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# The Role of Freedom Perceived in Leisure on Happiness and Mental Well-Being\*

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, it was aimed to determine the effect of the freedom perceived by individuals participating in sportive recreational activities on the level of happiness and mental well-being. The research was conducted by a total of 461 volunteer individuals participating in sporting recreation events in The Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. In addition to the personal information form as a data collection tool, "Freedom Perceived in Leisure Scale", "Oxford Happiness Scale" and "Mental Well-Being Scale" were used. Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression analysis were performed using the SPSS package program in the analysis of the data obtained. According to the research findings, it was determined that there was a statistically positive moderate relationship between freedom perceived in leisure and happiness and mental well-being. In addition, it was determined that freedom perceived in leisure predicted happiness level by 15% and mental well-being level by 14%. As a result, it was observed that the freedom that the individuals participating in the study perceive in leisure has made them happy and affect them positively.

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### Keywords:

Leisure, perceived freedom, happiness, mental well-being

## 1. Introduction

Time is a very valuable, unique and universal resource that human beings are in at any moment, that continues beyond their control and can never be returned, whose value cannot be measured, and that every person on earth can have equally, but is used differently by everyone (Örücü & Kanbur, 2007). The best and most efficient use of time is an inevitable necessity for today's people (Karaküçük, 2008; Keskin & Bayram, 2018).

When the way people use their time is considered, the role of leisure has become undeniably important with the developing and changing living conditions in the social structure (Henderson, 2010; Ekinçi & Ozdilek, 2019). Nowadays, leisure is the time interval in which the individual can freely decide and implement all the difficulties and connections he has left from his compulsory work in order to maintain his life or to meet the practical basic needs of his life (eating, sleeping, working, etc.) (Mull et al., 1997). According to Torkildsen (2005), leisure is defined as having fun, relaxing, activities for individual development or freedom (Tordkilsen, 2005). The time that people devote to and enjoy themselves, except for the routine work they do, is called leisure (Hazar, 2003). Arguing that the most important variable of leisure is perceived freedom, Neulinger (1981) defines perceived freedom as "the individual's desire for what he/she does, and the mood he/she feels as a result of his/her preference". (Neulinger, 1981). According to Kane et al. (1977), perceived freedom provides a causal relationship between individual and activity participation behavior and forms a

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basis for the individual's participation in the activity (Kane et al., 1977). Iso-ahola (1980), on the other hand, explained that internal motivation and freedom perception are two important conditions for effective leisure but the most important condition is the perception of freedom (Iso-Ahola, 1980).

Freedom perceived in leisure is defined as the situation in which the individual feels that he/she is doing it by choosing it and does it by desire. It is thought that individuals who think they have more freedom during their leisure experiences may tend to reveal a higher sense of internal motivation, competence, and happiness (Eskiler, Yildiz & Ayhan, 2019; Janke et al., 2010; Soyer et al., 2017).

Happiness is one of the basic needs of human beings, and thanks to this feeling, individuals feel more secure and successful. Happiness is an emotion and a reward that is felt after a successful job (Öztekin, 2016). It can be defined as happiness that the individual feels perfect and enjoys his life. Happiness, defined as subjective well-being in psychology, is an important need for individuals just like physiological needs (Layard, 2005).

Happiness can be defined in two ways: the hedonic approach and development-oriented approach (Myers & Deiner, 1995). According to the hedonic approach; it is the emotional state that occurs when negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness, etc.) are experienced less, and positive emotions are experienced by experiencing more intensely and getting enough satisfaction from life (Diener et al., 1999). According to the development-oriented approach; it is defined as closely related to the fact that the individual realizes himself by using his potential and powers in the most positive way and finds meaning in life by living a virtuous life (Koydemir & Mısır, 2015). The concept of happiness can be defined in many different ways, but the most basic and common judgment in these definitions is the positive psychological effects on the individual. Another fact that we can talk about the positive psychological effects on individuals is the concept of mental well-being.

Mental well-being can be defined as having healthy relationships with other individuals by experiencing positive emotions such as inner peace, satisfaction, happiness, and joy, being able to deal with stress faced by being aware of their abilities in a confident way, being able to take responsibilities, contributing to society in line with their abilities as useful and productive in work-life (WHO, 2004). An individual's psychological healthy life can be explained by the concept of mental well-being. Psychological well-being is related to revealing its own potential for a meaningful life in the face of various difficulties faced by the individual (Cenkseven Önder & Mukba, 2017). Mental well-being that deals with psychological conditions that may affect the mental, physical and social health of the person, which may be related to their present or past life experiences; have a multidimensional structure consisting of satisfaction, positive emotion, and psychological activity (Telef et al., 2013). It contains important results not only with the resources necessary for satisfying and stable relationships but also with health and social issues (Tennant et al., 2007).

