

A Qualitative Investigation of Adult Imprudent Behaviour

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Abstract

Imprudent behavior, indolence, dilatoriness, being unable to predict the result of behavior, perceiving probable harm far less than its magnitude based upon cognitive distortion, and suchlike are some reasons that lead individuals to indulge in risky behaviors without taking precautionary measures and to look for simple and easy solutions which do not require a radical change in habitual behaviors. The goal of this study is to evaluate adults' tendency to behave prudently/imprudently, their awareness of their behavioral tendency, their observations and ideas of social and environmental responses to their behavioral tendencies, and to explore the reasons why they behave prudently/imprudently. Data were collected through in-depth interviews in late spring 2006. The results were analyzed using a descriptive methodology. The sample of the study consisted of 25 individuals including doctors, nurses, teachers and firemen. Findings indicate that imprudent behavior is the result of a cultural aspect in Turkish society; some variables of which may cause adult imprudent behavior.

Keywords: Imprudent behavior, behavioral tendency

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Introduction

Risky behaviors have been subjected to numerous researches and are an indispensable part of human life and the behavioral repertoire. Risky behaviors are defined as: Behaviors that may result in an undesirable situation such as death, injury, illness, becoming disabled, suffering economical loss or a threat to security. There are many cognitive and motivational factors that cause risky behaviors.

Some risky behaviors are related to a sensation-seeking personality. These type of behaviors are termed “risk-taking” and are determined by a disposition to gain new experiences, innovation, change, and sensational needs. Individuals seek new, complex, intense and sensational situations and they take risks voluntarily (Zuckerman, 1990, 1994, 2000). This risky behavior is usually a characteristic of puberty (Arnet and Balle-Jensen, 1993).

Another form of risky behavior described in the literature is tolerating potential negative consequences in order to seek greater advantages (Kuriychuk, 1989). This type of risky behavior is also called “calculated risk”. Individuals commit risky behaviors voluntarily, depending on their tolerance levels, trying to balance the risks and rewards associated with the risks that a behavior includes (Emerson, 2001). A business person’s investments to expand the firm’s area of involvement, and thus increase transactions and profits in a business in which he/she does not have experience, is one example of calculated risk.

However, some risky behaviors committed in daily life are different from the ones described earlier since they are based on a different rationale. These type of behaviors are called “imprudent behavior”. Imprudent behavior is characterized as not giving careful consideration; imprudently incurring risk; lacking or showing lack of judgment or discretion and being unwise (Merriam-Webster, 2007).

Imprudent behaviors are also defined as “behaving in an unprepared manner of an impulsive nature, not planned beforehand” (Türk Dil Kurumu, 2005, s.1930). As a result of imprudent behaviors, either the person who committed the imprudent behavior or the person who is subjected to the behavior is likely to come to harm. However, the real intention of these behaviors is not to harm someone. To the contrary, the harm that emerges as a result of this type of behavior may cause grief and remorse on the part of the person who committed the behavior. Despite this fact, some people continue to regularly commit imprudent behaviors (Aypay, 2007).

Imprudent behaviors may be committed by individuals of all ages and educational levels, and in every aspect of life. However, for some individuals, imprudent behavior becomes a conventional mode of behavior or habitual practice (Aypay, 2007).

Examples of imprudent behaviors may be found in the media. However important and valued by their parents, children may suffer from the harmful consequences of their parent’s imprudent behaviors (CNN Turk, 2007). When inflammable materials and cutter tools or chemicals such as pills and detergents are not properly stored by parents (or not stored out of reach of children), children may suffer negative consequences such as poisoning, burns, injuries, or disabilities.

Similarly, although the life-saving role of seatbelts is well-known in reducing the risk of injury, disability or death, many drivers and passengers still neglect to fasten their seatbelts while traveling. This may cause them to suffer irredeemable losses (Sabah, 01 July 2007).

Pressure cookers are commonly used in kitchens to save time while cooking. When they are used carelessly, it is well-known by the user that they may lead to quite dangerous results. Despite this, people who use a pressure cooker at home sometimes open the lid without waiting for the pressure cooker to cool down. Such imprudent behavior may even cause the death of the individual who committed it (Sabah, 14 September 2002). Also, it is clear how dangerous and risky it may be trying to cross the street in heavy traffic with fast-moving cars. However, instead of using designated pedestrian crossings and overpasses and thus behaving prudently, some individuals still choose to use unsafe places to cross the road. It is often these types of behavior that one may read about or see in accident-related news in the media (Hürriyet, 14 October 2005). The behaviors of health professionals directly influence people's lives. Professionals in the health sector need to use additional caution and should be more cautious than other professions. However, when health professionals neglect to use basic precautionary measures, sometimes it may result in very high risks such as being infected with HIV/AIDS and eventually leading to the death of the very people who visit professionals to get health treatment (Hürriyet, 2007).

