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**THE COMPARISON OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TURKEY AND  
CYPRUS IN TERMS OF STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH STRESS AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS**

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**Özet.** Bu araştırmada, Türkiye ve Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti (KKTC) koşullarında öğrenim gören üniversite öğrencileri stresle başa çıkma stratejileri ve psikolojik semptomlar yönünden karşılaştırıldı. Her iki gruptaki öğrenciler Türkiye kökenlidir. Araştırmada şu iki probleme yanıt arandı: 1. Türkiye ve KKTC koşullarında öğrenim gören Türkiyeli üniversite öğrencileri arasında stresle başa çıkma stratejileri yönünden farklar var mıdır? 2. Türkiye ve KKTC koşullarında öğrenim gören Türkiyeli üniversite öğrencileri arasında psikolojik semptomlar yönünden farklar var mıdır? Araştırmaya, Türkiye’den 345, KKTC’den 251 öğrenci katıldı. Verileri toplamak için, Başa Çıkma Stratejileri Ölçeği ve Kısa Semptom Envanteri kullanıldı. Parametrik ve parametrik olmayan analiz bulguları, beklendiği gibi, KKTC grubunun kaçınma stratejisi, depresyon, anksiyete, olumsuz benlik ve somatizasyon puanlarının diğer gruptan anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek olduğunu gösterdi. Sonuçlar, değişim, yatkınlık ve kültür kavramlarıyla yorumlandı.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Stresle başa çıkma, psikolojik belirti, üniversite öğrencileri, çevre, kültürler-arası çalışma, Türkiye, Kıbrıs (KKTC)

**Abstract.** In this study, the university students in Turkey and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) were compared in terms of strategies for coping with stress and psychological symptoms. Students in both groups were Turkish origin. The following two questions were asked in this study: 1. Are there any differences between the Turkish students in Turkey and TRNC in terms of strategies for coping with stress? 2. Are there any differences between the Turkish students in Turkey and TRNC in terms of psychological symptoms? 345 students from Turkey and 251 students from TRNC participated into the study. Coping Strategies Scale and Brief Symptom Inventory were used for data collection. Parametrical and non-parametrical analysis findings showed that the avoidance strategy, depression, anxiety, negative self and somatization scores of TRNC group were higher than the other group as expected. Results are interpreted through the concepts of change, predispose and culture.

**Keywords:** Coping with stress, psychological symptom, university students, environment, cross-cultural study, Türkiye, Cyprus (TRNC)

University education is a big dream for many young people in Turkey. Students have to do well in Student Selection and Placement Exam (SSPE) upon the completion of four-year high school education in order to be able to enroll in a university. For this, they spend money and energy on tutorial lesson and special classes a long time during their high school education. As a competitive exam, SSPE challenges students. 1,450,582 candidates took SSPE in 2009, and only 586,237 of these that would constitute 40.41% of all participants were accepted in undergraduate and associate programs (Ministry of Education, 2010). Those students who could not get into a program in a public university in Turkey registered in private universities in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) that accept students with lower scores. According to 2009 statistics of Student Selection and Placement Center (SSPC) (<http://osyspuanlari.osymgov.tr/tablo4.aspx>), universities in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) rank lower than their Turkish counterparts. The university whose students constitute the sample of this study ranks the second from the bottom. University students that

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constitute the Turkish sample of this study rank on the average. It is assumed in this study that students in TRNC sample are enrolled in universities in Cyprus because they are not able to get accepted into universities in Turkey that accept students with higher scores.