The concepts of freedom, happiness, and mental well-being perceived in leisure have important effects on the psychologies of individuals, as can be understood from their definitions. Therefore, they interact with each other. Lee et al. (2012) mentioned that physical activities have several positive effects on individual's well-being. Taşkıran and Kaya (2015) stated that sportive recreational activities have positive physical and physiological effects on individuals. In another study, Ekinçi et al. (2014) stated that participating to the recreational activities increase the level of perceived freedom among university students. From this point on, this research was carried out to determine the effect of freedom perceived in leisure on happiness and mental well-being. For this purpose, answers to the following questions have been sought:

- 1- Is there a relationship between freedom perceived in leisure and happiness and mental well-being in individuals participating in sportive recreational activities?
- 2- Does freedom perceived in leisure has an effect on happiness variables in individuals who are participating in sportive recreational activities?
- 3- Does freedom perceived in leisure has an effect on mental well-being variables in individuals who are participating in sportive recreational activities?

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Model of the Research and Participants**

In this study, in order to reach a general judgment about the universe, in a universe consisting of a large number of elements based on the quantitative research design, the general screening model in which the screening is performed on the entire universe or a sample to be taken from it is used (Karasar, 2012). The sample of the study consisted of 461 volunteer individuals who participated in sportive recreational activities in the Eastern Anatolia region of Turkey. While obtaining data from these individuals, face-to-face survey method was used.

## 2.2. Data Collection Tools

In the research, the personal information form of the participants, Perceived Freedom in Leisure, Oxford Happiness, and Mental Well-being scale were used as data collection tools.

### 2.2.1. Personal information form

Gender, age, marital status, and daily leisure duration of the volunteers participating in the study were given below (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of participants

Variables	Categories	n	%
Gender	Woman	137	29.7
	Man	324	70.3
	Total	461	100.0
Age	18-21	70	15.2
	22-25	184	39.9
	26-29	99	21.5
	30-33	65	14.1
	+34	43	9.3
	Total	461	100.0
Marital status	Married	102	22.1
	Single	359	77.9
	Total	461	100.0
Daily leisure	1-3 hour	190	41.2
	4-7 hour	169	36.7
	+7 hour	102	22.1
	Total	461	100.0

### 2.2.2. Perceived freedom in leisure scale

This scale, which was developed by Witt and Ellis (1985) and was first validated by Yerlisu Lapa and Ağyar (2011), was adapted with 17 items and 2 sub-dimensions. Later, by Yerlisu Lapa and Tercan Kaas (2017), this scale was adapted to Turkish culture as 25 items and one dimension as a result of testing with confirmatory factor analysis. The scale consists of a 5-point Likert type (1- Strongly disagree, 5- Strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient calculated to test the reliability of the scale was found as .93. In the current study, this coefficient was found as .91.

### 2.2.3. Oxford happiness scale

Developed by Hills and Argyle (2002), this scale was adapted to Turkish by the validity and reliability study by Doğan and Çötök (2011). The scale is of 5-point Likert type (1- Never disagree, 5- Totally Agree) and consists of 7 items and one dimension. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient calculated to test the reliability of the scale was found to be .74. In the current study, this coefficient was found as .70.

### 2.2.4. Mental well-being scale

Developed by Tennant et al. (2007), this scale was adapted to Turkish by the validity and reliability study by Keldal (2015). The scale is a 5-point Likert type (1- Never agree, 5- Totally agree) and consists of 14 items and one dimension. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient calculated to test the reliability of the scale was found as .92. In the current study, this coefficient was found as .84.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 24 (Statistical Package for Social Science) package program was used to analyze the data obtained in the research. The skewness and kurtosis values were checked to determine whether the data showed a normal distribution. These values are checked and evaluated between -1 and +1 (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). As a result of this evaluation, it was seen that the data showed normal distribution. Accordingly, Pearson Correlation and Linear Regression analyses were used.

### 3. Results

The details of the findings based on the relationship and effect between the variables of freedom perceived in leisure, happiness, and mental well-being in individuals participating in sportive recreational activities, and the effect-based analysis were given in the Table 2-3-4.

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis on freedom perceived in leisure, happiness, and mental well-being levels

		(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Freedom perceived in leisure	r	1		
	p			
(2) Happiness	r	.393**	1	
	p	.000		
(3) Mental well-being	r	.379**	.655**	1
	p	.000	.000	

n= 461; \*\*p< .01

When the results are analyzed, it was determined that there was a moderately significant positive relationship between freedom perceived in leisure and happiness and mental well-being ( $p < .01$ ). In addition, a moderately significant positive relationship was found between happiness and mental well-being ( $p < .01$ ).

