prevent the virus transmission among people. Since social distance and social isolation measures were applied, face-to-face education has been transferred immediately to the distance education (Akbayrak, Vural, & Agar, 2021; Cicek, Tanhan, & Tanrıverdi, 2020) On the other hand, although maintaining the education system via online platforms is beneficial in terms of protecting the health system and securing the health of educators and learners, it has been proved that education activities cannot be pursued efficiently with distance learning (TEGV, 2020). Based on the efficiency and effectiveness of education, the restrictions in the education sector were re-evaluated and face-to-face education (formal) was gradually started being implemented in the second term of March 2021 in the field of education (MEB, 2021). In the context of the COVID-19 Vaccine National Implementation Strategy, the vaccination of teachers has been started on 6 June 2021 (Kaplan, 2021).

When the dates of transition to face-to-face education and vaccination are considered, it is noticed that teachers have not vaccinated yet while they are actively engaging in face-to-face education (Elc1 & Nuri, 2022). Therefore, assuming that teachers may feel threatened due to the COVID-19 pandemic and think that they may experience the fear of COVID-19 in their profession and/or in the institutions they are affiliated with (Elc1 & Nuri, 2022; Fu, Wang, He, Chen, & He, 2022; Puertas Molero, Zurita Ortega, Ubago Jiménez, & González Valero, 2019) . Thus, it is believed that the fear of COVID-19 and the quality of work life in special education teachers may be predictors of psychological well-being in this study.

The outcomes of the relevant research revealed that individuals with high levels of psychological well-being have a better physical health, psychology and quality of life (Keyes,

Dhingra, & Simoes, 2010), higher internal well-being and a wider working capacity (Rogach, Ryabova, & Frolova, 2017). In addition to this, it can be argued that individuals with high psychological well-being contribute to making a difference in life and the immune system that affected by stress and anxiety are influencial on effective work and human relations, being stronger than other people and leading a longer life (Diener, King, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). 2005). Individuals with such attributes have a sense of continuous improvement by making evaluations about their selves and their pasts. At the same time, those who believe that life should be lived meaningfully for a purpose, can establish healthy relationships with the people they interact with and simultaneously manage their environment, and they can also directly have a say in their lives and futures (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

When the literature regarding the relevant subject is scrutinized, it was revealed that few studies concerning the special education teachers were available, yet, there are not enough studies available on examining the quality of work life and psychological well-being of special education teachers (Benevene, De Stasio & Fiorilli, 2020; Bynum, 2019; Nuri & Ozer, 2022). In addition, special education teachers are included in the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic, which influences the world and causes people to be harmed in different ways day by day. Apart from the studies on the opinions of special education teachers and parents on special education during the COVID-19 process, or on the increasing challenging behaviors of individuals with special needs and individuals with special needs in this process, no different studies related to special education and special education teachers have been found in the literature.

Given this, it is aimed at examining the predictors of psychological well-being of special education teachers, which are fear of COVID-19 and quality of work life, in TRNC and TR. For this purpose, answers were sought to the following questions.

Research Questions

- 1. Is there a relationship between the fear of Covid-19, work-life quality and psychological well-being levels of special education teachers in TRNC and TR?
- 2. Do the Covid-19 fear scale and work-life quality scale scores of special education teachers in TRNC and the Republic of Turkey predict their psychological well-being scale scores?

Methodology

Research Model

Relational scanning was carried out by using the general scanning model in this study. Relational scanning; it is a research model used to determine the existence and/or degree of change in relation to two or more variables (Karasar, 2009).

