

The Role of Basic Needs Fulfillment in Prediction of Subjective Well-Being among University Students*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the role of fulfillment level of university students' basic needs in predicting the level of their subjective well being. The participants were 627 students (56% female, 44% male) attending different faculties of Pamukkale University. In this study, subjective well being was measured with Life Satisfaction Scale and Positive Negative Affect Scale. Students' perceptions about basic needs satisfaction were measured with University Students Basic Needs Scale (USBNS). Results show that, students' basic needs satisfaction is predicting subjective well being significantly for all dimensions of basic needs. Besides, freedom, fun and power needs are seen as stronger predictors of subjective well being in university students than the other basic needs.

Key Words

Subjective Well Being, Basic Needs, Choice Theory, University Students.

Studies about well being show that happiness is perceived as a very important life value for the people almost all over the world (Diener, Diener, 1995; Diener, Sapyta, Suh, 1998; King & Napa, 1998). Also, it can be said that university students from different countries in the world accept the happiness as a very important value in their lives (Diener et al., 1995).

Happiness is conceptualized as subjective well being in the positive psychology field (Ryan & Deci,

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2001), and subjective well being is consist of three different but also related components as (*a*) positive affect, (*b*) negative affect, and (*c*) life satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976 cited in Diener, 1984). However, an important discussion has occurred about what the predictors of subjective well being are. It can be said that need theories, under the telic theories headline, take a great place among the varied discussions about the predictors of subjective well being (Diener, 1984; Wilson, 1967; Yettim, 2001).

The major assumption of need theories is happiness is felt only if human needs can be fulfilled sufficiently (Wilson, 1967). Although this assumption about the needs theories projects a simple view, it is not seen so easy to explain the complex pattern of human needs. As a matter of fact, the investigation of the human needs has been the focus point of many researchers for a long time. For instance, Murray classified the human needs under twenty headlines such as achievement, autonomy, play, sexuality, etc (Burger, 2006). Maslow's needs hierarchy can be accepted as a similar attempt about the classification of human needs, and these needs are described as physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness

and love needs, esteem needs, and need for self-actualization (Schultz & Schultz, 2002). Another classification system about human needs in self-determination theory is about autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

It is also seen that the major theories about human needs are reconsidered with a more eclectic way in psychological well being viewpoint that stresses positive psychological health and personal growth (Akın, 2008). For instance, Ryff (1995) classifies the psychological needs as self-acceptance, positive relations with the other people, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth. Psychological well being viewpoint mostly underlines the actualization of human potential and full functioning in the life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). However, the fundamental point that stressed in the subjective well being viewpoint is about reducing the tension which appears at the lack of fulfillment of needs, and satisfying the needs to help people feel themselves happy, like as stressed in the choice theory approach (Glasser, 2005).

Choice Theory is accepted as a theoretical background for the William Glasser's new psychotherapy approach which is called Reality Therapy. Choice theory emphasizes that only we are responsible for all of behaviors we have displayed and we make internal decisions always whatever the external conditions are, and the aim of our behaviors is to fulfill our basic needs (Glasser, 1975, 2001a, 2001b, 2005). In choice theory approach, it is maintained that humans come into the world with five basic needs which are coded their genetic endowment in the long evolution process, and these needs are named as survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, fun (Glasser, 2001a, 2001b, 2005).

Survival is the basic physiological need to survive our life, and it includes our basic physical needs for food, water, air, safety, shelter, warmth, health, and sex (Frey & Wilhite, 2005). It also can be defined as the need to know or believe that we will be free from physical and psychological harm and that we will be able to satisfy our essential biological needs and our need for shelter (Litwack, 2007). Love and belonging need defines a commitment and closeness to the other people (Peterson, 2008). Love and belonging need also defines the desire for satisfied relationships with the important people in our lives, like as friends or family members (Glasser, 2005). Power need includes being prestigious, worthy, successful, competitive, fearless for vulnerability, capable of talking and being heard by the other people (Yalçın, 2007). Freedom is the need for independence and autonomy; the ability to make choices, to create, to explore, and to express oneself freely; to have sufficient space, to move around, and to feel unrestricted in determining choices and free will (Frey & Wilhite). Laughing is the best define of fun need (Glasser, 2005). Fun need includes positive occasions such as playing game, laughing, learning something new, having fun and sense of humor and realizing the positive sides of life (Yalçın). The major assumption of Choice Theory about basic needs is that happiness is felt only if five basic needs can be fulfilled sufficiently and a person who is unhappy is not able to fulfill at least one of these five basic needs (Glasser, 2005). However, it can be said that there is not enough empirical study about the validity of this theoretical assumption.

