

Investigation of the effect of the life satisfaction and psychological well-being of nursing students on their happiness levels

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine the effect of nursing students' life satisfaction and psychological well-being on their perceived happiness levels.

Method: The study, which was designed as a descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out in Turkey with 264 students of nursing.

Findings: Students' life satisfaction and happiness ($r = 0.722$), psychological well-being and happiness ($r = 0.743$), and psychological well-being and life satisfaction ($r = 0.689$) were found to be positively and highly correlated. Students' gender and perception of income status and general health status affected their happiness levels. It was revealed that life satisfaction and psychological well-being predict happiness (63.6%).

Practice implications: The factors of life satisfaction and psychological well-being play a decisive role in the happiness of nursing students.

KEYWORDS

happiness, life satisfaction, nursing students, psychological well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

Happiness is an emotion related to one's own life and includes positive components (Ergun & Meric, 2020; Kangal, 2013). It is the predominance of positive feelings and opinions about one's own life (Kangal, 2013). Happiness, which is tried to be understood and achieved with questions such as "What is the meaning of happiness?," "What factors affect happiness?," and "How can people be happy?," is a current and important issue. The concepts of "happiness" and "subjective well-being" are used synonymously in positive psychology. Subjective well-being includes three closely-related elements, which are positive affects, negative affects, and life satisfaction (Civitci, 2012).

Life satisfaction occurs as a result of the difference between what a person has in their life and what they want. It includes the satisfaction of the person in the past, the present, and the possible future, the desire to continue their life differently from the current situation, and the thoughts and ideas of others in the person's life (Demir et al., 2021). Life satisfaction is affected by conditions such as

occupation, marriage, health, parental attitude, income levels, socio-economic status, grade point average, and spirituality. A study revealed that university students' life satisfaction is related to their future expectations and perceived academic success (Yılmaz et al., 2020). The concept of life satisfaction is expressed as an important element in complete happiness (Yelpaze & Yakar, 2019). This concept is also an important element for psychological health and well-being (Kopmaz et al., 2017).

Psychological well-being is based on previous clinical and adult developmental psychology, which reveals one's existing potential for self-actualization and meaningful life when faced with difficulties (Kuscu et al., 2019). It defines the successful struggle with existential situations such as progressing in line with predetermined goals, having positive relationships with others, developing new positive relationships, and making efforts to develop (Demir et al., 2021). Psychological well-being is a concept related to how well one can function as a member of society. It also impacts subjective well-being related to life, namely a feeling of happiness (Kim, 2019).

University students may experience many academic and social concerns (Ergun & Meric, 2020). It has been reported that high rates of depression, anxiety, and stress among university students cause increasing public concern in Western societies; however, this issue is mostly unexplored in Eastern societies (Demirbatir et al., 2013). Students of nursing experience higher levels of academic stress than in other disciplines, as they have to adapt to various clinical environments in practice and are exposed to various negative patient and hospital conditions as well as death in practice settings. Academic stress elicits psychological distress and impacts students' happiness and psychological well-being. Additionally, students of nursing also have to cope with the emotional and academic demands of patient care (Chow et al., 2018). A systematic review by Priano et al. (2018) showed that nurses experience high rates of depression, compassion fatigue, and burnout, and they exhibit less healthy lifestyle behaviors and work–life balance. Accordingly, it is reported that studies focusing on improving the health, psychological well-being and life satisfaction of current students of nursing, who will be the future workforce, may have far-reaching effects (Williams et al., 2018). For this reason, it is necessary to explore the relationship between these concepts and how they affect each other.

Our literature review showed that Kuscu et al. (2019) identified the positive effect of the psychological well-being levels of nursing students on their life satisfaction. Chow et al. (2018) found that there is a significant relationship between resilience and psychological well-being of students of nursing, and the results show that individuals need to increase their resilience to improve their psychological well-being and to improve their perceived well-being to improve their resilience. Aboalshamat et al. (2018) reported a significant relationship between resilience and life satisfaction, resilience and happiness, and life satisfaction and happiness in their study conducted with medical and dentistry students.