Research Population and Sample

Convenience sampling technique, which is one of the non-random sampling methods, was used in the selection of special education teachers included in the research. In the convenience sampling method, the researcher attempts to create the sample starting from the most accessible respondents until he reaches a group of the size he needs, or works on a case sample that is the most accessible and will provide maximum advantage (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). Special education teachers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

(TRNC) and the Republic of Turkey (TR) were reached online via Google Forms due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The research sample consists of 133 special education teachers working in TRNC and 448 special education teachers working in TR. A total of 581 special education teachers were reached. The distribution of special education teachers in the sample according to their demographic characteristics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	-	TRNC		TR		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Age Group							
20-29 ages	63	47,37	266	59,38	329	56,63	
30-39 ages	57	42,86	124	27,68	181	31,15	
40 ages and above	13	9,77	58	12,95	71	12,22	
Gender							
Female	88	66,17	300	66,96	388	66,78	
Male	45	33,83	148	33,04	193	33,22	
Marital Status							
Single	63	47,37	249	55,58	312	53,70	
Married	70	52,63	199	44,42	269	46,30	
	Total 13	3 100	448	100	581	100	

When the socio-demographic characteristics of the special education teachers included in the study were examined, 47.37% of the teachers (n=133) in TRNC were in the 20-29 age group, 42.86% were in the 30-39 age group and 9.77%. It was revealed that they were in the 40 aged and above age group, 66.17% were female and 33.83% were male, 47.37% were single and 52.63% were married. 59.38% of the special education teachers in TR are in the 20-29 age group, 27.68% are in the 30-39 age group, 12.95% are in the 40-age and above-age group, 66.96% It was observed that 33.04% were female and 33.04% were male, 55.58% were Single and 44.42% were married.

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form

This form is prepared for special education teachers to obtain information about ages, gender and marital status.

Covid-19 Fear Scale

The "The Fear of Covid-19 Scale", was developed by Ahorsu et al. (2020) and the adaptation in Turkish, validity and reliability of the study were carried out by Seller et al. (2020). Although the scale of application is wide-ranging, it can also be applied to university students and adults. Scale consists of 7 questions and all items are scored positively. A 5-point Likert-type scaling was employed in the questions in the scale and the questions are scored between 1 and 5 (1. I strongly disagree... 5. I strongly agree). In this scale, which does not have a reverse scoring item, a score between 7 and 35 is taken. Since the scale is scored as positive, a high score indicates fear of Covid-19. The Cronbach Alpha value for the Turkish validity and reliability study was found to be (α =.82).

Work life Quality Scale

The work life quality scale, which was initially developed by Van Laar, Edwards, and Easton (2007) to measure the perception of health workers' work life quality, was adapted to Turkish and implemented to educators in educational institutions by Akar and Üstüner (2017). Akar and Üstüner (2017) conducted the validity and reliability tests of the completed scale; Van Laar, Edwards and Easton stated that they allowed researchers to use the work life quality scale free of charge on their website at http://www.qowl.co.uk and that the purpose of the study was to obtain permission to adapt the work life quality scale to Turkish and educational institutions. Researchers added that it was received by mail. It is stated that the work life quality scale developed by Van Laar, Edwards and Easton (2007) is a qualified scale that can be applied to determine the work life quality of teachers serving in educational institutions in Turkey (Akar & Üstüner 2017). Work life quality scale consists of 23 items and 6 subdimensions. The sub-dimensions of the study are "family-work life balance, work career satisfaction, stress in work environment, job control, working conditions and general wellbeing". When the confirmatory factor analysis result of the 6-factor structure of 23 items of the scale is examined, it is noticed that the scale meets the validity criteria. It is stated that items 7, 9 and 19 in the scale are items that should be reverse scored (Akar & Üstüner, 2017). The adaptation study of the scale into Turkish was carried out within the data collected from 324 educators, who were working in Gaziantep. It has been reported that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the sub-dimensions of the scale is between .70 and .91, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale in general has the value of .93. The aforementioned scale that was adapted into Turkish by Akar and Üstüner, consists of a 5-point Likert type and corresponds to a score of 5: totally disagree, 4: mostly agree, 3: moderately agree, 2: slightly agree, and 1: disagree (Akar & Üstüner, 2017).