**Table 3.** The effect of freedom perceived in leisure on happiness

Dependent Variable: Happiness					
Variables	B	Standard Error	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	18.356	.867		21.165	.000
Freedom perceived in leisure	.088	.010	.393	9.147	.000
R <sup>2</sup> = .154; adj.R <sup>2</sup> = .152					
F= 83.676; p< .01					
Method: Enter					

According to the results of regression analysis, it was determined that the freedom perceived in leisure predicted the happiness variable by 15% (adj.R<sup>2</sup>= .152). In other words, it was determined that freedom perceived in leisure had a statistically significant effect on the happiness variable ( $\beta = .393$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 4.** The effect of freedom perceived in leisure on mental well-being

Dependent Variable: Mental well-being					
Variables	B	Standard Error	$\beta$	t	p
(Constant)	39.721	1.699		23.378	.000
Freedom Perceived in leisure	.166	.019	.379	8.768	.000
R <sup>2</sup> = .143; adj.R <sup>2</sup> = .142					
F= 76.871; p< 01					
Method: Enter					

According to the results of regression analysis, it was determined that freedom perceived in leisure predicted the mental well-being variable by 14% (adj.R<sup>2</sup>= .142). In other words, it was determined that freedom perceived in leisure affects the mental well-being variable statistically ( $\beta = .379$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

#### **4. Discussion**

In this study, which was conducted to determine the effect of freedom perceived in leisure on the level of happiness and mental well-being in individuals who spend their leisure by doing sports, it was observed that there was a moderate positive relationship between freedom perceived in leisure and happiness and mental well-being. It is seen from these results that the activity choice of individuals in their leisure is based on free will and that this will increase and individuals have psychologically positive emotions. Sport, which is the most important of the activities that individuals do in their leisure, is thought to have an important role in this psychological factor. When the literature is analyzed, in a study conducted by Göklemen (2019) on archers, it was found that there was a positive relationship between freedom perceived in leisure and psycho-social benefit variable. Lifestyle with the people in the group in which the participants using the Olympic bows participate in leisure activities, emphasized that there were significant increases in his thoughts and values. In a different study, it was emphasized that sportive leisure activities have a very special place in the lives of individuals, and these activities develop individuals' creativity spirit, increase their happiness and have a positive effect on their life satisfaction (Demirel & Harmandar, 2009).

When the regression analysis results of freedom perceived in leisure and happiness variable were examined, it was determined that freedom perceived in leisure predicted happiness variable by 15%. It has been determined that freedom perceived in leisure significantly affects the variable of happiness. It is thought that the individual's evaluation of his/her leisure with her free will make her feel more satisfied with life by creating a feeling of satisfaction by pushing his/her to do activities that are relaxing, entertaining, happy, and stress-free. Therefore, it can be said that in evaluating leisure actively in this way, it will have important effects on many important factors such as working life, friends, family, and social environment. Akyıldız (2013) reported that thanks to the recreational activities that the individual participates, the individual will feel happy and feel psychologically relaxed and that the individual will ensure the continuity of these psychological benefits. Janke et al. (2010), it was concluded that individuals with a higher sense of freedom in participating in leisure activities had a higher sense of happiness. Kim et al. (2019) reported in a study conducted by campers that serious leisure of campers positively affected happiness. He also emphasized that leisure plays an important role in perceived happiness in line with the results obtained. Lee et al. (2019) emphasized that happiness increases as leisure time increases in individuals and leisure satisfaction has a significant effect on happiness.

When the regression analysis results of freedom perceived in leisure and mental well-being were examined, it was found that freedom perceived in leisure predicted mental well-being variable by 14%. It was determined that freedom perceived in leisure affects the mental well-being variable statistically significantly. It is thought that the freedom perceived by the individual in leisure will enable the individual to manage his/her relations positively and create a lifestyle philosophy in the individual in terms of the time he/she will devote the individual to social and physical activities. When the literature on the subject was examined, Kekäläinen et al. (2019) emphasized that participation in physical activity should be encouraged to achieve good psychological well-being in the study conducted to examine the relationship between leisure physical activity, mental happiness and subjective health in adulthood. Çerez et al. (2017) found that leisure management and leisure exercise participation significantly predicted mental well-being. In line with these results, they reported that leisure exercise levels and psychological well-being levels of individuals who managed their leisure well and with their own will increase positively. Aydın et al. (2019) stated that individuals who participated in leisure activities had higher levels of psychological resilience than those who did not. They reported that as the participants' psychological resilience levels increased, their perception of leisure boredom decreased.

#### **5. Conclusion**

It was seen that the freedom perceived by the individuals participating in the research at the leisure has made them happy and affect them positively. Accordingly, as the level of freedom perceived by individuals increases, their levels of happiness and mental well-being increase. In this context, they were physically and

mentally positively affected by gaining qualified experiences through activities in which participants participated freely in their leisure time for personal purposes. In line with the results of the study, the issue of freedom perceived in leisure can be associated with psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, depression, mental resilience, self-confidence, and motivation and different studies can be conducted. Facilities for recreational activities can be built by the relevant public institutions and organizations in order for individuals to participate in the activities they choose with their free will. Awareness-raising lessons can be held by educational institutions and organizations about the benefits of sportive recreational activities from primary education. It is recommended that individuals develop their time management skills by planning time in order to spend time freely and consciously.

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