When the studies conducted at national and international level are examined, it is seen that no studies have yet investigated the happiness level, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being of students of nursing together. Therefore, this study aims to examine the happiness level decisions of nursing students based on life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Aim

This study aims to examine the effect of nursing students' life satisfaction and psychological well-being on their perceived happiness levels.

2.2 | Research questions

1. What are the students' levels of life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and happiness?

2. Is there a relationship between students' life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and happiness levels?
3. Do students' happiness levels change in line with their socio-demographic variables?
4. Does life satisfaction play a mediating role between psychological well-being and happiness?
5. Does life satisfaction predict psychological well-being and happiness?

2.3 | Population and sampling

This study is a descriptive, cross-sectional study. The research was conducted in the nursing department of a private university in Konya between March 10 and April 10, 2021. The target population of this study were 300 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students of nursing. It aimed to reach the whole target population in the study. Inclusion criteria of the study in the sample were being a nursing student at the university where the research was conducted, continuing education on the dates of the research, and not being on leave during these dates, volunteering to participate in the research, and completing the data collection forms. The sample of the research was made up of 264 students who met the inclusion criteria.

In this study, using the G*Power program, the power of the work with a margin of error of 0.05 was calculated after data collection. The relationship between the variables in the study was revealed by standard multiple regression analysis. Accordingly, the effect size was 0.64 in the sample studied; the α value was calculated as 0.05 and the power as 100%.

2.4 | Data collection tools

The Demographic Information Form, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS), and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Short Form (OSQ-SF) were used to amass research data.

2.4.1 | Demographic Information Form

The form was prepared by the researchers in line with the literature. It consists of 16 questions related to sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, year of study, presence, and number of siblings, monthly income level perception, family type, parental education level, occupational status, and place of residence.

2.4.2 | OSQ-SF

The Turkish adaptation of the short form of the scale developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) was developed by Dogan and Cotok (2011). The short form of the scale consists of seven items on a six-point

Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Moderately Disagree*, 3 = *Slightly Disagree*, 4 = *Slightly Agree*, 5 = *Moderately Agree*, 6 = *Strongly Agree*). An increase in the scale score means an increase in the level of happiness. The Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient of the OSQ-SF is 0.74, and the test-retest reliability coefficient is 0.85 (Dogan & Cotok, 2011).

2.4.3 | SWLS

This was developed by Diener et al. (1985) to determine the satisfaction people get from life. The adaptation of the scale into the Turkish language was carried out by Dagli and Baysal (2016). The scale has a single factor structure and consists of five items. The items are scored on a five-point scale (I strongly disagree (1), I slightly agree (2), I moderately agree (3), I mostly agree (4), I strongly agree (5)). The Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.88, and the test-retest reliability is 0.97 (Dagli & Baysal, 2016).

2.4.4 | PWBS

This was developed by Diener et al. (2010) to measure socio-psychological well-being as a complement to the existing well-being measures. The Turkish language adaptation of the scale was done by Telef (2013). The items of the PWBS are scored on a seven-point scale from I strongly disagree (1) to I strongly agree (7). Scores range from 8 to 56. A high score indicates that the individual has many psychological resources and strengths to draw on (Telef, 2013).

2.5 | Data collection process

The data was collected online using Google Forms. It was accepted that the participants who ticked the box next to the "I agree" statement gave written consent to the statement of "If you have read the information above and if you are participating in this study totally voluntarily, please check the box below with an X" as a prerequisite for the questionnaire. After the students gave consent to participate in the study, they completed the data collection tools online via Google Forms.

