



SUBJECTIVE WELL BEING LEVELS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to investigate the SWB levels of university students and to question if SWB and its components (positive affect, negative affect, satisfaction with life) differ significantly according to demographic variables. The sample of this study was composed of 443 undergraduate students from Fatih University. The data collection instruments are Demographic Questionnaire, Positive-Negative Affect Scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale. The data was analyzed via SPSS 17 and descriptive statistics, t-test and variance analysis was utilized. The results show that SWB did not differ significantly according to demographic variables, however satisfaction with life differs significantly according to gender, age groups and perceived socioeconomical situation; and positive affect differs significantly according to perceived socioeconomical situation. In addition, negative affect was found as negatively correlated both with positive affect ($r=-0.080$, $p<0.05$) and satisfaction with life ($r=-0.319$, $p<0.01$). Positive affect and satisfaction with life were positively correlated ($r=-0.408$, $p<0.01$) with each other.

Key Words: Subjective well-being, positive affect, negative affect, satisfaction with life.

INTRODUCTION

Well being is a prominent concept in positive psychology and it has sometimes been used as synonymous with happiness. However, different types of well-being (objective, subjective and psychological) have also been defined by researchers. Bradburn (1969) has been one of the pioneers in defining well-being and he explained the state of well being or happiness as having more positive emotions than negative emotions (p.9). Withey (1976) defined life satisfaction as being a separate construct from affects, but being related with well-being (cited in Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999, p.276). Diener & Emmons (1984) found positive and negative emotions act separately from each other. Furthermore, Kahneman (1999) explained that well-being level is the answer of how much happy a person is (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999). In his 'flow' theory of happiness, Csikszentmihalyi (2005) asserted that well-being is not bond with external factors but it is within individuals. One of the founders of positive psychology Martin Seligman (2001) suggested separate explanations for well-being and happiness. He defined well-being as a five-dimensioned (positive affect, relatedness, relationships, meaning and purpose and achievement) construct (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011,).

The philosophical root of subjective well-being is based on the hedonic perspective of Greek philosopher Aristippus. This perspective asserts that in order for people to be happy, they need to increase the pleasurable situations (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The operational definition of subjective well-being has been generated by Ed Diener (1984), deriving from the previous findings regarding affects and life satisfaction (Wilson,1967; Bradburn & Caplovitz, 1965; Andrews & Withey, 1976 cited in Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Subjective well being deals with how and why people are happy in their lives; and it is based on the cognitive and affective evaluations about their perceived state of happiness (Diener ,1984, p.542). Diener (1984) used Andrews and Withey (1976)'s specification of three components (life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect) of well-



being. So, subjective well being is defined as the total of positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction (Grenville- Cleave,2012; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Positive and negative affect, which act independently from each other, constitutes the affective component of subjective well being; whereas life satisfaction forms the cognitive component (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999).

The factors that determine the level of subjective well-being have been broadly studied in related literature (refer to Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011; Hidalgo v.d., 2010). The characteristics of a happy person have been initially defined by Wilson (1967) as being 'young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married with high self-esteem and job morale, modest aspirations of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence' (cited in Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999, p.276). Later, the relatedness of these and other factors with subjective well-being have been studied.

Genetics is one of the substantial factors that determines the level of subjective well-being. It has asserted that although genetic factors do not solely determine the level of happiness, they play an important role on positive-negative affect predispositions, thus genetic factors determine the affect regulation during various situations (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Personality characteristics have been the strongest predictors of subjective well-being. Hefferon & Boniwell (2011) stated that extroversion and neuroticism are the two important personality factors for subjective well-being. The individuals who are high in extroversion and low in neuroticism got higher subjective well-being scores. Extroverts engaging in more social interactions increase their subjective well-being levels (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). A comprehensive study on young adults' well-being showed that participants who were trustworthy and extrovert reported higher levels of subjective well-being; and participants who had neuroticism characteristics had lower levels of subjective well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin ve Ryff, 2002). Furthermore, optimism, entrepreneurship, emotional stability and self-esteem are the other personality characteristics that are found to be related with subjective well-being (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