Although university life provides students with many opportunities for their personal growth, students face potential stressors during their school life. Among these are academic expectations, financial difficulties, separation from the family, new friendships and romantic relationships (Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006). In addition, not being able to study in a desired program might also cause stress and depression to students. Studies show that depression level during the fourth level becomes higher than the earlier years (Özdel, Bostancı, Özdel, & Oğuzhanoglu, 2002; Bakır, Yılmaz, Yavaş, Toraman, & Güleç, 1997; Temel, Bahar, & Çuhadar, 2007). According to the conditions in Turkey, fourth year university students need to get a score that is at least equivalent to the threshold score necessary to pass Public Service Personal Selection Exam (PPPSE). These students are registered in special classes (dershane) in addition to undergraduate education to be able to succeed in this exam. Students who graduate from universities in Northern Cyprus should also succeed in this exam if they want to work in a public office in Turkey. Students educated in Turkey or Northern Cyprus might be anxious for not being able to do well in PPPSE or not being able to find a job that is related to their educational background (Gizir, 2005). Attending to this special classes (dershane) might cause economical problems the lack of time for social and emotional activities and this also cause the psychological symptoms. It is also expected that Turkish students who go to TRNC for university education have higher stress due to individual and environmental factors. It is also expected that these students diverge from their counterparts who enroll in Turkish universities for strategies they use to cope with stress as well as their psychological symptoms. The reasons for their divergence are as follows:

#### Change

Many people prefer order, continuation, and predictability in their lives. For this reason, any good or bad event that disrupts the order and continuation might cause stress. Level of stress is determined due to the level of change caused by the stressors individual or external factors (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem, & Nolen- Hoeksema, 1996; Barry, 2002). Separation from family, starting university in addition to moving to a different geographical and cultural area to live might make a greater change in the lives of Turkish students who start their undergraduate education in TRNC. This, in turn, might cause them more stress.

#### Culture

Contextual factors play an important role in coping with stress according to Moos' (1984) transactional model. As a contextual factor, culture shapes appraisals of the individual; appraisals in turn shape stress-coping strategies, and consequently, success of coping with stress influences health and well-being of the individual.

Culture can be defined as a quiet complex system of meaning that is learned, shared and transferred from one generation to another, and changes as it is transferred across generations (Triandis, 1995). This system of meaning includes norms, beliefs and values that provide prescriptions for behavior. These norms, beliefs, and values can be grouped into two different types of behavior as "collectivism" and "individualism" (Hofstede, 1980). The Self is a central unit of society in individualistic cultures. Individual rights, interest in oneself and family, individual autonomy and self-fulfillment are emphasized in these cultures. As opposed to individualistic societies, in-group is the center of collectivist societies. This in-group connects individuals to their own needs, intentions and fate. Responsibilities and duties within the group, mutual dependency among its members, and realization of social roles are emphasized in collectivist cultures (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006). Meta-analysis of Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier (2002) shows that Americans and especially Euro-Americans are more individualistic than those who live in non-Western or developing countries. Social atmosphere in individualistic societies like the United States respect individual autonomy and independent rights. Also, they have the tendency to protect these



rights. Individual leaves family household upon the termination of adolescence. As such, cohesion with the family and group is not valued much. To the contrary, social atmosphere in collectivist societies promote conformity and interdependence. Individual autonomy is mostly regarded as selfishness and betrayal to the group. Personal sacrifice for the larger community is considered as a marker of maturity and strong character. Environmental system puts pressure on individuals in individualistic societies to be autonomous and independent. Many of the ongoing stressors may stem from this pressure. These pressures emerge in early adulthood when the individual is not ready to take the responsibility of becoming an independent individual, and thus, carry the responsibility that it brings onto him/her. On the other hand, environmental system puts pressure on individual to remain interdependent to the ingroup for the sake of their own welfare and to fulfill the demands of the group. Many of the ongoing stressors may stem from the pressure. Behaviors are evaluated through cost/benefit analysis in individualistic societies, and thus, dispute or conflict with others is considered normal unlike the situation in collectivist societies where social cohesion is very important. In-group is treated to be homogenous, and the distinction between ingroup and outgroup is major. Socialization based on compliance, social support and interdependency are mostly observed in collectivist societies (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990).

Individuals evaluate potential stressors in two groups. The first one is the consideration of the stressors as a “threat” in relation to harm or loss. According to the second group stressors is a “challenge” as related to the positive development and aims (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006). Promotion focused individual, according to the theory of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997), can be most sensitive to the potential of “the existence, or lack of, positive result,” and thus, consider the situation as a challenge to attaining a positive result. On the other hand, prevention-focused individual has a tendency to be more sensitive to the potential existence or absence of negative results. (S)he sees this situation as a threat to his/her security. Study (Aaker & Lee, 2001) show that individuals who have a dominant perception of independent self are more promotion-focused whereas those who have a dominant perception of interdependency are more prevention-focused. As such, individuals oriented towards collectivism are more likely to appraise stressors as threats whereas those oriented towards individualism are more likely to appraise these stressors as challenges (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006).