The Aim and Importance of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of fulfillment level of university students' basic needs in predicting the level of their subjective well being. It is thought that the findings obtained from this study will make significant contributions to the literature.

Wilson (1967), who studied the subjective well being as a scientific concept in a doctoral dissertation firstly, concluded that the "happy person emerges as a young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, high job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence" (p. 294). In the light of this conclusion, a series of studies examine the current validity of Wilson's conclusion and investigate the variables such as age, gender, income, education level, job satisfaction, health conditions, marriage, personal characteristics, intelligence, religious belief and life values, which are thought to be in relationship with subjective well being (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, & Lucas, Smith, 1999; Myers & Diener, 1995).

The new tendency which appeared in the result of these studies held through the years about subjective well being prefers studying on intra-psychological variables would bring more important findings, rather than the sociodemographic variables (Myers & Diener, 1995). Therefore, examination of the basic needs which would be thought as the significant predictors of subjective well being may be seen as an important study for the researchers who believe the importance of the intra-psychological variables at this concern.

Besides, it is seen that the fulfillment level of many physiological and psychological needs make significant contributes in predicting subjective well being of the university students (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001; Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009; Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener & Fujita, 1995; Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006). However, there has been no study on the literature which focuses on the relationship between five basic needs held in the choice theory approach and subjective well being. Thus, it would be useful to examine the validity of the theoretical assumptions of choice theory about basic needs and the happiness.

On the other hand, understanding the needs of youth is an important attempt to help them to attain the happiness which they accept as an important value of their lives. The university students, who are the participants of the study, are young, dynamic and well educated population of the society, and they are the adults, employees and parents of the future. Therefore, the question of how the university students feel themselves in the life can be accepted as an important issue for realizing the dream of living a happy future in a happy society.

Method

Research Model

This study is a quantitative research with a relational survey design. In this study, multi linear regression analysis was used to examine the relationship about the five basic needs, which was accepted as predictive variables, and the subjective well being, which was accepted as predicted variable of the study.

Study Group

The participants were 627 university students (55.8% female, 44.2% male) attending different faculties in Pamukkale University; 196 students (59.2% female, 40.8% male) were attending Faculty of Education, 125 students (76.0% female, 24.0% male) were attending Faculty of Arts and Administrative Sciences, 113 students (60.2% female, 39.8% male) were attending Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, 165 students (40.0% female, 60.0% male) were attending Faculty of Engineering, and 28 students (17.9% female, 82.1% male) were attending Faculty of Technical Education.

Instruments

Subjective Well Being Scales: Measurement of the subjective well being includes measurement of (a) positive affect, (b) negative affect, and (c) life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). This conceptual pattern of subjective well being that includes three related components was supported with other research findings (Diener et al., 1999; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). Thus, Positive Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Telegen, 1998) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) were used for the measurement of subjective well being in this study. This measurement was formulated by using the standard z scores, then negative affect score was subtracted from the sum of positive affect and life satisfaction scores (Diener, 1984; Diener & Fujita, 1995).