The influences of personal characteristics on subjective well being are possibly moderated by environmental factors. This interaction is reciprocal. On one hand, it has stated that the probability of a person to experience positive and negative emotions is almost the same; however how they attend the emotions differs. For instance, extrovert individuals are happier because they react more strongly to positive emotions (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). On the other hand, certain life situations are associated with better emotions; therefore these situations lead higher levels of well-being. For instance, being married offers warm relationships and good feelings; therefore promotes the subjective well-being of married couples (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Or, being religious or spiritual provides better feelings, thus increase well-being.

Demographic variables differently constitutes for well-being. Although, some research results with different well-being levels for different gender, age and SES, Diener (1984) reported that well-being does not rely on demographic variables. So, it has asserted that there is no difference on subjective well-being levels of females and males. For the age factor, although it has long asserted that young people are happier than older people; this difference may due to cohort effect (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Otherwise, age is not the factor that decrease the life satisfaction and postive affect. Income is also not among the predictive factors of subjective well being. The role of money on happiness relies on the satisfaction of basic needs; otherwise income does not solely provide happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). On the other hand, the level of education is found to be associated with well-being. Studies showed that the people that have higher subjective well being levels are more likely to come from a better educational background than the other group (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). This relationship is not due to the education itself, but the factors such as a good job, better relationships, better income account for the high subjective well-being levels. Because, the role of job satisfaction cannot be underestimated on life satisfaction, engaging with the right profession increases the job and life satisfaction (Hefferon & Boniwell (2011).

So, the factors that contributes to the subjective well being cannot be readily explored for all people. It has long asserted that heritability of personal traits, genetics of affect regulation and also other objective factors constitute for the level of subjective well being altogether. It has also stated that cross-cultural differences cannot be ignored (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the subjective well-being (SWB) levels of university students. For this purpose, SWB and its components of positive affect (PA), negative affect (NA) and life satisfaction (SWL) levels of university students are analyzed according to demographic variables. The research questions are the followings;

- 1- Are there significant relationships among SWB, PA, NA and SWL levels of university students according to gender?
- 2- Are there significant relationships among SWB, PA, NA and SWL levels of university students according to age groups?
- 3- Are there significant relationships among SWB, PA, NA and SWL levels of university students according to perceived socioeconomical situation?
- 4- Are there significant correlations among PA, NA and SWL levels of university students?

METHOD

Research Design

General screening method is adopted in this study for the purposes of describing a preexisting situation (Karasar, 2009, s.77-81). Descriptive statistics, independent-samples-t-test and ANOVA were used for analysis.

Sample

The population of this study is 9.000 students from Education, Arts and Literature, Economics and Administrative Sciences, Theology and Engineering Faculties in 2012-2013. The students that were selected randomly were asked to participate the research and volunteers constitute the sample group. The sample has 443 students. The distribution of sample according to demographic variables is shown on Table 1.

Table 1: The Demographic Distribution of Sample

	Group	Frequency(n)	Percentage
Gender	Female	311	70,2
	Male	132	29,8
	Total	443	100,0
Age Group	18-21	342	77,2
	22-25	101	22,8
	Total	443	100,0
Faculty	Faculty of Education	81	18,3
	Faculty of Arts and	221	49,9
	Faculty of Engineering	73	16,5
	Faculty of Eco.	40	9,0
	Faculty of Theology	28	6,3
	Toplam	443	100,0
Grade Level	Freshman	115	26,0
	Sophomore	206	46,5
	Junior	79	17,8
	Senior	43	9,7
	Total	443	100,0
The status	Full Internship	91	20,5
	Half Internship	117	26,4
	With Tuition	235	53,0
	Total	443	100,0
Perceived Socioeconomical Situation	Low	16	3,6

Medium-Low	20	4,5
Medium	218	49,2
Medium-High	152	34,3
High	37	8,4
Total	443	100,0

Instruments

Data collection instruments were Demographic Questionnaire, Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985).