Individuals oriented towards collectivism are likely to use passive or avoidance-focused coping due to their tendency to consider stressors as threat. Individuals oriented towards individualism, on the other hand, are expected to use active or approach-focused coping due to their tendency to appraise stressors as challenge. Appraise of threat and loss is mostly related to escape-avoidance strategies. There is strong evidence suggesting the relationship between being collectivist-oriented and using avoidance-focused coping. These strategies are more likely mostly used by Korean-Americans, adults and children of collectivist cultures such as Malai and Ghana (Bjorck, Cuthbertson, Thurman, & Lee, 2001). Adults and children of individualistic cultures such as Germans and Euro-Americans, on the other hand, are likely to use action-oriented and problem-focused coping strategies (Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002).

Türkiye/Turkey. Intercultural studies about different cultures claim that Turkish society has a “collectivist” culture. According to Hofstede (1980), Northern and Southern European countries, Australia, Canada, Germany, and Finland have “individualistic” cultures whereas Asian, Arab, Latin American, Southern European countries and Turkey have “collectivist” cultures. Some Turkish scholars (Ergun, 1991; Ceylan, 1997) also argue that Turkey has a collectivist culture.

Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Cyprus is the third largest island in Mediterranean. Cyprus hosted many empires throughout her history. It was conquered by Ottoman Empire in 1571, and Turks from Anatolia were settled in the island constituting 30 per cent of her population. It was taken under British command in 1878, and remained so until the foundation of Republic of Cyprus in 1960 (An, 1996). Republic of Cyprus was established



in August 15-16, 1960 under the guarantee of Turkey, Greece and England (Devlet, 2006). Nevertheless, a consensus was not realized between Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus about the position and status of the island. “Green line” was established in July 20, 1974 as Turks were settled in the northern part of the island and Greeks in the southern part. Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was founded in November 15, 1983. Yet, her independence was not acknowledged by any country except Turkey. For this reason, since her foundation she has been subject to economic sanctions and isolations (Somuncuoğlu, 2003). A referendum was organized in April 24, 2004 for the unification of two communities under “Cyprus” as a solution to Cyprus problem. However, no result was reached as majority of Turkish community voted for a “yes” (65 per cent), whereby majority of Greek community voted for a “no” (Devlet, 2006; Arslan-Akfarat & Öner-Özkan, 2010). Southern Cyprus-Greek part of the island- became a European Union member in May 1, 2004. Uncertainty about the future of TRNC still continues (Devlet, 2006).

TRNC is 65 km further from Anatolia, and lies on a surface of 3.355 km<sup>2</sup>. It is the closest neighbor of Turkey and is under the guarantee of Turkey. It means a geopolitical and strategic importance in terms of the control of land as well as commercial routes through land and air around Eastern Mediterranean (Çevikel, 2008). The official language in TRNC is Cypriot dialect of Turkish mainly because of the settlement of Anatolian Turks in the island in 1571 following Islam is its religion. Agriculture is not a well developed sector in the island, and 70 per cent of the labor force is employed in services sector. Aid from Turkey is a vital element in her survival. All of the universities in TRNC are private. A significant bulk of its national income, therefore, comes from these endowment universities. Students from abroad, primarily from Turkey, come to TRNC for university education (Devlet, 2006).

