

Subjective Well-Being, Positive and Negative Affect in Turkish University Students

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Abstract

The current study used a survey model to analyze 450 university students between 18 and 28 years of age to investigate associations between subjective well-being, positive and negative affect. Data were collected from Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) and Subjective Well-Being Scale. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were determined. We found that there was a significant negative relationship between subjective well-being and negative affect. However, there was a significant positive relationship between subjective well-being and positive affect. Besides, it was found that negative and positive affects making significantly explain subjective well-being.

Keywords: subjective well-being, negative affect and positive affect

Emotions are born with life, and they develop and enrich through life. Emotional reactions of people are different than each other, and each person has a unique emotional characteristic (Köknel, 1997). For the individuals to handle the problems they are facing, first of all they should realize the emotions they have against that problem. Many psychological support approaches highlight emotional awareness as the main purpose for changing life and state that it is very important in mental health of the individuals (Kuzucu, 2006). Individuals who are in positive emotionality are happy, calm, free from stress, energetic and they establish good relations with the others (Nonaka, 1994). Individuals experience negative emotions such as grief, sadness, burnout and failure at times during their life. In order to cope with such negative emotions, they need to relieve, calm down and most importantly get over these negative emotions without any damage. (Deniz, Kesici, & Sümer 2008). Negative emotions are transformed into a more positive feeling state, allowing for the clearer apprehension of one's immediate situation and the adoption of actions that change oneself and/or the environment in appropriate and effective ways (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Isen, 2000)

It is assumed that there is a positive relation between emotional awareness and psychological well-being (Kuzucu, 2006). In the recent years, another concept analyzed about happiness and mental health of individuals is subjective well-being. Subjective well-being enables individuals to evaluate their life cognitively and effectively. This subjective definition about the quality of life is democratic in respect that each individual has the right to state whether their life is valuable or not (Diener, 2000). The focus of subjective well-being is why and how life is evaluated with positive means (Diener, 1984).

Subjective well-being is a field of psychology which studies individuals' self assessment of their lives. These assessments people make are basically gathered under two different areas: cognitive features (e.g. life satisfaction) and assessment about feelings (for example, sadness and grief) they experience. The individual can make conscious assessments about the life as a whole or an aspect of life. This assessment about life can be about an emotional state. That is the individual can react to pleasant and nasty emotions or emotional situations in the pace of life (Yetim, 2001).

Subjective well-being is how an individual decides the importance of his life (Diener, 2000). If the person is highly satisfied with his life and frequently experiences positive emotions and experiences negative emotions rarely, s/he has high subjective well-being (Eryılmaz, 2010). Subjective well-being and life satisfaction are stated as the main aims of

life by many people. Subjective well-being is closely related with how one assesses his life. It is argued that convergence or divergence between individuals' goals and their perception of extend to which they have reached these goals play a determining role in reaching happiness (Rask, Astedt-Kurkin, & Laippala, 2002).

Subjective well-being has two main components: cognitive and emotional. The cognitive component determines perception of life satisfaction. In other words, life satisfaction makes up the cognitive aspect of happiness (Dorahy, Lewis, Schumaker, Akuamoah-Boateng, Duze, & Sibiya, 2000). Emotional component includes our positive and negative emotions (Rask et al., 2002). Subjective well-being requires individual to assess life positively. Positive emotions bring about satisfaction, self-commitment, attachment and meaning of life (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

Positive affect includes trust, interest, hope, pride, cheerfulness, and negative affect includes anger, hatred, guiltiness, sadness. Life satisfaction dimension is the cognitive component of subjective well-being. It reflects individuals' assessment of satisfaction in various aspects of life (Myers & Diener, 1995).

In studies on subjective well-being, one of the issues handled is how certain characteristics of life and personality contribute to individual's well-being. According to Diener (1984), the factors that affect individual's subjective well-being are categorized under the following headings: a) bio-social variables like gender and age, b) personality variables like self-esteem and extroversion and c) social support variables like family, job satisfaction.

Experimental findings show that individuals with high levels of subjective well-being display less mental disorders, they function more positively in the social environment, they have stronger interpersonal relationships, an optimal health oriented life style, more conformist personalities and also cognitive styles that enables more personal development possibilities (Diener, 1984, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith 1999; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). High level of subjective well-being is the determinant of appropriate level of functionality (Keyes, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2001) and it is accepted as an important personal and social goal (Diener, 2000).

The studies about the subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Myers & Diener, 1995) show that subjective well-being is composed of three dimensions, and these are positive emotion, negative emotion and life satisfaction. For subjective well-being to be high, positive emotions should be more common than negative emotions and cognitive judgment of the

individual about the quality of life should be positive (Tuzgöl-Dost, 2004). And in this research, the purpose is to analyze the relation between the subjective well-being of university students, and their positive and negative emotions.