The tendency of imprudent behavior, as in the examples provided, is for individuals to indulge in behaviors that may have harmful consequences for themselves or others. Although they know how to protect themselves from harm, individuals avoid seeking a new form of behavior which requires precautionary measures and stick with one which is easier and does not require a change in their habitual behaviors (Aypay, 2007). This definition is adopted from Anderson's (2003) definition of behavior avoidance. In other words, the tendency to behave imprudently exists in the context of committing risky behaviors, laziness, dilatoriness, not correctly predicting the results of behavior, or perceiving the consequences of cognitive falsifications as smaller than they actually are (Aypay, 2007).

There are several theoretical studies in the literature that attempt to explain the reasons for risky behaviors. While some of these theoretical explanations are based on rational perspectives such as the health belief model or seeking protection (Adler, Kegeles and Genevro, 1994; Conner, 2005; Umeh, 2004; Feldman, 1985), unrealistic optimism is based on more cognitive and motivational perspectives (Blanton, Axsom, McClive and Price, 2001; Higgins, Amand and Poole, 1997; Hoorens, 1995; Kruger, 1999; Peretti-Watel, 2003; Perloff, 1987; Weinstein, 1980). When the definition of imprudent behavior is taken into account, it appears more logical to consider that this type of behavior is likely to be more related to cognitive and motivational aspects. Some research findings in the literature (Brown and Imber, 2003; Brown, Messman-Moore, Miller and Stasser, 2005; Campbell, Greenauer, Macaluso and End, 2007; Chambers, Windschitl and Suls, 2003; Çok, Gray and Ersever, 2001; Gidycz, McNamara and Edwards, 2006; Hahn and Renner, 1998; Higgins and Watson, 1995; Klar, 1999; Krieger, Parrott and Afifi, 2006; Kruger, 1999; Kruger and Burrus, 2004; McKenna and Albery, 2001; Nelson, Evelyn and Taylor, 1992; Peretti-Watel, 2003; Weinstein, 1980) seem to support this idea.

This goal of this study is to explain the tendency to behave imprudently based on in-depth interviews with individuals who may be classified as having a tendency towards imprudent behavior. The study comprises adults' evaluations of their tendency towards prudent/imprudent behaviors, their awareness of their behavioral tendency, their observations and ideas about social and environmental responses to their behavioral tendencies, and an exploration of the reasons why they behave prudently/imprudently.

Method

Participants

In-dept interviews were conducted with a sample of 25 individuals which included doctors (4), nurses/health officers (5), teachers (11), and firefighters (5).

Design and Procedures

This study was carried out as a part of a larger study that focused on the tendency toward imprudent behavior. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

The sample included professionals who directly influence human life such as doctors, nurses/health officers, teachers, and firefighters. The ages of the individuals in the sample ranged from 22 to 55. These individuals were selected from a larger group (396) who were chosen via a convenience sampling and participated in the study based on their scores on a tendency towards imprudent behavior questionnaire. The individuals in the sample were selected from six cities (Ankara, Bartın, Çanakkale, Diyarbakır, Karaman, and Mardin) and four out of the seven regions of Turkey (Central Anatolia, Black Sea, Marmara, South Eastern Anatolia).

The data were collected from 396 individuals by using Tendency of Imprudent Behavior Scale (TIBS) and the List of Imprudent Behaviour (Aypay, 2007). To include contrasting views in the interview sample of 25, individuals who scored at the highest and lowest 25th percentiles on both scales and thus met the criteria were selected.

Based on the scores, individuals who scored within the lowest 25 percentiles were classified as prudent and individuals who scored within the highest 25th percentiles were classified as imprudently behaving individuals. Divergent or excessive sampling provides richer data when compared to regular sampling and allows the researcher to carry out a deeper analysis and understand multiple dimensions. While the interview sample was being determined, the researcher also took care to include individuals from each one of the various professions in the larger sample in order to have the maximum variation. Maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to determine similarities, communalities, and differences (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The in-depth interviews took approximately forty minutes on average and were conducted with individuals in three cities (Ankara, Mardin and Diyarbakır). Two different interview forms were used, including more common questions for both of the behavioral tendencies but with different questions. On the interview forms, the

questions were intended to tap the subjects' own evaluations of prudent and imprudent behavioral tendencies, their awareness and observations of societal/environmental responses, and ideas on their own prudent/imprudent behaviors.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive analysis in the qualitative research method. While developing the analysis categories, the correlates of the concepts were investigated in relation to imprudent behavior in the quantitative study, such as: Self-respect, locus of control, general self-efficacy, death anxiety, unrealistic optimism, sanctions, experience, feeling of responsibility, modeling, upbringing, optimism, participant views on whether precaution is necessary, level of awareness of prudent/imprudent behavior, evaluations of prudent/imprudent behavior, evaluations of the prevalence of prudent/imprudent behavior in Turkish society, and social responses to prudent and imprudent behaviors.