Aforementioned information implies that Cypriot Turks are influenced by Christian Western culture due to their historical closeness to British and Greeks. Results of 2004 referendum aforementioned also show that Cypriot Turks do have an individualist culture, or are in need of it. In addition her dry climate (Çevikel, 2008), her economic and political dependence on Turkey, her less developed economy, not being acknowledged by other countries except Turkey, her minor population and size, being under continuing threat due to its geopolitical and strategic importance, the approval of EU membership of Southern and the denial of EU membership of TRNC indicate that TRNC has its own problems and culture. In this context, it can be argued that students going from Turkey to Northern Cyprus for university education enter into a very different environment that might influence their strategies to cope with stress and their psychological well-being. There might also some communication problems between Turks from Turkey living in TRNC and Cypriot Turks due to cultural differences. In addition, it is also likely that quality of universities in such an environment would affect students. Attending to the private universities and the degree of physical, educational, social and health opportunities provided to students might influence strategies of students to cope with stress and their psychological well-being.

Moreover, the characteristics of students coming from Turkey also matters. It is possible that students who are already using certain strategies and who have certain psychological symptoms come to TRNC. In other words, there is a strong relationship between strategies to cope with stress and psychological well-being, and diathesis-predisposing risk of the individual in addition to environmental conditions. Below is a brief summary of the relationship between predispose and psychological well-being.

#### Diathesis-predisposing risk

Individuals who live in the same physical environment, and are exposed to the same stress conditions might not show the absolute similar signs of illness. One important variants of this process is diathesis-predisposing risk of the individual. Diathesis-predisposing risk might be innate, acquired, biological or psychological. A minimum level of stress is enough for individuals with high diathesis-predisposing risk whereas higher levels of stress are required for individuals with low diathesis-predisposing risk. Stressors increase the risk of



falling sick during this process whereas protective factors reduce this risk (Ashby, 2007). One of the important protective factors is effective strategies to cope with stress.

Relationship between strategies to cope with stress and psychological symptoms. Coping with stress is an important factor that influences well-being and the likelihood to fall sick. Main source of many types of psychological diseases is ineffective coping strategies (Barry, 2002).

Vulić-Prtorić and Macuka (2006) found according to the study they did among children and adolescents aged between 10 and 16 that avoidance-disengagement strategy is an important predictor of anxiety. They also found that depressed children deploy dysfunctional coping strategies more. Avoidance-disengagement coping is running away from stress or situations that trigger stress. This kind of coping strategy also works as a predictor of high level psychological distress (Blalock & Joiner, 2000; Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006). Social support appears to decrease the deployment of strategies like avoidance, withdrawal, and harmful disengagement (Hollahan & Moos, 1987; Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006). Perceived social support influences psychological well-being, and mental health directly and positively. In addition, it also decreases the effect of stress by buffering effect, and thus, protects mental health (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Positive thinking and problem-oriented coping protect psychological well-being (Nowack, 1989). According to a study done by Lee and Larson (1996) with Korean adolescents preparing for the university entrance exam, problem-oriented and information searching strategies are related to low levels of depression. The same study shows that strategy of emotional discharge is related to increase in physiological symptoms. Researches (Compas, Orasan, & Grant, 1993; Ebata & Moos, 1991) indicate that problem-oriented coping strategies are more effective in protecting adolescents' physiological and psychological well-being more than emotion-oriented strategies

#### SUMMARY AND CONTRUBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

There are two aims of this study: First is to compare Turkish students who were raised in Turkey and went to TRNC for university education with those who attend universities in Turkey in terms of strategies they use to cope with stress. Second is to compare these two groups in terms of their psychological symptoms. It is expected that the former group has weaker stress-coping strategies and psychological well-being. It is thought that this difference can be attributed to various individual and environmental reasons. Findings of this study might raise awareness to improve environmental condition and the services provided by the owners, managers and deans, and to individuals who are responsible from examining of these universities in TRNC. They might also raise awareness among managers, tutors and psychological centers at the universities to take students' cultural differences into account while providing them educational, psychological, and social services. In addition, public officials might also benefit from the study to improve relationships between Turks from Turkey living in TRNC and Cypriot Turks.

