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Meaning in Life and Subjective Well-Being among Turkish University Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between meaning in life and subjective well-being. The sample of the study consisted of 232 university students (171 female / 61male) from Sakarya University. The Satisfaction with Life Scale, The Positive-Negative Affect Scale and The Meaning in Life Questionnaire were used to collect data. In data analysis, Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis were used. The findings showed that presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life significantly predict subjective well-being. According to regression analysis, meaning in life accounts for 34% of the variance within subjective well-being. The findings were discussed and in the light of these findings suggestions for future studies were proposed.

Keywords: Meaning in life, subjective well-being, presence of meaning, search for meaning

1. Introduction

Human beings have been questioning the meaning of life and trying to make their lives more meaningful since the beginning of their existence. Many religions, philosophies and other disciplines up to now have tried to contribute to the search for meaning in life (Sezer, 2012; Pope, 1999). The science of psychology is definitely one of those contributing to the search for meaning by humans. Especially after

World War II, questions about meaning in life have become an important issue. Psychologist Viktor Frankl, who escaped from Nazi death camps, is the founder of 'Logotherapy', and attempts to answer these questions in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl was influenced by the ideas of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer, and also mentioned his own experiences and observations from Auschwitz concentration camp. Frankl observed that people who had no meaning in their lives died earlier than people who had purpose in their lives (Frankl, 2000). According to Frankl, lack of meaning in life is associated with many pathologies such as weakness in the face of difficulties, depression, suicide, dependence and negative well-being (Frankl, 2000; Schnell, 2009).

The concept of well-being, according to many philosophers and psychology researchers, is based on the eudaimonic and hedonic approaches of Aristotle (Waterman, 1993). While the eudaimonic approach refers to self-actualization and full functioning, the hedonic point of view defines well-being as satisfaction and happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Today, happiness is explained within the concept of subjective well-being (Eryılmaz, 2011). Subjective well-being, besides positive and negative affection, includes life satisfaction, which evaluates an individual's life and expresses the level of life goals one attains (Tuzgöl-Dost, 2010). Therefore, subjective well-being is a three-dimensional construct including positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Hybron, 2000). Life satisfaction represents the cognitive side of subjective well-being and includes judgments about an individual's satisfaction from different life areas (Myers and Diener, 1995). High satisfaction from life and more positive affect mean that the individual has high subjective well-being (Eryılmaz & Aypay, 2011).

Based on the literature, the concept of meaning in life is positively associated with many concepts examined within positive psychology (Melton & Schulenberg, 2008; Steger, 2005; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). In a study investigating the relationship between meaning in life and life satisfaction which represents the cognitive side of subjective well-being, it was found that there is a positive relationship between meaning in life and life satisfaction (Bonebright, Clay & Ankenmann, 2000). Another study of meaning in life similarly indicates a positive relationship between happiness represented by subjective well-being and meaning in life (Debats, Lubbe & Vezeman, 1993). Although there are existing studies on the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being, there has not been enough research on this issue in Turkey yet. The aim of the present study is to investigate the association between meaning in life and subjective well-being in Turkish culture. Two hypotheses were determined for the aim of the study:

H1: Presence of meaning in life positively predicts subjective well-being.

H2: Search for meaning in life negatively predicts subjective well-being.

2. Method

A relational screening model was used in this study. The aim was to examine the relationships between meaning in life and subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is the dependent variable and meaning in life and search for meaning in life are the independent variables of the research.

2.1. Participants

Participants of the study are 232 students from Sakarya University Faculty of Education, 171 female and 61 male. Age range of participants is 18-26 and mean of age is 21.43 (S=1.68).

2.2. Measures
2.2.1. The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS*)* is a 5-item, Likert type self-report questionnaire, developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). Diener et al., (1985) found that internal consistency of SWLS is .87 and test-retest reliability coefficient is .82. Scale was adapted to Turkish by Yetim (1993).

Yetim (1993) also reported that internal consistency of SWLS is .76 and test-retest reliability coefficient is .85.

2.2.2. Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)

Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) was developed by Watson, Tellegen and Clark (1988) and adapted to Turkish by Gençöz (2000). PANAS is a Likert type questionnaire including 20 items; 10 negative and 10 positive. Gençöz (2000) reported that internal consistency is .83 for "Positive affect" subscale and .86 for "Negative affect" subscale.

