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# Dimensions of mental health: life satisfaction, anxiety and depression: a preventive mental health study in Ankara University students population

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## Abstract

The main objective of this study is to investigate the interrelation between life satisfaction, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness among Ankara University students. 364 university students completed a test battery including the Beck Depression Inventory, the Beck Anxiety Inventory, the Hopelessness Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Life satisfaction was negatively and significantly correlated with the scores from depression, anxiety and hopelessness scales. The findings suggest that the relationship between developing a psychological problems is highly associated the perceived levels of anxiety, depression and life satisfaction. In addition life satisfaction can be taken into account as a moderator variable for mental health studies.

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*Keywords:* Mental health; life satisfaction; positive psychology.

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## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is the transition from childhood into adulthood. It is a period of significant biological, psychological, and cognitive development. It has been described as a period of both opportunity and risk (Chow, 2005) Leffert & Petersen, 1995). As part of the psychosocial developmental, most young adult deal with existential issues, at some level, in their efforts to achieve integrity or coherence.

Mental health refers to how people evaluate their lives and includes variables such as life satisfaction, lack of depression and anxiety, and positive moods and emotions (Diener and Diener, 1995). As subjective well-being, measured by life satisfaction, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness there should be an important and meaningful link between them. At this point, depression, anxiety, hopelessness and life satisfaction can be handled as the dimensions of mental health. Thus there has been an increased debate related to depression and common mental health disorders. While life satisfaction has been found as statistically significant with depression, anxiety in

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university students (Guney, 2009) the high prevalence of depression in university students population inevitably remind the clinical syndromes (Horstmanshof, et.al. 2008). Is subjective well-being (SWB) a necessary condition for mental health? It appears that some people function well in many aspects of their lives, but are not particularly happy. It has not yet been determined, however, the level of SWB that is optimal for mental health and good functioning.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the links between depression, anxiety, hope and life satisfaction mental health as the existential issue of integrity to the society among an youth population in Turkey.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 364 college students from Ankara University in Ankara, Turkey. There were 188 male (% 51.6) and 176 female (%48.4) students whose ages ranged from 19 to 25 yrs ( $M= 22.31$ ,  $sd=1.20$ ).

### 2.2. Measures

*Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)* (Diener, et.al., 1985; Turkish version, Yetim, 1991 and Köker, 1991) is a 5-item, 7-point Likert-type scale to measure respondents' life satisfaction.

*Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II)* (Beck et al., 1996; Turkish version; Şahin, 1988-89) is a widely used self-report scale to assess depressive symptoms, consists of 21 items, each of which is rated on a 4-point scale (0-3).

*Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)* (Beck et al., 1990; Turkish version; Ulusoy et.al., 1998) ) is a 21-item, self-report measure of anxiety severity experienced over the previous week. Respondents report their symptoms based on a 4-point Likert-type scale.

*Hopelessness Scale (HS)* (Beck et al.,1974; Turkish version; Durak, 1994) It is a self report scale which consists 20 questions. It has been developed to determine pessimist future expectations. The answers should be "true" or "false".

### 2.3. Procedure

The measurement tools were formed into a test battery by being arranged in a mixed way to control the sequence influence in the application process. Then, the materials were given to the participants in their classrooms of the different faculties of Ankara University, Ankara/Turkey. Statistical analysis were performed by SPSS. Pearson Correlation, One-way ANOVA and Tukey test used.

## 3. Results

The results pointed out anxiety scores, depression scores and the hopelessness scores statistically significantly correlated with the satisfaction with life (Table 1).

Four sub-groups were formed from data. The subjects scored 19 and 19+ from BDI were chosen as depressed (N=63) group. The subjects scored 26 and 26+ from BAI were assigned as anxious group (N=31). The subjects having a higher scores from cut-off points of the both BDI and BAI were assigned as depressed-anxious (N=35). Under the cut off points from BDI and BAI were assigned as "normal" group (N=235).

Table 1. Pearson correlations between the variables (N=364)

	BAI	BDI	SWLS	BHS
BAS	1			
BDI	0.57 **	1		
SWLS	-0.26 **	-0.48 **	1	
BHS	0.39 **	0.51 **	-0.41 **	1

\*\*. $p<.01$

Oneway ANOVA is computed to compare hopelessness and life satisfaction scores (Table 2).

Table 2. Oneway ANOVA Between groups (N = 364)

	Normal (N = 35)	Anxious (N = 11)	Depressed (N = 13)	Anxious-Depressed (N = 35)	F (, 360)
	M±SD	M±SD	M±SD	M±SD	
SWLS	23.70±9.8 A	22.23±8.3 A	16.92±6.2 B	18.97±7.02 I	2.158**
HS	5.36±3.36 A	7.52±3.76 B	10.09±6.4 C	10.24±4.57 C	3.706**

\*\* $p < .01$  Tukey multiple comparison test was used for Between group comparisons. Significant differences were shown as kapital letter(A,B,C) ( $p < .05$ ).

The results of oneway ANOVA between groups indicated a statistically significant difference for life satisfaction and hopelessness scores ( $p < .01$ ). For the multiple group comparisons Tukey test was run. Tukey indicated a statistically significant difference for the means of depressed and anxious-depressed groups than those of normal and anxious groups. Dealing with the life satisfaction scores, Tukey test for between group comparison was run. The results pointed out the means of normal and anxious groups were higher than those of depressed and depressed-anxious groups ( $p < .05$ ). Similarly the mean of hopelessness scores for both depressed group and depressed-anxious group were much more higher than those of normal and anxious groups ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally the hopelessness scores of the subjects with higher scores from BAI were higher than the subjects scored under the cut off scores from BAI, BDI, and HS.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of this study revealed that self-reported life satisfaction was strongly associated with concurrent depressive symptoms, hope and anxiety. In other words the state of psychological well-being across the four domains (pleasure, hope, anxiety, and depression) was associated with perceptions of safety, integrity to daily life whereas life satisfaction was associated with perceived of the distress, depressed mood, hopelessness.

On the other hand, limitations need to be considered when the study results are interpreted. First, although the study population seemingly is representative, the sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Given the favourable results, a replication study with a larger sample is warranted. Second, we limited the depression assessment to a single measure. For future studies, a stratified sample could be used to classify participants according to whether having suicidal thoughts and/or attempts. Third, we measured all four psychological constructions (that is, depression, anxiety, hope and life satisfaction), using quantitative self-rating scales. Future studies might include clinical and qualitative assessments of depression, anxiety, hope and life satisfaction.

In summary, it is apparent that depression, anxiety, hope and satisfaction with life are highly interrelated among the university students population and may contribute to their mastery of the psychosocial tasks of integrity to their social life. This study is unique as it concurrently addresses all four important dimensions with a specific focus on the adolescent developmental period of Turkish youth population in general. These favourable findings suggest a compelling need for more preventive mental health survey studies serving for the university student population and also the intentional assessment of depression, anxiety, hope, and life satisfaction in terms of positive psychology practice in both community and clinical settings and further exploration of these concepts in research.

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