Positive Negative Affect Scale (PANAS): PANAS includes 10 positive and 10 negative mood adjectives on a 5 point Likert Scale (1=very slightly or not all, 5=extremely). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .88 for the positive affect, and .85 for the negative affect subscales. Test-retest reliability coefficients were .47 for both subscales, in the original form of the scale (Watson et al., 1998). PANAS was adapted to Turkish culture by Gençöz (2000). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .83 for the positive affect, and .86 for the negative affect subscales. Test-retest reliability coefficients in three weeks were .54 for the positive affect, and .40 for the negative affect subscales.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): SWLS is a 5 item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life on a 7 point Liker Scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The scale was developed by Diener et al. (1985), and adapted to Turkish culture by Köker (1991). Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .76, and the item-total correlation coefficients were ranged from.72 to .90. Test-retest reliability coefficient in three weeks was .85 for the scale. In another study, test-retest reliability coefficient was .71, and KR-20 internal consistency coefficient was .78 (Yetim, 1991).

University Students Basic Needs Scale (USBNS): USBNS is a 33 item instrument designed to measure university students' fulfillment level of five basic needs on a 7 point Likert Scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) (Türkdoğan, 2010). Analysis show that the scale explains 47.99 (%) of the variance with five-factor, and eighteen values of the factors ranged from 1.69 to 7.33. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the subscales ranged from .76 to

.84, and two weeks test-retest correlations ranged from .77 to .85. Expectedly, subscales had negative correlations with Stress Self-Assessment Checklist, and positive correlations with Self-Esteem Scale, Social Connectedness Scale and Scales of Psychological Well-Being.

Procedure

Data were gathered in spring term of 2009-2010 academic years with the necessary legal permissions, and also with the voluntary participants of the students.

Data Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to explore the role of basic needs satisfaction in predicting university students' subjective well being. As a theoretical assumption, all of the five basic needs have an equal importance for the happiness (Glasser, 2005), and there is not any finding about some of these needs are stronger predictors than the others. Thus, the regression analysis was performed with enter method (Leech, Barrett, Morgan, 2008).

Results

First of all, before the regression analysis, results show that love and belonging (\overline{X} =6.18; SD=.94; n=627) is the most satisfied need among the students' basic needs perception. The students' perception about fulfillment level of power (\overline{X} =5.49; SD=.84; n=627), fun \overline{X} =5.21; SD=1.03; n=627) and freedom (\overline{X} =5.01; SD=.90; n=627) needs are relatively lower, but the lowest satisfied need is survival (\overline{X} =4.72; SD=1.26; n=627) among the five basic needs. However, the scores of university students' fulfillment level of basic needs, which were measured with 7-point rating scale, are above the neutral point (4 point) for all dimensions of the basic needs.

After the investigation of basic needs fulfillment, multiple regression was conducted to investigate the role of fulfillment level of five basic needs in predicting university students' subjective well being. The assumptions about linearity, multicollinearity, and normally distributed errors were also checked and met (Büyüköztürk, 2005; Leech et al., 2008). Results show that five basic needs significantly predicted subjective well being $(F_{(5621)})$ =

88.71, *p*<.001), with all of five basic needs significantly contributing to the prediction. The adjusted R squared value was .41. This indicates that 41% of the variance in subjective well being was explained by the model, and it can be accepted as a large effect (Leech et al.). The beta weights suggest that good levels in freedom need contribute most to predicting subjective well being, and good levels in fun, power, survival, and love and belonging needs also contribute to the prediction.

Discussion

The basic need which mostly contributed the prediction of subjective well being was freedom need. This is a consistent result with the other findings in the literature that examining the relationship about subjective well being and the autonomy need which is a really similar need with freedom (Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009; Reis et al., 2000; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006). Moreover, the research findings that focusing on the relationship with the life satisfaction and the individualism of the cultures, suggest that freedom is a very important life value for pursuing the happiness (Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener et al., 1995).

The fulfillment level of fun need was the other important predictor that contributed the prediction of subjective well being, after the freedom need. The other findings in the literature that examining the relationship about subjective well being and humor (Hills & Argyle, 1998; İlhan, 2005) or spare time activities (Cenkseven & Akbaş, 2007), which are similar needs with fun, suggest smaller correlation than the present findings. Thus, it can be said that conceptualization of the fun need as a specific and important need for pursuing the happiness, like as the other human needs, can be accepted as a correct assumption for the choice theory.