Validity and Reliability

The procedures followed, to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, can be summarized as follows:

- Contradictory and excessive sampling methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2000) were used to include both individuals with prudent and imprudent behaviors. All the professions/occupations included in the study and the individuals differ in terms of their tendencies. The scores of individuals on the The Imprudent Behavior List (TIBL) were also used.
- All the participants were voluntary.
- All the interviews were conducted by the researcher herself and thus the interviews were standardized.
- The researcher avoided expressing her views and emotions to avoid researcher bias.
- In order to secure extreme views (Miles and Huberman, 1994), the reasons why the subjects committed prudent/imprudent behaviors were asked. Thus, the reasons why individuals behaved in one way or the other were tapped and whether the explanations provided overlapped or not was checked. The results led the researcher to conclude that the majority of explanations overlapped regarding participants whose behavioral tendencies differed in a specific way. Thus, this finding increased the validity of the findings.
- All the data were transcribed by the researcher. Thus, loss of data was minimized and while the interpretations might have been improved since the author becomes familiarized with the statements while transcribing.
- While creating analysis categories, various categories were included. This variety of categories enabled the researcher to build a strong categorical scheme (Neuendorf, 2002).
- Before analysis, all transcripts of interviews were read five times by the researcher so that the interview data was correctly understood. This ensured the researcher achieved an accurate understanding of the inferences.
- The researcher was flexible while identifying units of analysis and tried to choose units that made sense among themselves. Thus, data loss due to rigid units of analysis was avoided (Kümbetoğlu, 2005).

- In order to ensure reliability, none of the sections of the interview transcripts was removed and they were analyzed as a whole.
- Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that to increase the validity of qualitative research it is important to check with various data sources, different data collection methods, and different analysis strategies. This study collected both qualitative and quantitative data to understand prudent/imprudent behaviors. Qualitative and quantitative data were checked whether they supported each other or not and the results suggest that the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data are parallel and support one another. The overlap between results may also be considered as a criteria for the validity of qualitative findings.
- When the findings were reported, quotes from the participant were extensively used to allow readers to test the appropriateness of the interpretations.
- The researcher reported all the steps in detail that she followed during the course of the study.

Results and Discussion

Types of Explanations for Prudent/Imprudent Behavioral Tendency

This section presents the findings gathered from the interviews.

Evaluation of Prudent/Imprudent Behaviors

Participant statements on prudent/imprudent behaviors and their evaluations were grouped into categories. In order to establish whether there are similarities or differences in their perceptions, both types of behaviors are grouped and presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

The participants' statements point to quite similar evaluations, regardless of prudent/imprudent behavioral tendencies. These findings indicate that imprudent behavior in general was perceived as negative or not endorsed while prudent behavior was seen as a more positive or endorsed type of behavior. However, to a lesser extent, there were participants who perceived prudent behavior also as negative or not endorsed behavior.

Findings in Table 1 and Table 2 suggest that the participants did not show a bias while evaluating their own behavioral tendencies, regardless of their own behavioral preferences.

Table 1
Evaluation of Participants with Prudent/Imprudent Behavioral Tendencies on Imprudent Behaviors

Statements used in the evaluation	Participants with Prudent Behavioral Tendency	Participants with Imprudent Behavioral Tendency
Being at fault	√	√
Not taking precautions	√	√
Impulsive behavior	√	√
Insensitivity	√	
Negligence	√	
Willy nilly (unplanned) behavior	√	
Forgetfulness	√	
Dilatoriness	√	
Indifference		√
Carefree (easy going) behavior		√
Careless behavior		√
Unrestrained behavior		√
Unsafe behavior		√
Reflexive behavior		√
Unconscious behavior		√

Table 2:
Evaluation of Participants with Prudent/Imprudent Behavioral Tendencies on Prudent Behaviors

Statements used in the evaluation	Participants with Prudent Behavioral Tendency	Participants with Imprudent Behavioral Tendency
Fastidious (nitpicking) behavior	√	√
Obsessive behavior	√	√
Perfectionist behavior	√	√
Careful behavior	√	√
Thoughtful behavior	√	√
Cautious behavior	√	√
Planned behavior	√	
Impeccable behavior	√	
Careful behavior	√	
Orderly behavior	√	
Humanistic behavior	√	
Premeditated behavior		√
Draconian behavior		√
Following Rules		√
Connoisseur behavior		√

Level of Awareness

One aim of the interview was to determine whether the participants were aware of their own behavioral tendencies or not. Secondly, participants were asked to evaluate their behaviors in terms of their behavioral tendencies and were required to provide information on the situations in which they behaved prudently/imprudently.