2.6 | Data analysis

The analyses were carried out using the SPSS 25 program. Descriptive statistical methods (number, percentage, min-max values, mean, and standard deviation) were used when evaluating the data. It was discovered that the data were not normally distributed. For data to show a normal distribution, the skewness and kurtosis values should be between ± 3 (Shao, 2002). As outliers increase the value of error variance, they also affect the power of statistical tests. For this reason, before the statistical tests, it was established whether outliers

were present in the analyzed data sets. Since the data were suitable for normal distribution, a *t* test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) analysis were performed as parametric tests. The Pearson correlation analysis was performed to establish the relationship between the scales. The Bonferroni analysis was used to determine the difference in multiple comparisons. In addition, standard multiple regression and process analysis were performed. A 95% confidence interval and $p < 0.05$ error level were taken into account for the evaluation of the results obtained. In this study, Cronbach's α values were found to be 0.867 for the PWBS, 0.854 for the SWLS, and 0.744 for the Oxford Happiness Scale.

2.7 | Ethical approval

Before the research, permission was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of KTO Karatay University on 01.03.2021 with the decision number 2021/02/06. Institutional permission was also obtained from the university.

3 | RESULTS

When the distribution of the students in the study according to their demographic characteristics is examined, it is seen that 83.3% of them are women, the majority (29.9%) are 2nd year, 53.4% have an income equal to their expenses, 78.4% have a nuclear family type, the longest place of residence is in a city (70.4%), and 97% have siblings, and 58% have poor general health condition. Also, the mean age of the students was calculated as 21.10 ± 2.53 (Table 1).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis uncovered that there is a high level of positive correlation ($r = 0.689$, $p < 0.001$) between psychological well-being and life satisfaction, and a highly significant relationship between psychological well-being and happiness ($r = 0.743$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, a highly significant relationship ($r = 0.722$, $p < 0.001$) was found between happiness and life satisfaction (Table 2).

The mean of the SWLS used in this study was found to be 16.13 ± 4.25 , which points to a moderate level. The mean of the PWBS was found to be 42.22 ± 7.67 , which is a high mean, and the mean of the Oxford Happiness Scale was 23.85 ± 4.69 , which is a low mean (Table 3).

A statistical difference was found between gender, income status, general health status, and the happiness of the students of nursing participating in the research ($p < 0.05$). According to the results of the Bonferroni analysis, the group that makes a difference in terms of income status originates from the group whose income is equal to expenses, while the group that makes a difference in general health status is caused by the very bad-bad, very bad-average, very bad-good and bad-average, bad-good binary groups. No statistical difference was found between year of study, family type, place of longest residence, sibling status, and happiness ($p > 0.05$) (Table 4).

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the effect of psychological well-being and life satisfaction on happiness. It is seen that psychological well-being and life

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics of the students

Characteristics	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	<i>n</i>	%
Age	21.10 \pm 2.53		
Gender	Male	44	16.7
	Female	220	83.3
Year at university	1st year	75	28.4
	2nd year	79	29.9
	3rd year	57	21.6
	4th year	53	20.1
Level of income	Income > expenses	69	26.1
	Income = expenses	141	53.4
	Income < expenses	54	20.5
Family type	Nuclear family	207	78.4
	Extended family	48	18.2
	Fragmented Family	9	3.4
Place of longest residence	City	186	70.4
	Town	49	18.6
	Village	29	11.0
Siblings	Yes	256	97
	No	8	3.0
General health condition	Very bad	46	17.4
	Bad	153	58.0
	Average	60	22.7
	Good	5	1.9

TABLE 2 Results pertaining to the correlation between psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness

Correlation between scales			
	1	2	3
1. Life satisfaction	1.000		
2. Psychological well-being	0.689*	1.000	
3. Happiness	0.722*	0.743*	1.000

* $p < 0.001$.

Scales	Number	Items	Min-max	$\bar{X} \pm SD$
Life satisfaction	5 items	(1-5, item)	5-25	16.13 \pm 4.25
Psychological well-being	8 items	(1-8, item)	23-56	42.22 \pm 7.67
Happiness	7 items	(1-7, item)	12-35	23.85 \pm 4.69

satisfaction explain 63.6% of the variation in happiness ($R^2 = 0.636$). It was observed that there is a positive and significant relationship between psychological well-being and happiness ($\beta = 0.468$, $p < 0.05$). A one-unit increase in psychological well-being elicits an increase of 0.286 in happiness ($\beta = 0.286$). It was observed that there is a positive and significant relationship between life satisfaction and happiness ($\beta = 0.400$, $p < 0.05$). A one-unit increase in life satisfaction elicit a 0.442 increase in happiness ($\beta = 0.442$) (Table 5).