Power need significantly contributed the prediction of subjective well being, after the freedom and fun needs. This is consistent with the other findings in the literature that examining the relationship about subjective well being and the similar variables like as self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995), assertiveness (Diener & Fujita, 1995), learned resourcefulness (Cenkseven & Akbaş, 2007), respect need (Oishi et al., 1999), and competence need (Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009; Reis et al., 2000; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006).

Survival need was another basic need that contributed the prediction of subjective well being, as a need that describing the physiological needs for safety, health, and shelter needs in the university life. It can be assumed that good levels in income or economical satisfaction perceived are significant variables for the survival need, and there is a significant relationship about subjective well being and these needs (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001; Cenkseven & Akbaş, 2007; Diener & Diener, 1995, 1996; Diener et al., 1995; Oishi et al., 1999; Tuzgöl-Dost, 2006).

Love and belonging need was also a significant predictor, and this is consistent with the other findings in the literature that examining the relationship about subjective well being and the similar variables like satisfaction with friends and family (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001; Diener & Diener, 1995) or relatedness need (Cihangir-Çankaya, 2009; Reis et al., 2000; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006). However, love and belonging need contributed lowest to predicting subjective well being, and it is an interesting finding that must be explain.

Despite the fact that love and belonging is the most satisfied need and survival is the lowest satisfied need among the five basic needs, these two needs were contributed lowest to prediction model. It could be assumed that any degree of increase or decrease in love and belonging or survival needs would be predicted the subjective well being more strongly than the other needs. However, freedom, fun, and power needs were appeared as the strongest predictors in the model.

First of all, the finding about the lowest levels in survival need is a typical finding for the university students almost all over the world (Diener & Diener, 1995). However, the university students also meet their food and shelter needs at a minimum level even if they are from very poor countries (Oishi et al., 1999). Thus, it can be assumed that the problems about the basic physiological needs influence subjective well being negatively, but these problems are perceived as a natural aspect of the university life to a certain degree.

On the other hand, the findings about the love and belonging need can be explain with its' high levels in that need. The fulfillment level of love and belonging need projects good relationships with the friends or family members, and these relationships are also have an permanence in the students' lives. Thus, it can be assumed that permanence of the good relationships in the students' lives is taking away the focus for the happiness to the other needs.

Additionally, some of these basic needs can be perceived more important than the others according to the life roles or developmental stages in the life (Mottern, 2008), and it can be assumed that freedom need is can be seen as a very important value for the university students who are very close to being adults in the near future.

Moreover, it can be assumed that freedom, fun, and power needs projects the individualistic values in a cultural context, and individualistic needs also on a rise in Turkish culture with the liberal orientated socio-economic changes (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün & İmamoğlu, 2002). On the other hand, the love and belonging need, which can be accepted as a collective value, is already a significant predictor of subjective well being among the university students. According to Kağıtçıbaşı (2004), even if it is assumed that Turkish culture has collective characteristics; there is a spread of individualistic characteristics among citizen, well educated, and young people. Thus, it can be said that the students' perceptions about the basic needs satisfaction are seen correspond to autonomous-related self concept in Turkish culture.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The results of the study supported the major assumption of choice theory about five basic needs and happiness relationship. In other words, five basic needs explained the variance of subjective well being in a large effect, with all of five basic needs significantly contributing to the prediction. However, freedom, fun, and power needs are seen as stronger predictors of subjective well being in university students than the survival, and love and belonging needs.

It can be said that the students who have the ability to make choices and to express themselves freely, who have an attempt to fun with their interests, who feel themselves worthy and successful, who have enough safety and shelter conditions, and who have good relationships with special people in their lives, are more close to happiness than the others.

As a suggestion, it would be useful to determine the risk groups, and then to help the students for developing new approaches to fulfill their basic needs and additionally contribute to their subjective well being. Thus, it would be useful to investigate the students' perceptions about basic needs satisfaction periodically in a more extensive way.

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