The analyses indicated that all participants were aware of their own behavioral tendencies. In addition, participant awareness may be regrouped into three categories, as follows:

1. "I am aware of my prudent/imprudent behavior. This tendency in my behaviors is quite strong." All the participants with prudent behaviors and two participants with an imprudent behavioral tendency agreed with these statements.

"I am a quite prudent person. I see myself 100 % as such, I see myself as careful." (Mr. Aydın, firemen, 45 years old, prudent)

2. "I am aware of my tendency of prudent/imprudent behavior. This tendency is not stronger than 50 % in my behavior." Half of the participants with imprudent behavior agreed with this statement. A good example reflecting this group of behaviors is the statement of Mr. Cemal, who is a fireman: *"I am 50 % imprudent."*
3. "I am aware of my prudent/imprudent behaviors. This tendency of mine is less than 50% of my behaviors." This statement was shared by individuals with imprudent behavior. The following quote may exemplify this group's tendency.

"Indeed, I prefer prudent behavior; however, when I am in a hurry, I am imprudent. I know that sometimes I do not exercise caution and I behave imprudently." (Ms. Zübeyde, teacher, 26 years old, imprudent)

When the evaluations of participants with prudent/imprudent behaviors of their own behavioral tendencies are considered together, it could be inferred that all participants were aware of their behavioral tendencies. However, participants with prudent behavior used stronger statements that reflected their behavioral tendencies when compared to individuals with imprudent behaviors.

These findings led the researcher to consider that individuals with prudent behaviors might have embraced their behavioral tendencies more. In contrast, the findings might also imply that since the participants with imprudent behavior were aware of the negative aspect of their own behavioral tendency, they might be trying to present the strength of their tendency as if it were weaker. Alternatively, it may also imply that they do not approve of their own behavioral tendency.

Analysis of the interview data revealed that specific situations might be the cause of some imprudent behavior. Based on the frequencies, these situations can be listed as:

- ✓ When it was thought that everything would run smoothly,
- ✓ Situations with deadlines (time pressure),
- ✓ When individuals thought that they had to move quickly or were in a hurry,
- ✓ Situations in which imprudent behavior led them to feel comfortable or happy,
- ✓ When indolence existed,
- ✓ When it was considered that an important job had to be completed on time,
- ✓ When the consequences of the behavior was not considered,
- ✓ When precautions made the individual uncomfortable.
- ✓ When an emergency was involved,
- ✓ When the focus had to be on the job,

- ✓ When the loss was small or it was played down,
- ✓ When the cost of being cautious was high,
- ✓ When impatience was involved,
- ✓ When the job was supposed to take a short time,
- ✓ When self-confidence was high,
- ✓ When detachment/forgetfulness was involved,
- ✓ When the individual was fretful,
- ✓ When the work was intensive,
- ✓ When facing the harm, time might be perceived as short,
- ✓ Non-frequent behavioral situations,
- ✓ When individuals were tired,
- ✓ When taking precautions was perceived as losing time.

Causal Explanations

This section includes participants' own explanations as to why they behave prudently/imprudently.

Unrealistic Optimism

Half of the participants used statements that led the researcher to think unrealistic optimism might have played a role in their prudent/imprudent behaviors.

“Usually the attitude is that ‘never mind, it won’t happen’ exists. For example, on the elevator it says ‘for four persons.’ Five or six persons get in to elevator... I went to buy gas at the gas station. The attendant was smoking. I asked ‘Don’t you think a fire may erupt?’ The attendant told me ‘Never mind, it won’t happen, I always smoke.’” (Mr. Hasan, firemen, 43 years old)

Findings indicate that one reason why individuals behave imprudently is that they estimate the possibility of facing negative consequences of imprudent behaviors to themselves is quite low. In another words, they may think that they are somehow immune to the negative consequences. Findings also indicate that some of the participants, while evaluating risk, usually use favorable information that the risks are lower for them and thus they develop a distorted image about their invulnerability. Another finding reveals that in these individuals' commitment to imprudent behaviors, motivational factors of unrealistic optimism may also play a role.