Before examining the mediating role in the created model, it was examined whether the independent variable affected the dependent variable. It was observed that life satisfaction had a statistically significant effect on happiness ($\beta = 0.7978$, $p < 0.05$). While the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable was significant, it was examined whether there was a mediator role in this effect. According to the results of the model obtained, the values within the 95% confidence interval do not include 0, which indicates that there is a mediator role in the model (0.3298, 0.5540). After it was determined that there is a mediator role, it was examined whether the direct effect was significant t to decide on the type of this mediator role. As a result, it was decided that the direct effect was significant but the effect coefficient decreased and the mediator was only a partial mediator ($\beta = 0.4419$, $p < .05$) (Table 6).

4 | DISCUSSION

Our study revealed that the life satisfaction of the students was at a moderate level. Similarly, studies conducted with nursing students reported that students have a moderate level of life satisfaction (Kim, 2019; Mathad et al., 2019; Uysal et al., 2017). In the study by Turan et al. (2020), the average life satisfaction of students of nursing was found to be high (22.72 \pm 6.45). The comparison of the life satisfaction of students of nursing from three different countries, revealed that life satisfaction was higher in Spain than in Poland or Slovakia (Kupcewicz et al., 2020). Satisfaction with life is a subjective feeling and is defined as the individual's positive evaluation of their life according to the criteria they have determined (Tian et al., 2018). Happiness in daily life is impacted by many factors such as making sense of life, adapting to achieving goals, a positive individual identity, physical well-being, economic security, and good social relations. Life satisfaction also impacts many psychological factors (Turan et al., 2020). Mathad et al. (2019) argued that life satisfaction and related concepts should be integrated into the nursing curriculum to train effective healthcare professionals. When the study findings were examined in light of the literature, it was thought that the nursing education curriculum, which includes social elective courses, should

TABLE 3 Mean scale scores and descriptive statistics

Scales	Number	Items	Min-max	$\bar{X} \pm SD$
Life satisfaction	5 items	(1-5, item)	5-25	16.13 \pm 4.25
Psychological well-being	8 items	(1-8, item)	23-56	42.22 \pm 7.67
Happiness	7 items	(1-7, item)	12-35	23.85 \pm 4.69

TABLE 4 Comparison of the descriptive characteristics of nursing students and the mean scores of the Happiness Scale

Characteristics		n	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	F, t	p	Bonferroni
Gender**	Male	44	22.15 ± 4.40	0.895	0.009*	-
	Female	220	24.10 ± 4.69			
Year at university***	Freshman	75	24.60 ± 4.71	2.584	0.054	-
	Sophomore	79	23.67 ± 4.59			
	Junior	57	24.36 ± 4.63			
	Senior	53	22.45 ± 4.70			
Level of income***	Income > expenses (1)	69	24.59 ± 4.93	5.848	0.003*	2
	Income = expenses (2)	141	24.21 ± 4.45			
	Income < expenses (3)	54	21.96 ± 4.58			
Family type***	Nuclear family	207	23.98 ± 4.92	0.400	0.671	-
	Extended family	48	23.41 ± 3.95			
	Fragmented family	9	23.85 ± 2.71			
Place of longest residence***	City	186	23.98 ± 4.63	1.192	0.305	
	Town	49	24.08 ± 5.50			
	Village	29	22.58 ± 3.38			
Siblings**	Yes	256	23.82 ± 4.70	0.734	0.638	-
	No	8	24.62 ± 4.83			
General health condition***	Very bad (1)	46	26.32 ± 4.66	17.727	0.000*	1 > 2, 1 > 3, 1 > 4, 2 > 3, 2 > 4
	Bad (2)	153	24.37 ± 4.28			
	Average (3)	60	21.18 ± 4.15			
	Good (4)	5	17.00 ± 2.82			

* $p < 0.05$.