#### METHODS

##### Participants

Sample includes 596 students in total, out which 345 (164 females and 181 males) attend university in Turkey and 251 (94 females and 157 males) attend to university in TRNC. Average age of the sample of students attending Turkish university is 20.92 (max 26, min 18), whereby it is 22.21 (max 29, min 18) for the sample of students attending university in TRNC Data was collected during 2008-2009 academic year. Measurement tools were applied in various faculties based on quantitative and qualitative academic fields. Departments of architecture, engineering, science-literature, education and veterinary constitute the sample of this study. Sample includes students from first year to the fifth. First, second and third year students constitute 64 per cent of the sample whereas fourth and fifth years constitute 34.7 per cent. Students of Turkish sub-sample are from a state university in county named as Mehmet Akif Ersoy University whereas those of TRNC sub-sample attend a private university called International Cyprus University. Students were selected through random sampling method.



### Procedures

Written and official permissions were taken from the faculties that students attend before starting data-collection. Data-collection instruments were applied immediately before or after the class while students can be found as a complete group in their classrooms. Classrooms were randomly selected. Researcher introduced oneself to students before distributing data collection tools, and told them about the aims and importance of his research. Researcher also explained stress, strategies to cope with stress, and psychological symptoms. Researcher encouraged them to speak about stress-factors that they frequently encounter at school. Following these, researcher distributed the tools to those students who volunteered to answer first Coping Strategies Scale (CSS), and later, Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). Researcher told the students might keep the information sheets anonymous, and the information given by them would only be used for the purposes of this study. Researcher also added that they could contact oneself later if they need further information for their own tools. Researcher read the instructions outloud before students start answering, and also made an exemplary application. Following this, students filled measurement tools. The whole process took an hour. Tools were collected back thanking the students, were put in an envelope before the students, and the envelope was closed.

### Measures

Coping Strategies Scale (CSS). CSS which is a measure of reliability and validity was developed by Amirkhan (1990), and was adapted to Turkish by Aysan (1994), and was used to determine the level of students' strategies to cope with stress. CSS is composed of three sub-measures: Problem solving, seeking social support, and avoidance. High scores in sub-measures indicate an increase in the defined characteristic. Reliability coefficient of the measure is found to be 0.92. Similar measurement validity studies show that problem solving sub-measure is positively correlated with Inner Control; avoidance sub-measure is negatively correlated with life satisfaction and positively correlated with depression level.

Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). It was developed by Derogatis (1992) to measure levels of psychological symptoms. Having been adapted to Turkish and tested for validity and reliability by Şahin and Durak (1994), the inventory has five sub-scales, anxiety, depression, negative self, hostility, somatization: and a total of 53 items. A higher score on the inventory shows a higher psychological symptom level, and thus, lower mental health. Correlations between the criterion that are related to the validity of the BSI and BSI are as follows: With Social Comparison Scale, between -.14 and -.34; With Submissiveness Scale, between .16 and .42; with Tendency to Stress Scale, between .24 and .36; with UCLA-Loneliness Scale, between .13 and .36; with Offer Loneliness Scale, between -.34 and -.57; with Beck Depression Inventory, between .34 and .70. Correlations obtained from the reliability of the BSI: Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the total inventory is .96. Coefficients for subscales ranged between .55 and .86 (Şahin & Durak, 1994 in Savaşır & Şahin, 1997).

### Analytic Strategy

SPSS 17.0 software is used in this study for descriptive method and data analysis. Following methods are used to find solutions to the problems of the research. Normality test was applied at the first place to decide on which tests to use. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (1-Sample K-S Test) when applied to Turkish sample shows that the variables problem solving, anxiety, negative self, somatization, and hostility have p-values less than 0.05. This finding implies that data related to these variables is not distributed normally. P-values of social support and depression variables, on the other hand, are more than 0.05 and are distributed normally. Data related to the variables of problem solving, social support, anxiety, negative self, somatization and hostility is not distributed normally for TRNC sample unlike the data related to avoidance and depression variables. One of parametric tests, t-test, was applied in the analysis of the first and second problems of the research to normally distributed data whereas Mann-Whitney U test, a non-parametric test, was applied to data that is not normally distributed (Gamgam & Altunkaynak, 2008).



## RESULTS

1. Findings related to the question of whether there is a difference between university students in Turkey and TRNC in terms of strategies they use to cope with stress are presented below.