Psychological Well-Being Scale

The psychological well-being scale, adapted into Turkish by Telef (2013), consists of eight items. The scale named as "Psychological Well-Being Scale" by Diener et al. (2009) was later replaced with the definition of "Flourishing Scale" which is believed to represent the meaning of well-being more accurately. Telef (2013) used the definition of psychological well-being in his study of adapting the psychological well-being scale into Turkish, since the word "flourishing" does not exist in Turkish. The items of the scale are answered between 1-7 as I strongly disagree (1) to I strongly agree (7). All items are formed positively. The scores obtained from the scale items range from 8 to 56. If the answer is strongly disagree to all the items, the score is 8, and if the answer is strongly agree to all the items, the score is 56. High scores obtained from the scale items indicate that the individual's psychological well-being has increased (Diener et al., 2009).

Data Collection and Analyses

In the present study, the "Covid-19 Fear, Work life Quality and Psychological Well-Being Scale", which was previously developed by carrying out validity and reliability studies, was used to collect data. Due to the fact that the research was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, the scales were sent to special education teachers between 01.03.2021 and 15.05.2021 via e-mail or online messaging applications and they were asked to answer them electronically. Data were obtained by reaching 448 special education teachers from 133 participants from TR in total via Google Forms. After the data total process, the collected data were evaluated by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0 program. In

accordance with the sub-objectives of the research, the following statistical operations were performed. In order to determine the hypothesis tests to be used in the research, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to examine the normal distribution of the data and it was determined that it did not show normal distribution. Spearman correlation analysis was also conducted to determine the relationship between the fear of Covid-19, Work life quality, and psychological well-being levels of special education teachers serving in private education institutions. In addition, regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of teachers' fear of Covid-19 and work life quality on their psychological well-being levels.

Findings

Findings Regarding the Comparison of Covid-19 Fear Scale and Work-Life Quality Scale, Psychological Well-Being Scale Scores of Special Education Teachers in TRNC and TR

Illustrates the Spearman test results for examining the correlations between the COVID-19 Fear Scale, Work life Quality Scale and Psychological Well-Being Scale scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR.

Table 2.Correlations between Special Education Teachers' COVID-19 Fear Scale, Work life Quality Scale, and Psychological Well-Being Scale Scores in TRNC and TR

		COVID-19 Fear Scale Job Career Satisfaction	General Well- being	Ability to Control Work	Working Conditions	Stress in Work Environment	Family-Work life Balance	Work life Quality Scale	Psychological Well-Being Scale
1	r	1 -0,013	-0,217	-0,035	-0,103	-0,159	-0,135	-0,123	-0,079
	p	. 0,757	0,000*	0,398	0,013*	0,000*	0,001*	0,003*	0,057
2	r	1	0,574	0,791	0,762	0,422	0,623	0,862	0,541
	p	•	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*
3	r		1	0,570	0,636	0,510	0,663	0,826	0,623
	p		•	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*
4	r			1	0,710	0,470	0,577	0,833	0,521
	p			•	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*
5	r				1	0,552	0,727	0,876	0,498
	p					0,000*	0,000*	0,000*	0,000*
6	r					1	0,587	0,649	0,315
	p						0,000*	0,000*	0,000*
7	r						1	0,827	0,403
	p							0,000*	0,000*
8	r						•	1	0,606
									0,000*
	p r							•	1
9									1
*	p								•

When table 2 is examined, it is revealed that the scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR from the COVID-19 Fear Scale and the scores they got from the Work life Quality Scale and the sub-dimensions of general well-being, working conditions, stress in the work life, and family-work life balance in the scale. Statistically significant and negative correlations were found (p<0.05). As the scores of the teachers from the COVID-19 Fear Scale increase, the scores they get from the overall Work life Quality Scale and the subdimensions of general well-being, working conditions, stress in the work life and familywork life balance decrease. It was revealed that there was no statistically significant correlation between the scores of the teachers from the COVID-19 Fear Scale and the scores of the Psychological Well-being Scale (p<0.05). It was obtained that there were statistically significant and positive correlations between the scores of the special education teachers participating in the study from the Job-Work life Quality Scale in general and from all subdimensions in the scale and the scores of the Psychological Well-Being Scale (p<0.05). Accordingly, as the scores that teachers get from the Work life Quality Scale in general and from all sub-dimensions in the scale increase, the scores of the Psychological Well-being Scale also escalate.