Method

Participants

The survey model was used in the current study. The sample set of the research was taken from faculties of education, occupational, science, and technical education at Selcuk University in Konya/Turkey. Participants were 450 university students (219 female and 231 male) who participated in the research voluntarily. The mean age of the participants was 21.91 years, with a standard deviation of 1.51 years.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Gender	450	1,00	2,00	1,51	0,50
Age	450	18,00	28,00	21,91	1,51
Negative affect	450	10,00	50,00	22,58	7,68
Positive affect	450	10,00	50,00	34,12	7,63
Subjective well-being	450	103,00	229,00	173,06	25,54

Instruments

The Subjective Well-Being Scale (SWS). The SWS was developed by Tuzgöl Dost (2005). The scale consists of 46 items. By assessing individuals' cognitive appraisals of their lives and the frequency and intensity with which they experience negative and positive feelings, the scale intends to measure their degree of subjective well-being. The SWS includes evaluative statements about major domains of life and about positive and negative emotionality. A 5-point Likert scale is used: "(5) fully agree;" "(4) mostly agree;" "(3) agree;" "(2) somewhat agree;" and "(1) disagree." Each item has a score ranging from 1 to 5. There are 26 positive and 20 negative statements. In scoring, regular (positive) items are assigned points 1 to 5, whereas negative items are assigned points 5 to 1. The lowest possible score on the scale is 46 and the highest is 230. Higher scores indicate higher degree of

subjective well-being. Internal reliability for the SWS was a Cronbach-alpha coefficient of .93. In order to determine test re-test reliability the scale was administered to 39 persons. The time interval between two administrations was two weeks. Test re-test reliability yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = .86$.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): The PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) consists of two 10-item mood scales and was developed to provide brief measures of positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). Turkish adaptation studies were carried out by Gençöz (2000). Gençöz found two dimensions as in the original form and internal consistency coefficients were .83 and .86 for positive and negative affect, respectively; test-retest reliability for each was $r = .45$ and $r = .54$, respectively. Criterion-related validity was assessed by examining the relationship between the Beck Depression Scale and the Beck Anxiety Scale. The correlation coefficients were -.48 and -.22 for positive affect, .51 and .47 for negative affect.

Data analysis

SPSS 16.0 was used in order to evaluate the data which were collected by the scales employed in the research. The Pearson correlation coefficient technique was used to determine the relationship between subjective well-being and positive affect and negative affect in university students. Simple linear regression analysis was used to search whether positive affect and negative affect significantly explain subjective well-being.

Results

Relationships between subjective well-being, positive and negative affect in University students were studied by Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and results are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Correlations between subjective well-being, positive and negative affect

	Positive affect	Negative affect
Subjective well-being	.35**	-.49**

** $p < .01$

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a statistically significant ($p < .01$) positive relationship between subjective well-being and positive affect. There is also a statistically significant ($p < .01$) negative relationship between subjective well-being and negative affect.

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Analysis on subjective well-being

Predictors	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² _{ch}	<i>F</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Beta</i>	β	<i>p</i>
(Costant)						177.71		.00**
Negative affect	.55	.30	.30	95.16	2/447	-1.43	-.43	.00**
Positive affect						.81	.24	.00**

It was seen that negative and positive affects entered to the model, developed to explain the subjective well-being, in first was seen to be significant in the model ($R^2=.30$, $F(2/447)=95.16$, $p < .01$). Negative affect ($\beta = -.43$, $p < .00$) and positive affect ($\beta = .24$, $p < .00$) was found to be significant.

Discussion

In our research, it was found that there is a positive relation between the subjective well-being of university students and their positive emotions. Also the study revealed that there is a negative relation between subjective well-being and negative emotions. It is observed as a result of the analysis about the explain ability of the subjective well-being with positive affects and negative affects that while positive affects and negative affects explains 30% of the subjective well-being. The findings of our study showed that as the positive emotions of the students increase, their subjective well-being level also increases, and as the negative emotions increase, their subjective well-being levels decrease. This result suggests the importance of individuals to be in positive emotions. Also in a way, this study supports the approach in the subjective well-being studies (Diener, 1984; Myers & Diener, 1995) about the subjective well-being having two dimensions as positive emotion and negative emotion. This result shows that increasing the positive emotions of individuals and decreasing their negative emotions will affect their subjective well-being positively.

For this reason, it would be beneficial to discuss positive and negative emotions in the psychological consultation process about the happiness and mental health of individuals.

Furthermore, the activities performed about the positive and negative emotions within the guidance studies will be beneficial to increase the subjective well-being levels of students.

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