Demographic Questionnaire was designed by the researchers and contains six questions regarding the demographic variables of students.

PANAS measures the affective component of subjective well-being. There are ten positive and ten negative affect expressions on 5-Likert-type scale (Watson, Clark ve Tellegen, 1988). Gençöz (2000) conduct the Turkish adaptation of PANAS. The Turkish form internal consistency levels (Cronbach alfa) were found between .83 and .86 for positive affect, and between .35 and .71 for negative affect. Test-retest reliability were .54 for positive affect and .40 for negative affect (Gençöz, 2000).

SWL measures the cognitive component of subjective well-being. There are five questions on 7-Likert-type scale. The internal consistency of Turkish form was found as .81 for university students. The concurrent validity was .40 for self-esteem, .29 for perceived parental attitudes, .26 for perceived friend support, -.40 for depression, -.29 for negative affect and .011 for personal income (Durak, Şenol-Durak ve Gençöz ,2010).

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure was conducted during 2012-2013 fall semester. The target population information was gathered from university students' service. Researchers attended to the randomly selected courses of target population and volunteer students participated into the research.

Statistical Measures

The subjective well being levels of students were calculated by adding the mean scores of PA and SWL with subtraction of NA mean scores. The data were analyzed by SPSS Statistics 17. In order to use parametric tests, the sample size should be sufficient and the variables should be normally distributed (Kalaycı, 2008). Therefore, Kolmogorov Smirnov test for Normality is used. The results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test showed that the test distribution is normal. Therefore, parametric measures of t-test and ANOVA were utilized.

FINDINGS

Table 2: The Mean Scores of Participants

	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
SWB	443	17,000	71,000	32,273	14,522
PA	443	19.00	70.00	48.0790	8.31700
NA	443	10.00	59.00	32.0609	7.84888
SWL	443	5.00	25.00	16.2551	4.32508

The mean scores of SWB, PA, NA and SWL are shown in Table 2. SWB score is (32,273 ± 14,522), PA score is (48.0790±8.31700), NA score is (32.0609± 7.84888) and SWL score is (16.2551± 4.32508).

Independent samples t-test were conducted in order to find out if there is significance difference between SWB, PA, NA and SWL according to gender.

Table 3: T-Test Results According to Gender

	Grup	N	X	SD	t	P
SWB	Female	311	32,113	14,888	-0,357	0,721
	Male	132	32,652	13,669		
PA	Female	311	47.6977	8.49584	1.483	.139
	Male	132	48.9773	7.83754		
NA	Female	311	32.0997	7.68533	.159	.874
	Male	132	31.9697	8.25078		
SWL	Female	311	16.5145	4.54855	2.113	.035*
	Male	132	15.6439	3.69058		

The test found that female participants had statistically significantly higher SWL scores (16.51 ± 4.54) compared to SWL scores of males (15.64 ± 3.69), $t(443) = 2.113$, $p = 0.035$. It has also found that there are no significant differences among females and males according to SWB, PA and NA scores.

Independent samples t-test were conducted in order to find out if there is significance difference between SWB, PA, NA and SWL according to age groups.

Table 4: T-Test Results According to Age-Groups

	Age Group	N	X	SD	t	P
SWB	18-21	342	31,652	14,969	-1,660	0,098
	22-25	101	34,376	12,739		
PA	18-21	342	47.8977	8.50555	-.844	.399
	22-25	101	48.6931	7.65211		
NA	18-21	342	32.2222	8.10255	.795	.427
	22-25	101	31.5149	6.93053		
SWL	18-21	342	15.9766	4.41665	2.509	.012*
	22-25	101	17.1980	3.87303		

The test found that 18-21 years age group had statistically significantly lower SWL scores (15.97 ± 4.41) compared to SWL scores of 22-25 age group (17.19 ± 3.87), $t(443) = 2.509$, $p = 0.012$. It has also found that there are no significant differences among age groups according to SWB, PA and NA scores.