Findings Regarding the Correlations between the Covid-19 Fear Scale, Work-Life Quality Scale and Psychological Well-Being Scale Scores of Special Education Teachers in TRNC and Turkish Republic

The results of the regression analysis examining the predictive status of the scores of the COVID-19 Fear Scale and the Work life Quality Scale in TRNC and TR to the Psychological Well-Being Scale scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.The Prediction of the Psychological Well-Being Scale Scores of the COVID-19 Fear Scale and Work life Quality Scale Scores of Special Education Teachers in TRNC and TR

	Non- standard coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p	F	\mathbb{R}^2
	В	S.H.	Beta			p	AdjR ²
(Fixed)	22,03	1,42		15,534	0,000*		
COVID-19 Fear Scale	0,03	0,03	0,02	0,751	0,453		
Job Career Satisfaction	0,31	0,09	0,20	3,374	0,001*		
General Well-being	0,88	0,06	0,63	14,041	0,000*	81,976	0,500
Ability to Control Work	0,32	0,13	0,14	2,402	0,017*	0,000*	0,494
Working conditions	-0,11	0,13	-0,05	-0,821	0,412		
Stress at Work	0,02	0,13	0,00	0,114	0,909		
Family-Work life Balance	0,46	0,12	0,19	-3,749	0,000*		

p < 0.05

When Table 3 was examined, it was realized that the COVID-19 Fear Scale scores of the special education teachers in TRNC and TR, which were included in the study, did not predict the Psychological Well-Being Scale scores at a statistically significant level (β =0.03; p>0.05). Job Career Satisfaction (β =0.31; p<0.05), General Well-being (β =0.88; p<0.05) and

Work life Quality Scales of special education teachers at TRNC and TR are included in this study. It was revealed that the scores that participants acquire from the Family-Work life Balance (β =0.46; p<0.05) sub-dimensions predicted the Psychological Well-Being Scale scores in a statistically significant and positive way.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion, Conclusion

The findings obtained with the relationship between the scales of COVID-19 fear, the quality of work life and the level of psychological well-being of special education teachers in TRNC and TR were discussed exhaustively in the present study through the light of the literature and in itself.

This study yielded that there is no statistical difference among the scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR obtained from the COVID-19 Fear Scale. It means that the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still influencial today, is preserving its impacts in diverse regions. Also, study yielded that the scores of the teachers in TRNC from the overall work life quality scale and its subscales of job career satisfaction, general well-being, job control, working conditions, stress in the work life and family work life balance are higher than the teachers in TR. Job career satisfaction expresses the level of happiness of working individuals by meeting their desires and needs in the work environment (Cook, 2008). General well-being is a concept that expresses not only the state of the disease in the individual, but also the state of physical, social and mental well-being of the individual (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). The case of being able to control the job can be described as the ability of individuals to have control over the work they do (Rethinam & Ismail, 2008). It is known that good working conditions in schools affect both teachers and schools at a beneficial level. Pursuing this further, stress is expressed as the reaction of human organs when confronting with intense pressure (Genç, 2005). Family, work and life balances are concepts expressing that one's working life and private life should be different from each other. Hence, it can be concluded that the work life quality perceptions of the special education teachers in TRNC is higher than the special education teachers in TR, due to aforementioned factors. Considering that the majority of the special education teachers in TRNC participating in the research are employed by TRNC abroad, it can be considered that the fact that special education teachers in TRNC receive salaries both from the country they employ and from the country where they are assigned may have a positive effect on their work life quality. In line with this, Akman's (2017) study, which aims to investigate the problems of teachers assigned to foreign organizations, affirms that educators, who are employed abroad receive salaries both from the country they work and the country they are assigned to.