“ I warn people when someone else does something. ...But when it comes to myself, I think ‘nothing will happen to me.’ I can protect myself... I am more careful than they are, I don’t know how?” (Mrs. Tulay, Teacher, 34 years old)

Interview results suggest that unrealistic optimism sometimes may lead individuals to think that the perceived protective value of a measure is lower than it actually is or when the task takes a very short time, it makes it easier for individuals to commit imprudent behavior.

“I do not lock my car when I will be there only for a very short time or I park where I block the way of other parked cars. It crosses my mind that it may be

stolen or someone may have a hard time since I am blocking their exit. 'But I think that since it is only for two minutes, it won't happen.' I neglect taking precautions, even though I know the possible risks." (Mr. Aydın, firemen, 45 years old)

When all the findings are taken together thus far, it may be interpreted that this type of thinking leads to imprudent behavior or facilitates resorting to imprudent behavior.

Experience

Data indicates that past experiences, which came up in all interviews, play a role in the participants' prudent/imprudent behavior. Findings indicate that in any situation requiring precautions, experience plays quite an important role. Over half of the participants stated that they behaved more prudently once they had personally had negative experiences.

"...While driving the lighted butt of my cigarette fell off, and I bent down. When I looked up, I was in a field. It might have been a cliff. If I were to experience that again, I would not do the same." (Mr. Hasan, firemen, 43 years old)

The findings suggest that not only direct but indirect experiences also are important in learning to take precautions. Indirect experiences may not only be related to the experiences of someone they know but also others' experiences cited in the media.

A large majority of individuals who have the tendency of prudent behavior also demonstrate a tendency to overgeneralize negative experiences in a specific area to behaviors in other areas. Based on the findings, imprudent behavior may have been experienced directly by the individual and it may also have been learned from others' experiences indirectly. In contrast to this, only two of the participants who admitted a tendency of imprudent behavior stated that the results of an imprudent behavior in any aspect of life caused them to be prudent only in that specific aspect of their life.

All the individuals denoted with imprudent behaviors stated that when they did not perceive the negative experience of an imprudent behavior as serious enough, they continued to carry on with that behavior. However, when they perceived a serious consequence, they ceased that behavior.

"I had accidents twice while crossing the street; but I still do that... If it repeats, and I face serious harm I do not do those behaviors. But if it is not very serious, I may continue to do." (Mrs. Zeynep, nurse, 30 years old).

Findings imply that the idea of unrealistic optimism is a reason or a facilitator of imprudent behavior and it is influenced by the experiences of individuals. Half of the participants used statements that remembered an experience as the reason for creating unrealistic optimism. Mrs. Selma, who is a nurse, while explaining the idea of 'It won't happen to me' as a result of imprudent behavior, said that "... it is

because nothing happened to me so far.” This statement summarizes this finding. Moreover, findings indicate that the idea of unrealistic optimism in any area may change and become stronger or weaker depending on the experiences (direct or indirect).

Overall, these findings indicate that unrealistic optimism may largely be a result of experiences. In other words, unrealistic optimism is the design of past experiences in the future in a certain area and they may be considered as the forethoughts that guide behavior.

Modeling and Upbringing

Over half of the participants related their modeling behaviors and upbringing to their own prudent/imprudent behaviors. Findings especially indicated that modeling behavior may have played an important role in learning prudent behavior. A great majority of the participants with the tendency of prudent behavior said that they had models who also had the tendency of prudent behavior in their families. That the prudent role models were usually parents and mothers was stated by many individuals.

“...my mother is quite careful, she behaves quite prudently. Usually I think I got this prudent behavior from my mother...” (Mr. Mehmet, health officer, 30 years old)

Just a few individuals with a tendency of imprudent behavior claimed that their role models were influential in their imprudent behavior. They also added that the existence of individuals who outwardly displayed imprudent behavior encouraged others towards similarly imprudent behavior.

“We may have been behaving imprudently since we may have learned from our families. They also do these behaviors. My mother is not very careful. It may be because of that.” (Ms. Selma, nurse, 25 years old).

Analyses revealed findings that past experiences in teaching consciousness of prudent behavior and responsibility may have played a role in learning prudent behavior.

“I behave prudently because of the experiences I had in my life and profession. I was a boy scout. I have been taking care of people since I was seven years-old. It may be because of this. Secondly, I am a sportsman... A marine. It is very important to exercise caution in sports ...” (Mr. Orçun, MD, 55 years old)

Some participants stated that the number of individuals who behave imprudently is large and the reason for that is lack of experience regarding prudence, consciousness and responsibility, as well as insufficient education.