TABLE 1  
U-Test Results for Problem-Solving Strategy of each Group

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Turkey	328	283.88	93111.50	39155.5	0.352
TRNC	250	296.88	74219.50		

No statistically significant difference is found between two samples in terms problem-solving strategy ( $P>0.05$ ).

TABLE 2  
T-Test Results for Avoidance Strategy Scores of each Sample

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	df	t	P
Turkey	333	20.52	3.34	587	2.397	0.05
TRNC	248	22.79	3.71			

Statistically significant relation is found between two groups in terms of avoidance strategy ( $t_{587}=2.397$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). University students in TRNC have higher avoidance levels when compared on the basis of average values.

TABLE 3  
T-test results for Social Support Seeking Strategy of each Sample

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	df	t	P
Turkey	335	23.56	5.08	580	0.61	0.05
TRNC	247	23.53	5.44			

There is no statistically significant difference between two samples in terms of social support seeking strategies ( $P>0.05$ ).

2. Findings concerning the question whether there is a difference between university students in Turkey and TRNC in terms of their psychological symptoms are presented below..

TABLE 4  
U-test results for Anxiety Symptoms of each of Group

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U	P
Turkey	338	278.94	94281	369.90	.008
TRNC	251	316,63	79474		



There is a significant difference between two samples in terms of anxiety symptoms ( $U=369.90$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). University students in TRNC are found to have higher anxiety levels in terms of mean rank.

TABLE 5  
U-Test Results for Negative-Self Symptoms of each Group

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U	P
Turkish	333	279.82	93180.50	37569.50	.052
TRNC	249	307.12	76472.50		

Statistically significant difference is found between two samples in terms of negative-self symptoms ( $37569.50$ ,  $P<0.10$ ). University students in TRNC have higher negative-self symptoms when compared on the basis of mean rank.

TABLE 6  
U-Test Results for Somatization Symptoms of each Group

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U	P
Turkey	341	273.93	93409	35098	.000
TRNC	250	326.11	81527		

Statistical significant difference is found between two samples in terms of somatization symptoms ( $U=35098$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). University students in TRNC have higher somatization symptoms on the basis of mean rank.

TABLE 7  
U-test Results for Hostility Symptoms of each Group

Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Rank	U	P
Turkey	340	287.68	97811.50	39841.50	.167
TRNC	251	307.27	77124.50		

No statistically significant relationship has been found between two samples in terms of hostility symptoms ( $P>0.05$ ).

TABLE 8  
T-Test Results for Depression Symptoms Scores of each Sample

Group	N	$\bar{X}$	S	df	t	P
Turkey	338	17.96	10.20	502.96	2.397	0.05
TRNC	251	20.14	11.43			





There is a statistically significant relation between two samples in terms of depression symptoms ( $t_{502.96}=2.397$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). University students in TRNC have higher depression symptoms compared on the basis of average values.

## DISCUSSION

1. First purpose of this study is to understand whether there is a significant difference between university students in Turkey and those in TRNC in terms of strategies they use in coping with stress. Results imply that there is a difference between Turkish students studying in TRNC and those attending Turkish universities in terms of avoidance strategy. TRNC sample has higher average in avoidance strategy variable than Turkish sample. Turkish students attending universities in TRNC make use of “avoidance” strategy at times of stress. This result can be explained by the variable change. Family support and attachment to the family are important in collectivist Turkish culture. Students have to stay away from their families in a different environment either in Turkey or in TRNC. Students who are enrolled in Turkish university are placed in universities in different parts of Turkey according to the scores they attain in SSPE. All these cause significant changes in students’ lives. According to the research (Çam-Çelik & Erkorkmaz, 2008) on the Turkish university students, obligated to live far from their families, the degree of the depressive symptoms was found higher. Turkish students attending universities in TRNC, on the other hand, have to adapt much more changes they move to a different country, geography, and culture. As a result, students in TRNC sub-sample might perceive more threats due to more changes taking place in their lives. As such, they might employ avoidance strategy owing to the increase in stress level in their lives.