Additionally, it was yielded that the scores of the teachers working in TRNC on the Psychological Well-being Scale are higher than the teachers working in Turkey. In this case, it can be associated with the fact that special education teachers have a good quality of work life in the TRNC.

As the scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR from the COVID-19 Fear Scale increase, it was noticed that the scores they get from the overall Work life Quality Scale and the sub-dimensions of general well-being, working conditions, stress in the work

life and family-work life balance in the scale decrease. Considering that the COVID-19 causes anxiety, anger, health problems, loss of relatives and loved ones, it does not seem possible that the work life of an individual with a fear of COVID-19 is not affected by the presence of these known situations. To elaborate, Memis Dogan and Duzel's (2020) study, in which they aimed to examine the levels of fear and anxiety in individuals during the COVID-19 process, stated that all individuals reacted to fear and anxiety in this process, which negatively affected their lives.

Additionally, as the scores of special education teachers in TRNC and TR from the overall work life quality and from all sub-dimensions in the scale increase, their scores on the psychological well-being scale increase. It can be concluded that the high work life quality of special education teachers in TRNC and TR positively affects their psychological well-being, as the psychological well-being of teachers is based on the efficiency they receive from work life. In fact, the study of Yakut and Yakut (2018) in which they aimed to examine the relationship between the level of psychological well-being of teachers and exclusion at work, it is argued in parallel with the research findings that teachers' psychological well-being levels are also good as long as no exclusion and similar negativities available in their work life.

In light with this, it was revealed that the scores of the special education teachers in TRNC and TR included in the study from the Job Career Satisfaction, General Well-being and Family-Work life Balance sub-dimensions in the Work life Quality Scale predict the Psychological Well-Being Scale scores in a statistically significant and positive way. Accordingly, it can be related that the special education teachers in TRNC and TR are satisfied with the efficiency they get from their jobs, and they are good socially, mentally and physically. Therefore, it can be argued that the psychological well-being levels of teachers who have these factors are also positively affected. To support, the study conducted by Salimirad and Srimathi (2016) determined that there is a significant relationship between teachers' professional self-efficacy and psychological well-being levels. In parallel with this, another relevant study carried out by Bentea (2017) regarding teachers stated that those who scored low in the environmental dominance, autonomy, life purpose, self-acceptance and personal development sub-dimensions also had low professional self-efficacy perceptions

Recommendations

- 1. Economic factors, as in all professions, can directly influence the performance and productivity levels in the teaching profession. It is believed that increasing teacher salaries could potentially enhance teachers' perceptions of their quality of work life.
- 2. As the psychological well-being levels of the teachers included in the study increase, their perceptions of work-life quality also increase, and as their perceptions of work-life quality increase, their levels of psychological well-being also increase. It is believed that maintaining high perceptions of work-life quality among teachers will positively influence their psychological well-being levels.
- 3. Teachers should be provided with a supportive work environment. A school environment that encourages collaboration, offers emotional support, and creates a positive atmosphere can increase teachers' psychological well-being.
- 4. Open and effective communication should be established between school administration and teachers. Talking about problems, setting expectations, and exchanging feedback can increase teachers' motivation.

- 5. Teachers' workload management should be helped. Overwork, stress and feelings of burnout can negatively affect psychological health. It is important to offer support in regular planning and resource management.
- 6. Emotional support should be provided to teachers in order to improve their skills in coping with difficult situations. It may be helpful to establish counseling services or peer-to-peer support groups.
- 7. If possible, flexible working conditions should be provided. Giving teachers flexibility to maintain a work-life balance can support their psychological well-being.

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