When modeling and upbringing practices are taken into consideration together, it is important to provide role models so that children in their early years can identify with and internalize attitudes and behaviors of prudent behavior. Once again,

parents as role models are important. In teaching the responsibility for prudent behavior and consciousness, a child's training in his or her early years is important. Especially in schools, in addition to basic life skills an awareness of prudent behavior should also be taught. Moreover, in order to encourage children to take responsibility and contribute to their learning of prudent behavior, scouting and other group sport activities may be useful.

Sense of Responsibility

A large majority of participants linked their explanations of prudent/imprudent behavior to a feeling of responsibility. The findings support this claim in that if a person feels responsible for their own or someone else's security (in terms of both life and property), this is related to prudent and imprudent behaviors. In particular, individuals who have the tendency of prudent behavior explained that the reason for their prudent behavior was because they had a feeling of responsibility.

"Since I am a teacher, I may be prudent because I teach children between the ages of 6 to 14. I have to be prudent in general. ... Because I am responsible for them... Definitely, I feel the responsibility of prudent behavior to society."
(Mr. Metin, teacher, 30 years old)

Findings are consistent in that individuals who committed imprudent behavior do not feel that they are responsible.

"I used to behave imprudently. Then, I would always leave caution to others, thinking that others were responsible." (Mr. Yılmaz, teacher 29 years old).

Almost all the participants who had the tendency of imprudent behavior said that they would behave imprudently when it was related to themselves; however, in cases where there is the possibility of others' being affected, they usually try to be more prudent. Findings indicate that conscience may have been involved in cases where others were involved; even individuals who had an imprudent behavior tendency started to be more careful. Very few individuals claimed that when someone with a high level of feeling responsible existed regarding prudence, they themselves might have postponed developing the same feeling of responsibility regarding prudent behavior.

"When I am with my family and friends, I know that they are prudent. Because everyone thinks that they are responsible for others. Because of that, certainly one of them is careful. For example, if I am not, my mother, and if she is not, my sisters. If my mother is careful about everything, then I may not think I myself should be careful." (Ms. Zehra, teacher, 26 years old).

This finding indicates that in order to acquire prudent behavior habitually, individuals should be conscious of a feeling of responsibility to themselves and others.

When the relationship between prudent/imprudent behavior and responsibility is taken into account in its totality, the following may be inferred: that individuals see their prudent/imprudent behavior in a situation partially depends on their decision as to whether they view the responsibility for taking cautionary measures as being

shouldered by themselves or others. Whatever the reason, it helps individuals to develop a conscious responsibility towards taking precautionary measures themselves or in others. Such a conscience may be taught/learned not only in early childhood but also in adulthood, following more experience of life.

Self-Esteem

One-fourth of the participants used statements that lead the researcher to think that self-esteem may be related to prudent/imprudent behavior. Only one of these participants has the tendency of prudent behavior, others have the tendency of imprudent behavior.

“I look at life positively. But is it contradictory for someone who looks positively not to value herself?... I mean, when I think that I do not value myself, then I may behave imprudently ...” (Mrs. Reyhan, teacher, 36 years old)

Except for one, all participants who referred to self-esteem also stated that low self-esteem may be related to imprudent behavior. This finding is interesting since it may be inferred that cultivating individuals with high self-esteem may also help individuals develop prudent behavior.

Control Belief

Half of the participants stated that their prudent/imprudent behaviors are related to control belief. A large majority of individuals who referred to control belief have the tendency of prudent behavior. There is a common characteristic in these explanations. All statements point to the role of internal control belief in prudent behavior. In contrast, none of these statements involve the role of external control belief. This finding may therefore be worthy of further investigation.

‘In the end, I should not say why I didn’t do it. First, I should exercise caution ... I mean, instead of regretting, I am taking caution in the beginning... but I exercise caution thinking that I can prevent many things.’ (Mr. Mehmet, health officer, 30 years old).

Two participants who have a tendency of imprudent behavior similar to the previous examples made statements on the relationship between prudent behavior and internal control belief. However, these statements signify that the relationship between internal control belief and prudent behavior is specific to an area where the individuals faced serious harm.

Self-Efficacy

Findings suggest that a few participants related their prudent behavior to high self-efficacy in their explanations.

‘It may be because I work at a hospital that I do not like going to a doctor... If I am not too sick, I do not go... Doctors prescribe medicine; but they also tell patients to drink a lot of water and eat vegetables. I already know this...’

Indeed, I may not know this but I know it because I think I know it ... For example, a doctor prescribes medicine, I do not use that medicine much. I mean, I choose the ones I think are necessary. I know the treatment more or less. I learned how to deal with illnesses. I trust my knowledge. So I do not rush to the doctor when I get sick. I have the idea that I know this business.” (Mr. İbrahim, health officer, 27 years old).