**Independent t test.

***One Way ANOVA.

TABLE 5 Results of multiple regression analysis of the effect of psychological well-being and life satisfaction on happiness

Independent variable	Dependent variable	β	t	p	Beta	F	Model (p)	Adjusted R ²
	Constant	4.556	4.641	0.000*		228.001	0.000	
Psychological Well-being	Happiness	0.286	9.076		0.468		0.000	0.636
Life satisfaction		0.442	7.763		0.400		0.000	

* $p < 0.05$.**TABLE 6** Results regarding the mediating role of psychological well-being in terms of the effect of life satisfaction on happiness

Effect (no mediator)	Prediction (β)	Standard error	t	p	Result
Life satisfaction → happiness	0.4515	0.0404	11.1680	0.0000	Accepted
Direct effect (with mediator)	Prediction (β)	Standard error	t	p	Result
Life Satisfaction → psychological well-being → happiness	0.3269	0.0568	5.7544	0.0000	Accepted
Indirect effect (with mediator)	Prediction (β)	Confidence interval		Result	
Life satisfaction → psychological well-being → happiness	0.1247	(0.0400, 0.2071)			

* $p < 0.05$.

be developed to improve life satisfaction by increasing students' positive experiences.

Nursing students have high levels of psychological well-being. According to the Happy Planet Index, Turkey's welfare level is 4.9 out of 10, and it ranks 113th among 152 countries (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2021). Nursing students experience higher levels of academic stress during their university education compared to other disciplines. Academic stress experienced by students can have harmful effects on psychological well-being over time (Chow et al., 2018). According to Kim (2019), the psychological well-being of nursing students is close to moderate. In a study conducted in Hong Kong, it was reported that the moderate level of psychological well-being of students of nursing was more marked in senior students (Chow et al., 2018). Smith and Yang (2017) found in their cross-sectional study that the psychological well-being of Chinese nursing students tended to decrease toward their senior year. Nursing students begin their clinical placement in the first academic year. Clinical practices have been identified as an important stressor for students as they require managing multiple demands from the clinical environment (Reyes et al., 2015). The different results in the literature may be related to the different readiness levels of students to manage the demands in the clinical environment before clinical practice. During the data collection process of this study, the students were not able to engage in clinical practice due to the pandemic, which may have reduced the psychological burden on the students.

Our study further revealed that the happiness levels of the students were low. According to the global Happy Planet Index, Turkey ranks 102nd among 152 countries, with a score of 41.3 (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2021). The level of happiness of Iranian health science students, including nurses, is moderate (Feizi et al., 2020). Thai university students have been reported to have lower happiness than students from the United States and England (Calderon et al., 2021). Han et al. (2020) applied positive psychology activities, which were effective in impacting the happiness of nursing students. The activities created change for a positive, determined, and meaningful life where students enjoy their university life. Milić et al. (2019) showed that nursing students have higher subjective happiness levels compared to medical students. Nursing students report lower happiness than other undergraduate students due to the burden of compulsory clinical practice and national undergraduate examination in addition to theoretical courses (Jo, 2016; Park, 2019). Because of the data collection dates of this study, the fear and uncertainty about the pandemic process we have been going through may have caused students to adjudge their happiness levels as lower.