It can be assumed that TRNC has a more individualistic culture since it was affected by Greek and English culture. Turkish students enrolled in TRNC universities, on the other hand, are raised within a collectivist culture. It is probable to have communication problems, disappointments, and problems like alienation among individuals of these two different cultures. These factors might trigger stress levels of Turkish students registered in universities in TRNC. Moreover, analyzing this finding from the perspective of theory of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997) suggests that Turkish students going to universities in TRNC might appraise conditions in TRNC more threatening. As a result, they might be more avoiding in their actions. In other words, these students perceive life in TRNC as a threat to be avoided, rather than approaching it as a series of provoking factors to challenge. If these students were raised in an individualistic culture, they would perceive the environment they live in as a chance to improve themselves or as a challenge, and thus, they would have employed problem-solving strategies. Briefly, this finding of the study can be interpreted as that individuals with collectivist tendencies appraise “differences” as “threats,” and are more likely to employ “avoidance” strategy. This finding is consistent with the findings of Bjorck et al. (2001).

It is also possible that insufficient university conditions might trigger avoidance strategies applied by Turkish students in TRNC universities. The researches on the university students suggested that the students’ distress, hopelessness (Çam-Çelik & Erkorkmaz, 2008), depressive symptoms (Bostancı, Özdel, Oğuzhanoğlu, Özdel, Ergin, Ergin, Ateşçi, & Karadağ, 2005), stem from the insufficient opportunities of the universities they attend. Students in TRNC sample are enrolled in private universities whereas those in Turkish sub-sample are enrolled in state universities. It is possible that students in TRNC sample experienced high levels of stress because they were not able to thoroughly fulfill their physical, social, emotional and educational needs. Avoidance might occur when stress level reaches a high point, and it is believed that it is not possible to cope with it on an individual basis. In fact, students shared some of their concerns during data-collection period of this study. Some of these are as follows: “Electricity is shut down in very cold weather, and especially during exam periods. Air conditioning sometimes does not function even if there is electricity. We feel very cold and get sick. We are not able to study as there is no light at night. Under these circumstances, we have to re-pay tuition fees if we fail to succeed. We



think that these electricity cuts, especially during exam periods, are done on purpose. We are scared from failing....There is no one here to share our psychological problems. Please help us!...” Researcher himself also observed that students take exams during hot days of summer when air conditioning does not function. Students also mentioned the researcher about poor quality of education.

More usage of avoidance strategy by students in TRNC sample can also be explained by their diathesis. Students might have registered in private universities in TRNC which usually require lower scores in SSPE because that they might not have been able to enter universities in Turkey that require higher scores. Accounting that these students go to private universities, it is highly likely that their economic situation is much better than the general situation in Turkey as well as the average of Turkish sample. Accordingly it can be argued that these students could go to a better state university after taking a better high school education. In other words, these students were not able to cope with SSPE related stress, or they prepared for SSPE many times and were not able to succeed, and therefore, they decided to register in a TRNC university. Higher age average of TRNC sample confirms this hypothesis. It can, therefore, be argued that students in TRNC sample had already been facing already facing high levels of stress even before they moved to TRNC due to their perception of challenges and threats in their lives. As a result, they were mostly deploying avoidance strategy to cope with stress.

2. Second purpose of this study is to research whether there is a significant difference in terms of students' psychological symptoms between TRNC and Turkish samples. Results show that there are significant differences between two groups in terms of depression, anxiety, negative self, and somatization. The t test results and mean rank of these variables of TRNC sample are higher than those of Turkish sample. In other words, psychological health of Turkish students in TRNC are worse than those in Turkey. This finding can be attributed to the following reasons: It is possible that Turkish students in TRNC get more changes than their counterparts in Turkey under a different physical and cultural environment. They might be facing more stress due to these changes. Schreier ve Abramovitch (1996) asserts that American students studying medicine in Israel experience problems in adaptation to the cultural environment in addition to academic stress they experience. They also found that depression and anxiety students experience disrupt their cognitive performance which in turn triggers academic stress and emotional distress. It can be assumed that students in TRNC sample might have psychological symptoms as they use avoidance strategy at times of stress. Many studies argue that there is a positive correlation between avoidance strategy and psychological symptoms, and that avoidance influences psychological symptoms (Vulić-Prtorić & Macuka, 2006; Blalock & Joiner, 2000; Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006).