ANOVA test were conducted in order to find out if there are significant differences between SWB, PA, NA and SWL according to perceived socioeconomical situations.

Table 5: ANOVA Test Results According to Perceived Economical Situations

	Group	N	X	Ss	F	P
SWB	Low	16	32,063	21,638	2,227	0,065
	Medium-Low	20	27,700	13,853		
	Medium	218	30,849	14,806		
	Medium-High	152	34,013	12,934		
	High	37	36,081	14,769		
PA	Low	16	49.8750	9.36572	3.465	.008*
	Medium-Low	20	45.7000	8.93308		
	Medium	218	47.2248	8.26463		
	Medium-High	152	48.4539	7.89068		
	High	37	52.0811	8.46686		
NA	Low	16	32.3750	10.56330	.697	.594
	Medium-Low	20	32.9500	7.59830		
	Medium	218	31.8349	7.74717		
	Medium-High	152	31.7763	7.69467		
	High	37	33.9459	8.03100		

Table 6: ANOVA Test Results According to Perceived Economical Situations (cont.)

	Group	N	X	Ss	F	P
SWL	Low	16	14.5625	5.09861	7.069	.000*
	Medium-Low	20	14.9500	4.12279		
	Medium	218	15.4587	4.13378		
	Medium-High	152	17.3355	4.11256		
	High	37	17.9459	4.69010		

An analysis of variance showed that there is significant difference on PA scores according to perceived socioeconomical situations, $F(4,438) = 3.465$, $p = 0.008$. Post hoc analyses using the Tukey post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average PA scores of medium-low group ($M = 45.70$, $SD = 8.93$) are significantly lower than the scores of medium group ($M = 47.22$, $SD = 8.26$), $p = 0.043$. The average PA scores of medium group ($M = 47.22$, $SD = 8.26$), are significantly lower than the scores of high group ($M = 52.08$, $SD = 8.46$), $p = 0.009$.

An analysis of variance showed that there is significant difference on SWL scores according to perceived socioeconomical situations, $F(4,438) = 7.069$, $p = 0.00$. Post hoc analyses using the Tukey post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average SWL scores of medium-high group ($M = 17.33$, $SD = 4.11$) are significantly higher than the scores of medium group ($M = 15.45$, $SD = 4.13$), $p = 0.00$. The average SWL scores of high group ($M = 17.94$, $SD = 4.69$) are significantly higher than the scores of medium group, ($M = 15.45$, $SD = 4.13$), $p = 0.009$. Pearson Correlation was conducted to find the relationships among PA, NA and SWL.

Table 7: Correlations among Variables

		PA	NA	SWL
PA	r	1.00	-0.080	0,408
NA	r	-0.080	1.00	-0.319
SWL	r	0,408	-0.319	1.00

There are significant correlations among PA and SWL, $r(441)=0.40$, $p<0.01$; there are significant inverse correlations among PA and NA, $r(441)= -0.080$, $p<0.05$; and there are significant inverse correlations among SWL and NA, $r(441)= -0.31$, $p<0.01$.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that subjective well being, positive affect and negative affect levels of university students do not differ significantly according to gender, but life satisfaction levels differ significantly. The literature suggests different findings. There are researches that show the difference among subjective well-being regarding gender (Cenkseven ve Akbaş, 2007; Dilmaç ve Bozgeyikli, 2009; İlhan, 2005; Yavuz-Güler ve İşmen-Gazioğlu, 2008; Tümkiye, 2011; Gündoğdu & Yavuzer, 2012) whereas there are also other studies that do not support gender as a predictive factor for subjective well-being (Diener, 1994, s.554; Diener, Suh & Smith, 1999; Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009; Tuzgöl-Dost, 2006; Saygın & Arslan, 2009; Tuzgöl-Dost, 2010;). Diener (1984) defined subjective well-being levels independent from gender differences. As stated, there are other factors that contribute to the subjective well being differences among individuals. So, it can be inferred that if there were gender difference the reason is other variables such as personal characteristics. For positive and negative affects, the literature suggests that there is no significant difference among genders (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988; Uzun Ozer & Tezer, 2008). Satisfaction with life levels showed that female students got significantly higher life satisfaction levels than male students. These results are consistent with Köker (1991), Cenkseven & Akbas (2007) and Tuzgol-Dost (2007). There is also other research which shows that life satisfaction does not differ according to gender (Chow, 2005; Gündoğar, Sallan Gül, Uskun, Demirci & Keçeci, 2007). Cenkseven & Akbas (2007) It has generally stated that the role of gender on predicting life satisfaction is very low.