The finding summarized in the quotation above suggests participants sometimes think that when they have a specific ability and knowledge of an area, they may do imprudent behaviors anchored in self-efficacy. Based on this finding, it is possible to think that self-efficacy may be a predictor of imprudent behaviors in a specific area.

Sanction

Very few participants related prudent/imprudent behaviors with sanctions. These participants said that sanctions might lead individuals to exercise caution. However, when the explanations on this were investigated, they suggested to the researcher that the prudent behaviors were obedience behaviors rather than espoused behaviors.

“Sanctions have been introduced recently. For example, individuals in the construction sector have to obey the rules as much as possible. The employer sets up scaffolding, buys helmets, and has the workers use a strong rope when they work. These businesses were less controlled in the past.” (Mr. Mehmet, teacher, 55 years old)

“We wear safety belts only since we are afraid of penalties. I wear them for the same reason when driving long distances.” (Mr. Hasan, firemen, 43 years old).

When the findings from the above-quoted statements are summarized, sanction may make sometimes individuals prudent. However, these cautionary measures are only taken as long as the sanctions exist and they do not go beyond obedient behavior.

Optimism

While the interview form was being prepared, one of the goals was to get information on whether the participants' approach to life was optimistic or pessimistic. Thus, participants were asked to make predictions about their own futures. When the participants' predictions concerning their own future are analyzed, with the exception of one participant with a tendency of imprudent behavior, they all made positive predictions about their own futures.

“Not ten years from now, or even two years from now, my situation will be different. Things will get better. Will be better, I will be happier...” (Mr. Abdullah, teacher, 25 years old).

A great majority of participants with prudent behavior answered that they had pessimistic ideas about their future when asked about their own predictions.

“My heart tells me that I will be more unhappy. I do not see my future as being good... I think I will, even Turkey will, be worse off than Iraq after a decade...” (Mr. Tevfik, firemen, 40 years old).

“I think it is highly likely that in the future I will be worse off... The future will be worse ...” (Mrs. Figen, teacher, 40 years old).

When the findings are evaluated together with the quotations above, the participants with imprudent behavioral tendency were more optimistic in their view toward life. As pointed out earlier, findings indicated that imprudent behaviors related to unrealistic optimism and experiences might have influenced the unrealistic optimism. When all these findings are taken together, the researcher is of the opinion that the concept of unrealistic optimism might be a metamorphosized version of optimism. It is also possible that individuals who developed a more positive attitude towards life may have been developing the idea of unrealistic optimism through their experiences.

Necessity of Prudent Behavior

The interviews also aimed to discover to what extent participants believed in the necessity of prudent behavior. Participants who had a tendency of imprudent behavior to use short answers implied that indeed they were aware of the possible negative consequences of imprudent behaviors. However, they still did not have internalized beliefs that they should exercise caution in the areas in which they behaved imprudently. It is as if these participants have the following understanding: *“It is necessary to exercise caution; however, this necessity is rather for others than myself.”*

All the participants with imprudent behavior, while explaining the necessity of exercising caution, began by saying that indeed, they believed it was necessary. However, as they progressed they provided various reasons why it was not necessary to exercise caution in the cases where they behaved imprudently. As understood from the participants' statements on this topic, this type of thinking either led them towards imprudent behavior or facilitated their resorting to imprudent behaviors.

“I view wearing gloves and masks as things that are really required by medicine... I really believe that imprudence should be avoided and thereby mistakes in medicine... But we wear them only if we know that a person has a really bad illness, then of course we may feel that we need to exercise caution. For example, if the patient has AIDS or a disease which is contagious through skin, then we feel the need to exercise caution. But except for that, we do not wear gloves and masks.” (Mr. Murat, MD, 35 years old).

(However,) When the statements of participants exhibiting prudent behavior regarding necessity are analyzed, the answers for this group show that they really believe in the necessity of prudent behavior.

“The consequences of imprudent behavior are quite heavy. For example, our profession always requires caution. There are rules for even a small needle. You need to stick it back to its protection in its casing. Dressing a wound should be done with gloves because all diseases like the hepatitis virus are spread by contagion. It is very important to wash one’s hands after examining a patient, I mean one needs to be prudent. Because diseases are highly contagious. One needs to exercise extra caution under the conditions we work.” (Mr. Ali, MD, 36 years old).

The findings above suggest that whether individuals have an internalized belief partially or not explains their prudent/imprudent behaviors.