According to the literature, symptoms related to anxiety, somatization and depression reveal themselves simultaneously. Somatization is bodily manifestation of mental distress and psycho-social stress (Rosen, Kleinman, & Katon, 1982). In TRNC sample, somatization remains in the highest mean rank (326.11) among the psychological symptoms. Emotions are mostly expressed through bodily images in somatization, rather than through words (Stoudemire, 1991). Public revelation of emotional problems is not proper in some cultures and families. Prevention of expression of emotions supports symbolization. Primary childhood experiences and secondary gain about attraction attention and love from one's surrounding due to bodily pains are among the factors that affect somatization (Kesebir, 2004). Latin Americans, Asians and Africans are more likely to express somatic concerns compared to Europeans and people of Euro-American culture (Brown, Schullberg, & Madonia, 1996). Absence of a statistically significant difference between two groups in terms of hostility can be explained as follows: Students from both samples might think that going into conflict due to hostility might harm themselves. Or, it is likely that they express their hostile emotions through somatic complains. As already stated above, conflict with one's environment is not considered a good manner among collectivist cultures (Triandis, Mccusker, & Hui, 1990).



### Limitations of the Current Study

It might have been apparently seen whether the difference between the two groups were related to diathesis-predisposing risk or not if the analysis for TRNC sample had been done when the students were still in Turkey. In addition, inclusion of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot students to the study might also have revealed reveal better to what extent culture (individualistic or collectivist) relates the differences between two samples.

### Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

An important portion of national income of TRNC is provided by university education, especially through Turkish students who go to TRNC universities. The number of Turkish students who registered in universities in TRNC in 2010 is 3940 (<http://www.osym.gov.tr/dosya/1-56296/h/osysyerlestirmebulten2010.pdf>). Adding the already existing Turkish student community to this number will increase the total number of Turkish students studying in TRNC. Turkish students who would like to be employed in public sector upon graduation from TRNC universities are likely to work in Turkey. It can be argued that this student body who do not use effective stress-coping strategies and who are not in a good psychological state might constitute an important risk to Turkey. It is frightening to think that the damage a kindergarden school teacher who uses avoidance-disengagement strategies, and is not psychologically well can cause to little children who are at a very critical position in their development. Universities are also responsible from protecting and improving their students' psychological well-being. Effectiveness of stress-coping strategies and the level of psychological symptoms might be inspected immediately after Turkish students arrive TRNC. Psychological counseling and guidance services at the universities might help students, both individually and in groups, who do use avoidance strategies and who show psychological symptoms. They can teach students problem-solving and social support seeking strategies. In addition, they can also provide students with peer support training.

Researchers can investigate quality of TRNC universities, and its influence on students. Students might perceive universities that they attend as stress factors when they cannot fulfill their educational, physical, social and health needs. It is also a solution to stop student acceptance to universities in TRNC that cannot fulfill the needs of students from Turkey or other countries. Students proposed the following suggestion during data for this study was collected: "The University has only one psychological counselor, and she/he does not understand much as he is Cypriot. We are not able to ask for help from her/him as we get distracted since he speaks with 'Cypriot dialect.' The person whom we would go for psychological help should be from Turkey." Therefore, one psychological counselor from Turkey per 150 students should be sent to universities in TRNC (Aydın, 2010). It is also possible to include in psychological counseling and guidance program curriculums in Turkey and TRNC cross-cultural psychological counseling courses. Psychological counseling and guidance services in universities should be made more effective. Professionals who provide these services assure the students that they are the social supports. Psychological help services should be introduced to students during orientation activities. Researchers can investigate character of communication between Cypriot Turks and Turks from Turkey in TRNC. Stress factors for students in TRNC, the influence of geographical and physical environment and that of living in an island on stress-coping strategies and psychological well-being of students. Because level of satisfaction from the physical environment one lives in (i.e. safety, walkability, social network, traffic and noise) also affects psychological well-being (Leslie & Cerin, 2008).

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