2.2.3. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) was developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler (2006). The questionnaire is Likert type with 10 items and has two subscales: Search and Presence. Steger et al. (2006) reported that internal consistency coefficients are between .83 and .85 for "search" subscale, and between .83 and .88 for "presence" subscale. It was adapted to Turkish by Terzi, Tekinalp and Leuwerke (2011).

2.3. Procedure

A personal information questionnaire was also used to collect the demographical information of participants in addition to other measurement tools. Cross-sectional design was used and data was obtained at one time. Group practices were performed. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and informed consent was considered. Questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes and data was analyzed by SPSS 15.0 and Lisrel 8.71 programs. Subjective well-being is defined as life satisfaction, feeling more positive emotions and feeling less negative emotions (Diener, 1984). Based on the theoretical definition, SWLS and PANAS were used to measure subjective well-being. Subjective well-being was considered by the following formula:

Subjective Well-being = (Satisfaction with Life + Positive Affect) – Negative Affect

3. Results
3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Mean scores and standard deviations of research variables were calculated and findings are displayed on Table 1.

Table1. Mean scores and standard deviations of searching for meaning in life, presence of meaning in life and subjective well-being

Variables	$\overline{X}$	Sd
Presence	27.41	5.88
Search	22.98	7.42
Positive affect	33.15	6.97
Negative affect	22.74	7.01
Satisfaction with life	21.86	6.05
Subjective well-being	32.26	13.87

N=232

Mean scores of search for meaning in life, presence of meaning in life and subjective well-being are showed on Table 1. According to these findings, the mean score of presence is 27.41 (Sd=5.88), mean score of search is 22.98 (Sd=7.42) and mean score of subjective well-being is 32.26 (Sd=13.87).

3.2. Multiple Regression Analysis Findings

Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to investigate the relationships between subjective well-being and interpersonal relationship styles (see results on Table 2).

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis findings of subjective well-being prediction of presence and search variables

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
Presence	1.327	.127	. 56	10.482	.000
Search	-.274	.100	-.15	2.738	.007

R=.58, R^2=.34, F=59.281, p<.001

According to the findings, presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life subscales significantly predict subjective well-being (R=.58, R^2=.34, F=59.281, p<.001). In regression analysis, it was found that presence of meaning in life positively affects subjective well-being (β= .56; p= .000) and search for meaning in life negatively affects well-being (β= -.15; p<.007). Meaning in life accounts for 34% of the variance within subjective well-being.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Meaning in life and subjective well-being are important research topics of positive psychology. This study aimed to test the relationships between presence and search for meaning in life and subjective well-being. Research findings indicated that presence of meaning in life significantly predicts subjective well-being in a positive way and search for meaning in life significantly predicts subjective well-being in a negative way. Accordingly, presence and search for meaning in life account for 34% of variance of subjective well-being. These findings show that meaning in life is an important component of subjective well-being. It is inferred that presence of meaning in life has an increasing effect and search for meaning in life has a reducing effect on subjective well-being. Previous research done in different cultures also shows the same findings as this study (Cohen & Cairns, 2011; Galang, Magno, Paterno & Roldan, 2011; Ho, Cheung & Cheung, 2008; Morgan & Fastides, 2009).

The findings of the study can be utilized on two levels. The first is the positive relationship between presence of meaning in life and subjective well-being. Human beings are the only creatures who have awareness of meaning in life and death. Meaning in life can be described by the answer to the question 'What am I living for?', and individuals who can answer this question have meaning in their lives. The first hypothesis is that presence of meaning in life positively predicts subjective well-being. Findings of the study confirm the hypothesis. The second hypothesis was determined that search for meaning in life predicts subjective well-being negatively. Findings also confirmed this hypothesis. Search for meaning in life is actually a positive concept. Therefore this question arises: Why is the search by individuals for meaning in their lives negatively associated with subjective well-being? Search for meaning in life may indicate that there is still no meaning in life. Hence, search for meaning in life was found negatively associated with subjective well-being.

Consequently, findings of this study would contribute to the existing literature. Cultural factors are directly associated with the meaning in life. In this context, results of this research on Turkish university students have clinical utility. Considering the results, meaning in life can be focused on during

psychological counseling procedures and programs aiming to increase happiness. Future research may examine the mediating effect of variables such as religion and altruism, which contribute to the meaning in life, between subjective well-being and meaning of life.

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