Participant Evaluations on the Prevalence of Prudent/Imprudent Behaviors in Society

In the interviews, participant evaluations were collected on how common behaviors that reflected their own behavioral tendencies were in society. Participant responses showed that groups with both tendencies made remarks that overlap. Mr. Yılmaz’s remark *“Imprudence is knee-length (meaning quite high). I mean that imprudence is much more, certainly there is much more.”* This statement summarizes the common view shared by both behavioral tendency groups.

All the participants with the tendency of prudent behavior claimed that the number of individuals with prudent behaviors was quite low in society. At the same time, all the participants with the tendency of imprudent behavior claimed that individuals with imprudent behaviors were rather higher in number than individuals with prudent behavior in Turkish society. When all the responses are evaluated together, it may be inferred that from the perspective of the participants, imprudent behavior is quite common in Turkish society.

Social Responses to Prudent/Imprudent Behaviors

The analysis of interviews indicated that social responses for both prudent and imprudent behaviors were negative. Even though participant explanations for both types of behaviors point to negative responses, the characteristics of these responses may be different.

Some examples of social response statements for participant explanations are provided below in groups.

Examples of Social Responses to Prudent Behaviors: *“It is not your business? Why it is needed? Why are you so cautious? Are you going to salvage this institution? As if you know everything. It won’t happen to me, enough! You have been bothering people around you! I mean, you have been creating unnecessary stress and torturing people around you. Why do you exaggerate so much? It is enough. Never mind. Why do you fret yourself? God knows, how difficult life must be for your spouse?”*

Examples of Social Responses to Imprudent Behaviors: *“Why don’t you be more careful? Look, you do this like this; but it is very dangerous! Don’t please for*

God's sake! How can you do things like that? Why do you tire yourself out? If you don't consider yourself, think about your children. I will complain about you to your spouse."

When the response statements were evaluated together, there were more social responses to prudent behaviors and individuals around were quite uncomfortable because of prudent behaviors. When this finding is considered with another finding which indicated the prevalence of imprudent behaviors in Turkish society, since imprudent behaviors are prevalent, individuals might become surfeited with this type of behaviors. As a result, society may have undergone a desensitization of sorts.

Manner in which Participants were Influenced by Societal Responses

Interviews determined that participants with both types of tendencies did not seem to be influenced by societal responses. Examples of statements provided by the participants on how they were influenced by social responses are as follows:

Manner in which Prudent Participants were Influenced by Societal Responses: *"I will certainly continue with the way I am used to." "I will definitely do as I know." "I am more determined." and "I think I will be prudent until I die."*

Manner in which Imprudent Participants were Influenced by Societal Responses: *"When my spouse tells me something, I sometimes say 'OK' not to upset her. However, if she does not tell me the next day, I don't take any notice. I complete my work claiming that 'it is almost over.'" "I continue with the same set of behaviors." "Even though my spouse warns me saying 'don't do it!', I always do."*

Although the participant answers denote that their behaviors were resistant to social responses, there are signs that prudent behavior might have been a stronger tendency than the imprudent behavior. One possibility is that prudent behavior might have been more internalized than imprudent behavior.

Conclusion

Findings indicate the influence of many factors while prudent/imprudent behavior was being formed. Findings also indicate that the quality of early childhood life (in the family circle and the existence of role models who behave prudently/imprudently, the quality of upbringing, direct or indirect experiences), as well as the quality of adulthood life experiences were all important in the process of forming prudent/imprudent behavior. Moreover, findings also point to self-respect, self-efficacy, control belief and having an optimistic/pessimistic outlook towards life being influential on imprudent behavior. Another important point the findings indicate alludes to the idea that unrealistic optimism might have a role in the imprudent behaviors of individuals, determined by some cognitive and motivational evaluational biases (Blanton, Axsom, McClive and Price, 2001; Higgins, Amand, and Poole, 1997).

When this finding is taken into account for individuals with the tendency of imprudent behavior, they did not have an internalized idea of the necessity of taking precautionary measures. This internalized idea did not include them exercising caution. Furthermore, the importance of unrealistic optimism in taking self-protective

measures (McKenna, 1993; Tyler and Cook, 1984; Weinstein, 1989) was also supported by the findings of this study.

The statement that individuals with the tendency of imprudent behavior did not have an internalized idea of taking precautionary measures while committing risky behaviors reminds us of Festinger's claim that individuals change their beliefs in order to be consistent with their behaviors (cited in Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959). Thus, rather than attempting to change individuals' imprudent behavioral habits, it would be more functional to teach prudential behavioral habits. Finally, quantitative research should also be carried out to investigate the relationship between the tendency of imprudent behavior and many other related concepts such as control belief, self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, death anxiety.

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