It has been found that female students are happier than males. Similar to the result of the study, male students from Thailand have lower happiness levels than female students. In the same study, it was reported that male students used more alcohol and tobacco than female students (Calderon et al., 2021). This data suggests that as the level of happiness decreases, students develop harmful habits more. Milić et al. (2019) found that the happiness levels of nursing students do not differ according to gender. The factors affecting the happiness levels of individuals can be very diverse. However, the fact that female students had higher levels of happiness in the study may be

related to their professional sense of belonging. In the study, the happiness levels of those who perceived their income as equal to expenses were found to be higher than those who perceived income as more or less than expenses. However, it is a fact that income status alone is not a decisive factor for the happiness of individuals. For example, Luxembourg, which ranks 139th with a score of 13.2 in the Happy Planet Index, is also the first in the world in terms of per capita income (Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 2021). Students who perceived their general health as bad or very bad were found to have higher levels of happiness than those who perceived it as moderate and good. This inverse relationship between general health perception and happiness levels is interesting data. No study has been found in the literature examining the happiness levels of nursing students and their perception of health. Further analysis is needed to shed light on the factors associated with perceived health that contribute to students' happiness.

This study investigated the effect of psychological well-being and life satisfaction of nursing students on their happiness. In addition, it was revealed that there is a positive and highly significant relationship between the variables of happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being. The concepts examined in the study are closely related and intertwined. When the national and international literature was examined, no study was found in which the happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being of nursing students were discussed together. Kaya and Orçan (2019) found a relationship between life satisfaction and happiness levels in their study of nursing students. Similarly, in the study conducted with health science students, the relationship between life satisfaction and happiness was significant (Aboalshamat et al., 2018). It is an expected finding that a relationship in this direction will emerge between life satisfaction and happiness, which are sometimes used interchangeably. In other words, individuals' satisfaction with their life is related to their level of happiness. A recent study conducted in Turkey revealed that the psychological well-being levels of nursing students positively affects their life satisfaction (Kuscu et al., 2019). Similarly, a strong correlation was found between life satisfaction and psychological well-being in nursing students (Kim, 2019). Urquijo et al. (2016) found a high positive correlation ($r = 0.71$) between life satisfaction and psychological well-being in their study of health science students. In our study, with the inclusion of psychological well-being as a mediator in the model between happiness and life satisfaction, the error rate increased and the prediction coefficient decreased. Although the decrease in the prediction coefficient does not prevent the model from working, it can be understood that psychological well-being, which is the mediating variable, affects the prediction coefficient. This may be attributed to the fact that variables other than happiness may strengthen the relationship between psychological well-being and happiness.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

The life satisfaction of the nursing students participating in the study was determined as being moderate, their psychological well-being was high, and their happiness level was low. It can be said that the

relationship between life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and happiness variables is high and positive. It was concluded that as the life satisfaction and psychological well-being of the students increased, their happiness levels also increased. Students' gender, perceived income status, and perceived general health status were found to affect their happiness levels. According to the findings of the regression analysis, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being variables predict happiness. The psychological well-being variable has an explanatory effect as a mediating variable in the relationship between happiness and life satisfaction. While determining the effect of life satisfaction on happiness, which is the main variable in the study, psychological well-being appears to have a partial mediating role in this effect.

Based on the results of the study, curriculum-oriented educational strategies should be developed to create a supportive learning environment that will promote life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and happiness in nursing students. In this way, nursing students can be supported to be successful in their future professional careers by enabling them to realize their strengths and enjoy their lives. In addition, it is recommended to introduce clinical practice early and to conduct empowerment workshops within the scope of preclinical preparations so that students can manage the stressors they may subsequently encounter during clinical practice. In this way, they can be helped to adapt to the clinical environment and their psychological well-being may improve. The nursing curriculum in Turkey should include interventions that increase happiness, including positive emotions and life satisfaction. In addition, further studies on these closely related concepts can be carried out with different research patterns (qualitative, experimental, etc.).

6 | LIMITATIONS

Since the variables examined in the study were measured with self-reporting tools, the participants may have tended to answer the questions in a socially desirable way. Although the study group is very representative of the population (response rate > 92.3%), it is still a very small sample. Larger, multicenter studies are needed to obtain a more comprehensive overall assessment.

7 | IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING PRACTICE

Life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and happiness levels of nursing students who will be nurses in the future should be evaluated in line with the findings. Relevant interventions should be added to the curriculum to achieve the desired development in students regarding these variables.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data derived from public domain resources.

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