The findings showed that subjective well being, positive affect and negative affect levels of university students do not differ significantly according to age groups, but life satisfaction levels differ significantly. The research results that even among young and elders there were no significant difference regarding subjective well-being (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Diener, Suh & Smith (1999) stated that positive affect differs among women's age while negative affect does not differ with age. Another similar study showed that for women positive affect differs with age while for men there are other factors that accounts for differences (Mroczek & Kolars, 1998). Since the age difference in this study is low, it supports the previous literature findings (Şahin & Karabeyoğlu, 2010 etc.). In this study younger group (18-21) has lower life satisfaction levels than the older group (22-25). Some research showed differences among ages regarding life satisfaction levels (Ünal, Karlıdağ & Yoluoğlu, 2001), while other studies do not offer age as an important factor for satisfaction with life (Gündoğar, Sallan Gül, Uskun, Demirci & Keçeci, 2007). The age difference in this research is low, so that we can conclude that freshman students feel lower life satisfaction than senior students. This difference can be accounted for the feelings of achievement on the initial and final years of university.

It has found that subjective well being and negative affect do not differ significantly according to perceived socioeconomical status, however it has an effect on positive affect and life satisfaction. The existing literature suggests that subjective well being and economical situation do not linearly related with each other. It has supported that providing personal needs makes individuals feel better, however on the long run it does not effect the general well-being (Johnson & Krueger, 2006; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). So, while individuals feel better (positive emotions) when satisfying their needs, they do not become happier with more money. The



higher positive affect of medium-low group than low group can be explained by satisfaction of basic needs. The existing national studies both show the relationship (Tuzgöl-Dost, 2006; Tuzgöl-Dost, 2010; Tümkaya, 2011) and no relationship (Şahin & Karabeyoğlu, 2010) between socioeconomical situation and subjective well being. Gündoğar, Sallan Gül, Uskun, Demirci & Keçeci (2007) found in their research on university students that financial situation and life satisfaction levels are correlated with other. This research showed that students who perceive their socioeconomic situation as high and medium-high got higher grades on life satisfaction than those of medium group.

The findings regarding the relatedness of subjective well being components show the positive correlation between positive affect-life satisfaction (0.40), and negative correlations between positive affect-negative affect (-0.080); and life satisfaction-negative affect (-0.31). The strength of correlation between positive-negative affect is very similar with the original findings of the scale (-0.09) (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). This results show that although positive and negative affects are inversely related they are not the opposites of each other and act independently. Satisfaction with Life Scale original scale also has very similar findings with the results of this study. Diener, Emmons, Larsen, Griffin (1985) found that the correlation between positive affect-life satisfaction is .50 and the correlation between negative affect-life satisfaction is -.32.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that subjective well being levels of university students do not differ significantly according to demographic variables such as gender, age and perceived socioeconomical status. However, the cognitive component of subjective well being is found higher in female participants than male participants, in higher age group than lower age group and in higher socioeconomic status groups than lower socioeconomic groups. The affective component of subjective well being shows differentiated results for positive and negative affects. While positive affect is found higher among higher socioeconomic status groups, there are no significant negative affect differences among participants regarding demographic variables. Lastly, the findings of the research support the direction and strength of relatedness among the components of subjective well being.

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